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VISION FOR INCLUSION:
AN LGBT BROADBAND FUTURE

FINAL DRAFT DATED: APRIL 27, 2014

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FOR THE
LGBT TECHNOLOGY PARTNERSHIP

THIS PAPER WAS WRITTEN WITH FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM THE TIME WARNER CABLE RESEARCH PROGRAM ON DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS, 2014. THE VIEWS EXPRESSED ARE THOSE OF THE AUTHOR(S) AND NOT NECESSARILY THOSE OF TIME WARNER CABLE OR THE TIME WARNER CABLE RESEARCH PROGRAM ON DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS.

THIS RESEARCH WAS COLLECTED, ASSEMBLED AND PRODUCED BY THE AUTHOR(S) AND THE LGBT TECHNOLOGY PARTNERSHIP. THE AUTHOR(S) CERTIFY THAT THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THE RESEARCH ACCURATELY REFLECT THEIR COMPILED INFORMATION ABOUT THE SUBJECT AND CAN BE REVIEWED IN THE REFERENCE SECTION.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in the U.S. are core users of the Internet and broadband technologies (Driscoll, 2013). Even as we have won important civil rights, LGBT people face ongoing challenges, such as employment discrimination and social marginalization. Of course, the LGBT community is not a monolith but rather is comprised of many communities along lines of race, religion, age, class or geographic location. As a result, the struggles that individual communities confront may be complicated when sexual orientation or gender identity are part of the mix. These challenges make accessing the Internet across broadband technologies, as well as providing protections to ensure privacy and safety when using these technologies, necessities for survival rather than luxuries for entertainment.

This report provides an overview of the current scholarship, including policy reports around the particular needs of LGBT people and the Internet. Key points detailed in the report are that LGBT people:

- are core users of the Internet, with 80% of LGBT respondents saying that participate in a social networking site, such as Facebook or Twitter, compared to just 58% of the general public;
- rely on the Internet for the important tasks of identity formation, peer connection, and identification of partners;
- look for health information, health care providers, parenting, prevention, support networks, housing, and jobs prevention and health care providers online;
- are often blocked from finding LGBT-relevant information on the Internet if they search at public libraries or schools;
- can be vulnerable to cyberbullying when anonymous use and privacy are breached;
- depend on the Internet for job-seeking and navigating an at times discriminatory economic landscape; and
- often use their phones for safety when faced with challenges of crime or homelessness.

The particular needs of LGBT people suggest some potential solutions and the report concludes with a number of policy recommendations, including:

1. Access to Thoughtful and Responsible Filtering Software That Respects Civil Liberties and Rights To Free Speech
2. Increase the Amount of Licensed and Unlicensed Spectrum Available for Broadband Internet Services
3. Increase Support and Training Particularly for Educators and Librarians Working with Youth and Older LGBT Adults
4. Expand Health Support via Mobile-Internet
5. Call on Public and Private Sector Commitments to Internet Users' Right to Privacy & Anonymous Use
6. Expand Research Initiatives With and About the LGBT Community
7. Ensure that LGBT Specific Needs and Considerations are Taken into Account in Public Policy Conversations.

The Federal Communications Commission dedicated a significant amount of time to examining the state of broadband and its unique impact on vulnerable populations, from disabled communities to communities of color (National Broadband Plan, 2010). Representatives of LGBT communities were not at the table at that time to contribute to this framework but this paper aims build on that work and add LGBT communities' needs to a more inclusive vision for the future of Internet access.

Having established that LGBT people have particular needs when it comes to these technologies, LGBT Technology Partnership will seek to work closely with policy makers on changes that can address these needs. These proposed changes would improve not only the lives of LGBT people, but also the lives of anyone in need of resources and information that would otherwise not available within their local communities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part I. Introduction

A. Demographics	5
B. Adoption & Use	8
C. Identity, Community & Relationship Formation	10
D. Mobile Technology	12

Part II. Particular Needs

A. HEALTH

HEALTH BENEFITS	14
HEALTH RISKS	15
ACCESS TO PREVENTIVE SERVICES & HEALTH CARE	16

B. EDUCATION

CYBERBULLYING, EDUCATION & LGBT YOUTH	18
FILTERING, LIBRARIES, E-RATE	20

C. ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY	23
-------------------------	----

D. CIVIC & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	25
---------------------------------	----

E. PUBLIC SAFETY	26
------------------	----

Part III. RECOMMENDATIONS	28
----------------------------------	----

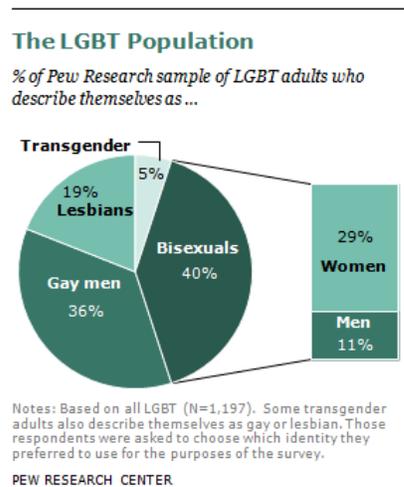
REFERENCES	32
------------	----

APPENDICES	44
------------	----

Part I. Introduction

Demographics

Approximately 3.5% of adults in the United States identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual and an estimated 0.3% of adults identify as transgender (Gates, 2011). This means that there are approximately 9 million LGBT people in the country, a figure roughly equivalent to the population of New Jersey (Gates, 2011). Of course, a variety of factors, including continuing stigma, changing identification over the course of a lifetime, and methodological challenges of accurately recording sexual and gender identities, make it difficult to know if these are low population estimates. Yet we do know that there are an increasing number of families led by LGBT-identifying people (Ryan, 2012) and there remain consistent shared experiences of this population (Pew Research, 2013) that suggest that their specific individual and community-wide needs warrant attention.



(Pew Research Center, 2013)

A report published in October 2012 by the Williams Institute found that people of color were more likely to identify as non-heterosexual than whites (4.6% of blacks, 4.0% of Hispanics and 3.2% of whites identified as LGBT). In addition, people between the ages of 18–29 were three times more likely to identify as LGBT than those over the age of 65.

LGBT individuals vary in race, religion, age and gender. Thus, the LGBT community is not a monolith but rather contains multiple, intersecting communities. There are several characteristics of modern life make the Internet particularly important for LGBT communities.

Despite enormous advancements in LGBT rights in recent years, discrimination and stigma persist, and many LGBT people remain cautious about to whom they reveal their identity. A 2013 Pew survey of a nationally representative sample of LGBT adults found that 39% have been rejected by friends or family because of their sexual or gender identity; 30% have been physically attacked or threatened; 58% have been the target of slurs or jokes; and 21% have been treated unfairly by an employer. In fact, it still remains legal to fire someone in 29 states based merely on their LGBT status (HRC, 2013). The survey also found that a large proportion of LGBT people have not disclosed their identity to their parents -- just 56% say they have told their mother about their sexual or gender identity, and 39% have told their father. Studies show that most young people – both gay and heterosexual first become aware of being sexually attracted to another person around age 10, with most realizing they were LGBT around 13 years old (Ryan, C., 2009). Many of those surveyed realized they were gay around ages 7 or 9 but do not reveal the information because by that age most had learned that being gay was shameful and wrong from family, friends and other people in their community.

[CALL OUT BOX: Stories about being fired for being gay:
<http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/press/5-people-who-were-fired-for-being-gay-and-the-29-states-where-that-is-still-legal/>]

Given this ongoing context of stigma, along with the related risks of employment security and safety that surround the disclosure of one's sexual and/or gender identity, the Internet proves particularly important to LGBT-identifying people and their communities. Specifically, the Internet offers a key means for LGBT people to explore their identities without risking physical harm; connect to other people in and beyond their own neighborhoods and communities; and, seek out information about an array of LGBT-specific issues, ranging from safe places to live to health information.

As this report makes clear, LGBT people are dependent on the Internet to meet a range of individual and social needs because supportive resources are not widely and readily available offline. Paradoxically, this reliance also makes them particularly vulnerable to the threats and limitations posed by our current Internet policies. The [Federal Communications Commission](#) dedicated a significant amount of time to examining the state of broadband and its unique impact on vulnerable populations, from disabled communities to communities of color (National Broadband Plan, 2010). Representatives of LGBT communities were not at the table at that time to contribute to this framework. This report aims to build on that framework and add LGBT communities' needs to a more inclusive vision for the future of Internet access.

The Internet has the potential to help LGBT people navigate around the threats that face in their everyday lives. It provides them with extraordinarily powerful tools to mitigate some of the discrimination, stigma, and isolation that have historically limited their livelihoods and full participation in society. Even as younger generations may be less likely to identify with any one sexual category

(Savin-Williams, 2005), the need for information and community-specific support remains (Stephen Russell, 2001). However, for this vision to become a reality, policymakers must make deliberate choices that account for the unique needs of LGBT online users.

[FOOTNOTE: Add a clarifying footnote about the usage of terms: “online” vs. “mobile device” vs. “mobile” here?

Add a brief paragraph here where you provide a roadmap for the rest of the document.]

[Might use: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWcvEcaRcf8>]

Adoption & Use

According to a recent study by the Pew Research Center, LGBT people are core users of the Internet, with 80% of LGBT respondents saying they participate in a social networking site, such as Facebook or Twitter, compared to just 58% of the general public (Pew Research, 2013).

Online Behaviors

% of all LGBT adults

Ever use social networking site?



Ever met new LGBT friends online?



Ever revealed sexual orientation/gender identity on social networking site?



Regularly discuss LGBT issues online?



Notes: Based on all LGBT (N=1,197). Those who did not answer not shown.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

LGBT/SNS,84,85,85a

(Pew Research Center, 2013)

Experts suggest that part of the reason for the larger adoption and use of social media among LGBT people has to do with age cohort. The LGBT population is younger than the general population. When young LGBT adults are compared with their age cohorts, the proportion using social networking sites is almost the same, for example 89% of LGBT adults ages 18 to 29 compared to 90% of all adults ages 18 to 29.

Another part of the reason that LGBT people are such heavy users of the Internet is a powerful need to connect with others to foster a healthy sense of self and realistic understanding of LGBT lives and communities. Young people in the United States turn to social media for many reasons but central among them is to connect with peers and the broader world. Unlike their parents, many of today's teens no longer have easy access to the private and public spaces that made traditional social identity formation possible. Concerns for their physical safety, increased pressures among middle class families to focus on

academics, and economic pressures to work have left most teens reliant on the Internet for basic social interaction and camaraderie (Gray, 2009; boyd, 2014). LGBT-identifying youth, and, especially those questioning their sexual and gender identities in their early teens, arguably have an even greater need for seeking out alternative representations of themselves. As Larry Gross and other communication scholars have argued, LGBT and questioning young people, like the greater population, turn to popular and digital media to see reflections of themselves (Gross, 2001, 2007; Walters, 2001; Gray, 2009). While popular media representations of LGBT people have increased dramatically in the past two decades, they fail to reflect the diversity (or reality) of LGBT communities (Walters, 2002). Yet LGBT-identifying young people are more dependent on these media types to understand what it means to be an LGBT-identifying adult because of the relative absence of a visible, diverse range of LGBT-identifying adults in their schools, families, churches, and public life (Walters, 2001; Gross, 2002).

These two factors combined—the importance of the Internet for today’s generation and the pressing need for realistic reflections and connections to diverse communities of LGBT-identifying people—place even greater value and social importance on digital technologies for LGBT and questioning young people.

Identity, Community and Relationship Formation

The Internet is an important site for identity and community formation for LGBT people (Driver, 2007; Gray, 2009). For many LGBT people, the Internet is their main source of information about LGBT issues. They often use the Internet to connect to local groups or organizations that serve LGBT people and connect to vital online community spaces (DeHaan, et al., 2013).

LGBT young people use the Internet differently than their heterosexual peers. The differences in the LGBT communities Internet uses mirror similar areas that we know LGBT young people are often invisible in their offline lives: finding safe spaces to explore their sexuality, finding other young people negotiating their identities, accepting and supportive friendships, same-sex romance, and information about same-sex relationships and safe sex (Hiller, Mitchell, & Ybarra, 2012). For example, Franssens (et al., 2010) found that many young gay and bisexual men are active on the Internet and that many—but not all—meet their first same-sex partner online. Similarly, DeHaan (et al., 2013) found that for many LGBT youth, the Internet is their main source of information about their emerging identities. Many young people also used the anonymity of the Internet to experiment with their sexuality and to create peer and romantic relationships. The authors found that use of the Internet gave these young people confidence to make more informed decisions offline. In part due to the historical marginalization and stigmatization of LGBT communities, the privacy, security and confidentiality needs for LGBT communities online are significant. The range of issues and the complexity of online privacy and confidentiality go beyond the scope of this report, but warrant further research.

Considering adult behavior,, Ashford (2009) posits that the Internet provides a safe virtual space for the exploration of sexual or gender identities that is unprecedented for marginalized communities. The Internet can be especially useful for those who are beginning to understand their sexual identity (Alexander, 1997; 2002; Maczewski, 2002). Roughly half (43%) of LGBT adults have revealed their sexual or gender identities on a social networking site (Pew Research, 2013). Some research indicates that blogging can help to foster the experience of a healthy coming out process through a combined identity and community formation, in which a blogger and readers engage in dialogue online (George, 2011). What a growing body of research has made clear is that LGBT people, particularly young people, are heavily reliant on the Internet, not only for

information, but also for the important tasks of identity formation, peer connection, and partner identification.

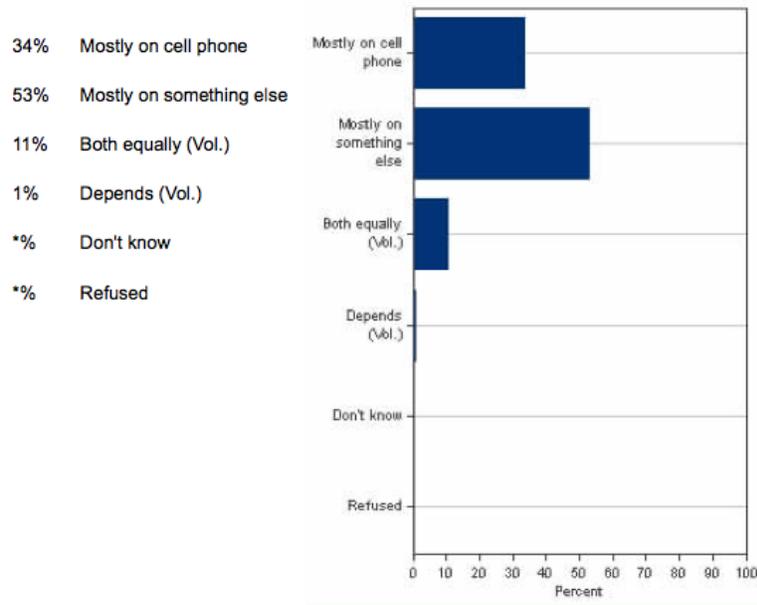
In particular, the Internet provides LGBT people with a greater range of social connections. Among all LGBT adults, 55% say they have met new LGBT friends online or through a social networking site. Gay men are the most likely to say they have done so (69%). By contrast, about half of lesbians (47%) and bisexuals (49%) say they have met a new LGBT friend online (Pew Research, 2013). (Additional Resources: <http://www.staggapp.com/category/blog/>)

Mobile Technology

Increasingly, adults access the Internet through mobile devices. Globally, 91% of people own mobile phones and use them to access the Internet rather than through desktop or laptop computers. In the U.S., 57% of adults use their mobile phone to go online and 34% of mobile phone owners say they mostly access the Internet using their mobile device (Pew Internet, 2013).

Pew Internet & American Life Project Poll, Apr, 2013

Overall, when you use the Internet, do you do that mostly using your cell phone or mostly using some other device like a desktop, laptop, or tablet computer? [Q.12]



(Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Poll, Apr., 2013)

While there is not yet reliable national data on the rate of mobile phone ownership among LGBT people, a May 2013 survey by the marketing firm Digitas found that LGBT mobile owners use their devices for shopping and travelling at higher rates than the larger population (Marketing Charts, 2013). The Digitas survey also found that a large number of LGBT-identifying people live in a post-PC world, with 56% choosing to use a mobile device over a "desktop" or "laptop" compared to 2012. Some 51% of LGBT-identifying adults have used a smartphone or tablet for three years or more, nearly twice as much a compared to those who do not identify as LGBT (28%). Another finding in the Digitas survey is the increased use of mobile technology by LGBT older adults (65+), with 21% having used a smartphone

Comment [1]: I was taught that you never begin a sentence with a number/percentage like this. Having said that, I'm not sure if this still holds but that's the reason I changed this one – and one like it above. As alternative, you could begin this sentence with "Fifty-one percent (51%) ..."

or tablet for five years or more. On the other end of the age spectrum, the survey found that 35% of LGBT individuals ages 18-24 have used a mobile device in their coming out process. Again, beyond the Digitas survey, research is limited around LGBT and mobile but we can hypothesize that mobile devices play a particularly vital and important role in the lives of LGBT-identifying adults because of their unique need to find resources and places that will be welcoming and supportive to them as they develop and express their identities.

[TEXT BOX: The Myth of the wealthy gay. Williams institute.

Caution should be taken when trying to understand the affluence of LGBT communities.]

Part II. Particular Needs

Health Benefits of the Internet for LGBT People

The Internet offers a set of health benefits for LGBT people, including the ability to search for health information online, a greater range of social connections (which beneficial for overall health), as well as increased access to preventive health services, such as mental health and HIV prevention. In addition, many LGBT people make use of the Internet to navigate an often hostile health care system and to find health care providers who understand the needs of LGBT clients and patients (KL Schwartz et al., 2006; [JC Magee](#) et al., 2012).

The Internet provides an ideal forum for LGBT people to seek health information without having to disclose their sexual or gender identity. Indeed, LGBT people, especially youth, are more likely to use the Internet to search for health information than their non-LGBT counterparts (Detlefsen, 2004; Gray, Klein, & Noyce, 2005; Kanuga & Rosenfeld, 2004; Magee, Bigelow, DeHaan & Mustanski, 2012). A 2013 study by GLSEN found that a large majority (81%) of LGBT youth have searched for health information online as compared to just 46% of non-LGBT youth (GLSEN, 2013). Other research indicates that searching for health information online may be particularly meaningful for lesbians whose health needs are often ignored or overlooked (Lindley, Friedman, & Struble 2012; Polonijo & Hollister, 2011).

[GLSEN – Explain the organization and define it.]

[GLMA – Explain the organization and define it.]

Homophobia among health care providers is well documented (GLMA reports). Many LGBT people either fail to disclose their sexual or gender identity to

medical professionals or seek out LGBT and LGBT-sensitive providers. For example, one study found that as many as 45% of lesbian and bisexual women are not out to their providers (GLMA report). The Internet can provide a means for LGBT people to locate providers who are either LGBT themselves or who are sensitive to their needs. For instance, the Gay & Lesbian Medical Association offers an online service to help LGBT people find friendly doctors. Similarly, the Human Rights Campaign offers a rating of healthcare facilities against the Healthcare Equality Index, which measures a facility's commitment to providing high-quality, equitable care to LGBT people.

Social support is linked to improved health and increased longevity (Brody, J., 2012). Some research indicates there is a link between overall Internet use and seeking HIV/AIDS-related information online to community involvement. Further, those with more community involvement tend to acquire more HIV/AIDS information online. And, these people tend to see that information as more relevant, and have more knowledgeable peers in their networks with whom they may discuss that information (Veinot et al., 2013).

Policy makers may need to take a fresh look at laws that govern telemedicine, so people in rural LGBT communities can gain access to health and mental health services. For example, a transgender young person should be able to easily and confidentially gain access to a medical professional who is familiar with transgender medical and health issues.

(GET A QUOTE FROM A TRANSGENDER ACTIVITIST about this issue)

Health Risks of the Internet

While LGBT people clearly benefit from Internet access, there are health risks associated with this access for the small portion of LGBT individuals turn to

places online that could put them at higher risk for damaging health outcomes. For example, research indicates that seeking sexual partners online may put one at higher risk for STDs and HIV.. Research about the health risks of the Internet for LGBT people is limited and has focused almost exclusively on HIV risk among men who have sex with men (MSM). There is no data to suggest that lesbians experience the same level of health risks associated with MSM. The data indicate that MSM who use the Internet to find sexual partners have an especially high risk for HIV transmission and other STDs (Benotsch, et al., 2011; Chew, et al., 2013; Jenness, et al., 2010; McKirnan, Houston, & Tolou-shams, 2006). However, McKiernan (et al., 2006) found that men who have sex with men who reported any Internet use were more sexually active -- but not more risky -- than men who had never been on the Internet. Indeed, some researchers have found no strong evidence of greater exposure to health risks from seeking online partners (Groves et al., 2007). Some researchers have posited a “self-selection hypothesis” that higher rates of unprotected sex among Internet users merely reflects risks that were already there (Jenness et al., 2010). What is clearly indicated is that there is a need for greater education about the potential health risks associated with meeting people online, and there is an opportunity for policy makers to support such educational efforts.

Research on how other groups and other health risks are mitigated or facilitated by the Internet is sorely needed. But whether or not the Internet facilitates health risks, it is clearly a critical avenue for health information and interventions.

Access to Prevention Services & Healthcare

Public health professionals and community activists are also using the Internet to promote access to healthcare and prevention services among hard-to-reach populations. There are a plethora of efforts to reach gay men and other men

who have sex with men with¹ information about preventing STDs and HIV (Bull, McFarlane, Lloyd & Rietmeiler, 2004; Conner, et al., 2005; Fields, et al., 2006; Jenkins & Wold, 2012; Moskowitz, Melton, & Owczarzak, 2009; Muessig, 2013; Nguyen, et al., 2013; Rosenberger, et al., 2011). Those working in HIV/AIDS-related services for those who test positive are also making use of the Internet for social support (Peterson, 2009).

LGBT people have particular needs when it comes to mental health services. There is strong evidence indicating that LGBT individuals report higher rates of suicide ideation and attempts from their late teens through early twenties than their heterosexual counterparts (Silenzio, et al., 2007). The fact that 89% of young LGBT people use social media suggests that social networking sites offer a novel opportunity to reach them with mental health interventions or services (Silenzio, et al., 2009; Benson, 2013). However, to date, this remains a missed opportunity. A recent study of college counseling center web sites found that these online portals to mental health services often overlook the needs of LGBT college students (Wright & McKinley, 2010). Only 11% of those sites surveyed made any mention of the capacity to counsel LGBT clients (Wright & McKinley, 2010).

There is a well-documented pattern of reluctance to seek medical care among LGBT people due to social stigma and physician prejudice (Hinchliff, Gott, & Galena, 2005; Kelly & Robinson, 2011; Steele, Timmouth, & Lu, 2006). Given this context, the Internet has been identified as a valuable resource for navigating social stigma in the doctor-patient relationship by LGBT people seeking health

¹ Men who have sex with men (MSM), also known as males who have sex with males, are [male persons](#) who engage in [sexual activity](#) with members of the same sex, regardless of how they identify themselves; many men choose not to (or cannot for other reasons) accept [sexual identities](#) of [gay](#), [homosexual](#) or [bisexual](#).

care providers (Gee, 2006; Hoffman, Freeman, & Swann, 2009; Mulligan & Heath, 2007; Sánchez, Paul, Hailpern, Lowe, & Calderon, 2007; Seçkin, 2010).

Lastly, recent evidence that mobile texting technologies may also offer a route to better support young people could give policy makers new motivation to make bandwidth and spectrum improvements to areas such as the rural United States, where mental healthcare resources are sparse (Leslie Kaufman, “In Texting Era, Crisis Hotlines Put Help at Youths’ Fingertips,” New York Times, February 4, 2014,

Available online at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/05/us/in-texting-era-crisis-hotlines-put-help-at-youths-fingertips.html>).

Cyberbullying, Education, LGBT Youth & the Internet

[Call Out Box: TREVOR PROJECT QUOTE]

Schools are often a setting where young people who identify as LGBT encounter stigma, harassment, bullying, and even physical violence (Hong & Espeage, 2012; GLSEN, 2010; Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009; Pascoe, 2007). We cannot divorce the increased reports of cyberbullying directed at LGBT-identifying youth or those perceived to be LGBT from the larger context of anti-LGBT violence and harassment that pervades school environments (Pascoe, 2007; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Bazelon, 2013). However, bullying—verbal threats and harassment online—clearly presents a new challenge to educators and parents concerned about the mental health and welfare of all young people. A recent report found that 42% of LGBT youth report experiencing bullying and harassment online as compared to just 15% of non-LGBT youth, according to a national survey of 5,680 students in 6th -12th grade (GLSEN, 2013). The same report finds that 27% of LGBT youth were bullied via text message as compared to just 13% of non-LGBT youth. Experiences with cyberbullying contributed to

negative self-esteem, higher depression and lower grade point averages (Donnerstein, 2012; Varjas, Meyers, Kiperman, & Howard, 2012). Indeed, like bullying on the playground, any young person can become a target of social media and text-based slurs that use anti-LGBT sentiment. But, in the case of cyberbullying, there are rarely clear routes for bystanders or responsible adults to intervene. In addition, unlike playground bullying which is geographically limited, cyberbullying offers opportunities to scale and compound bullying efforts, even anonymously.

In the context of an Internet in which privacy is very hard to maintain, LGBT individuals – both youth and adults – are even more vulnerable to cyberbullying when their name, face, and identity can be so easily tracked through multiple online accounts. Educators can do much to help create welcoming environments for LGBT youth and their families, even for students at young ages (Burt, Gelnaw, & Lesser, 2010).

Schools are, simultaneously, the primary place where LGBT youth are likely to use the Internet for learning across all ages and grade levels. Such Internet-based learning can contribute to identity formation, finding community and lessening the impact of homophobic stigma for LGBT youth. While there is no research on LGBT-positive Internet curricula in elementary or middle schools, there is some emerging research about high schools and colleges. For high school students, the Internet makes possible exercises and role-playing games that can allow young people room to experiment in ways that help reduce the impact of stigma and homophobia (Alexander, 1997). In college, educators may use the Internet as an instructional tool for writing exercises that focus on LGBT issues (Burnes, 2007). Such an Internet-enabled and LGBT-focused pedagogy may reduce prejudice in those students who identify as heterosexual and can help young people who are trying to understand their sexual or gender identity,

or who may be looking for communities of other people like them in settings where they are visibly in the minority.

The presence of openly identifying LGBT instructors can be extremely important for the well-being of LGBT students (Depalma & Atkinson, 2007); this may be particularly crucial for those attending colleges or universities in rural areas (D'Augelli, 2006). In keeping with an ethical stance that embraces educational equity for LGBT students (MacGillivray, 2000), some educational researchers have advanced the idea of a 'queer pedagogy' that incorporates the knowledge base of LGBT students themselves in creating teacher education programs (Peters & Swanson, 2004; Strauss, 2005; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010). Such an Internet-enabled and LGBT-focused pedagogy can help young people who are trying to understand their sexual or gender identity, or who may be looking for community of other people like themselves. Critical to making schools healthy learning environments for all youth is a reassessment of Internet access and filtering that may limit the knowledge base of LGBT-identifying and questioning young people.

Filtering, Libraries, e-Rate

Young LGBT people looking for information about their own identities or a community of friends who are like themselves are often blocked from accessing the open, public Internet due to the presence of filters. For example, in response to widespread, illegal censoring of Internet content in Tennessee, the American Civil Liberties Union launched its "Do Not Block" initiative to help students identify school computers unlawfully blocking appropriate LGBT content from students. Issues having to do with filters, libraries and "e-Rate" are pertinent, even crucial to the discussion of LGBT youth in educational settings.

Commonly used filters – that is, software designed to block "objectionable" content – can also, either inadvertently or intentionally, block LGBT-specific

Comment [2]: It's not all inadvertent.

content. In 1998, the U.S. Congress passed The Child Online Protection Act (COPA). COPA prohibits the transmission of any material over the Internet deemed “harmful to minors,” if the communication was made for a commercial purpose. The Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA), passed in 2000, requires libraries and K-12 schools to install filters on their Internet computers to retain federal funding – known as the “e-Rate” - and discounts for computers and computer access. (American Library Association, <http://www.ala.org/offices/oif/ifissues/issuesrelatedlinks/cppacopacipa>).

Some filtering software does a commendable job blocking egregious and harmful materials, such as violent depictions of child abuse. Unfortunately, in the absence of policy guidelines that explicitly support the rights of young people to seek out information about LGBT identities and sexual health, the vast majority of filters often block LGBT-specific content, as well as much sexual and reproductive health content (ACLU, March 28, 2011. “ACLU Demands That Schools Stop Unconstitutional Web Filtering of LGBT Content.” Available online at: <https://www.aclu.org/lgbt-rights/aclu-demands-schools-stop-unconstitutional-web-filtering-lgbt-content>)

The COPA and CIPA laws have unintentionally blocked access to information and LGBT-themed content of all kinds. For example, websites that provide information about LGBT health issues are blocked by filtering software (Holt, 2009; Jones, 2003; Keegan, 2006). In the absence of clearly articulated guidelines, COPA and CIPA leave the definition of content deemed both “objectionable” and “harmful to minors” to those, ultimately, marketing and setting up the software itself. This jeopardizes the fundamental rights to free speech not only for young people, but also adult users of publicly funded Internet access. The lack of explicit support for the rights of people to information about sexual health and LGBT communities presents an additional burden for youth who are trying to access LGBT-specific content on the Internet

from school or a library. Research indicates that Internet filtering impairs construction of online communities, identity formation, and access to health information for LGBT youth (Holt 2007; 2009).

Librarians are often crucial guides, especially for adolescent LGBT patrons, who want to navigate through filters for information related to sexuality, gender identity, or health information (Storts-Brinks, 2010). For their part, schools and libraries are reluctant to remove filters because the funding they receive from the e-rate program requires these strict filters be in place. Removing the filter mandated by the e-rate program would cost these schools and libraries millions of dollars in much needed revenue (Jones, 2004). Given the reality of filters, the role of librarians becomes even more significant.

Librarians often serve both as guides in the information age and as LGBT role models. There are reference resources on the web for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people that may not be easily located without the guidance of a skilled librarian (Watstein, Gales, & Stratton, 2001). Reference librarians who are attuned to the specific needs of gay (Hamer, 2003), lesbian (Rothbauer, 2004) and transgender (Taylor, 2002) individuals can prove to be helpful. Librarians, like openly LGBT or accepting teachers, can be important role models and guides for young people (Ciszek, 2011; Greenblatt, 2011; Mehra & Braquet 2011). Finally, libraries provide crucial public spaces and access to online portals for LGBT people who want to access the Internet (Kapitzke, 2001).

[add infographic here]

Economic Opportunity, the Internet & LGBT People

Approximately 4% of the U.S. workforce identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (Williams Institute, 2011). At the present time in the U.S., there is no nationwide federal employment protection for LGBT people. Instead, there is a patchwork of protections at the state level, with only 21 states offering explicit protection for LGBT employees from losing their jobs because they identify as or are perceived to be LGBT. This variation in legal status leaves LGBT people vulnerable to discrimination in hiring and firing, as well as to on-the-job harassment (Chung, 2001). According to a study from the Williams Institute (2011), 21% of LGB employees report having been discriminated against in hiring, promotions and pay, while 47% of transgender employees report similar discrimination at work. Another report, "Injustice at Every Turn," from The Gay and Lesbian Task Force (2011) presents an in-depth account of the difficulties faced by transgender individuals in the labor market, including that 27% have been fired from jobs and 96% have been harassed at their jobs. Additionally, transgender people of color are more likely to experience such discrimination than their white counterparts (Whitfield et al., 2014).

Some companies welcome LGBT employees and this has been good for their business. According to the same Williams Institute study, 96% of Fortune 500 companies that have LGBT workplace protections say such policies have boosted their businesses. Fortune 500 executives, including Apple CEO Tim Cook, have said such workplace policies boost productivity, increase retention rates and attract talent. Among the sectors where LGBT people find work, the multimedia, online and Internet industries are among the most accepting workplaces (*Politics & Government Business*, Nov.29, Dec.6, 2012).

Given this context of less than full equality, the Internet can be a valuable tool for finding information about LGBT-friendly employment opportunities and organizing for greater protection under the law.

Comment [3]: At the beginning, this is 3.4% - should be consistent throughout.

According to a recent study, 32% of people in the U.S. credit social media for their current job (2012 Social Job Seeker Survey, http://web.jobvite.com/rs/jobvite/images/Jobvite_JobSeeker_FINAL_2012.pdf).

While there is no separate national data on the job-seeking strategies of LGBT people, it is reasonable to assume based on previous research that this population is making use of the Internet to find employment at similar or even higher rates than the larger population (Kirk, 2000; Mehra, Merkel, & Bishop, 2004). By comparison, there is a recent study of African American jobseekers that found that this group is more likely than the general population to use the Internet for their search (Horrigan, John 2013 "Broadband and Jobs: African Americans Rely Heavily on Mobile Access and Social Networking in Job Search," Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2013, <http://www.jointcenter.org/sites/default/files/upload/research/files/Broadband%20and%20Jobs.pdf>). Until we have a coherent federal policy protecting the rights of LGBT-identifying people in the workplace, there is a clear need for both expanding online resources that identify employment opportunities and workplaces supportive of LGBT communities and individuals as well as an awareness that those individuals drawn to online work may very well be seeking refuge from otherwise hostile work environments. Employers in the IT sector would do well to know that they may have a disproportionately high number of LGBT-identifying people in their applicant pool and would be best positioned to attract the strongest candidates by adopting LGBT-supportive hiring and employment policies, ranging from transgender health support to legal counsel for employees adopting their same-sex partner's children from a previous relationship.

Civic & Community Engagement

The form that civic engagement takes is changing. Traditionally, civic engagement meant activities like joining a club or community group where people discussed politics. Now, people are just as likely to find community online and discuss politics with far-flung others as they are with neighbors living in the same zip code (de Zúñiga et al., 2010). This is especially true for LGBT people who may find community at online LGBT affinity websites or apps in a study of Gay.com, Campbell examined a variety of discussion forums and found that these constituted emerging forms of civic engagement (Campbell, 2007). In a majority of the forums that he examined, online discussions led to calls for offline political activism, such as voting, boycotting, letter writing or protest marching. In this way, the Internet, and LGBT-specific sites like Gay.com, function as a kind of public sphere for LGBT people (Mowlabocus, 2008; Rhoades, 2011; Shapiro, 2004).

A recent study indicates that LGBT youth have high rates of civic engagement online (GLSEN, 2013). In this study, 77% of LGBT youth reported taking part in an online community that supports a cause or issue. A large majority, 68%, said they had written a blog post or posted comments on another blog about a cause or an issue, while 51% said they had used the Internet to participate in or recruit people for an offline event or activity (GLSEN, 2013).

[add a box insert here with a story from Michael Crawford with a narrative about the success of “Freedom to Marry” and online activism.]

[Insert a box here with a story from Rich at GLAAD]

[Insert text here with quote from the Matthew Sheppard Foundations and Trevor Project]

Public Safety

LGBT people continue to face serious threats to their safety on a daily basis even as there have been gains in public recognition of same-sex marriage and the repeal of harmful legislation (e.g., DOMA, DADT). A 2013 report by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs reported 25 anti-LGBTQ homicides in the United States. This is the 4th highest yearly total ever recorded by NCAVP. Given the persistence of racism in the contemporary US, LGBT people of color are at an increased risk for threats to their personal safety. The same NCAVP report found that 73% of all anti-LGBTQ homicide victims in 2012 were people of color. Of the 25 known homicide victims in 2012 whose race/ethnicity was disclosed, 54 percent were Black/African American, 15 percent Latino, 12 percent white and 4 percent Native American. Transgender women of color are nearly 3 times more likely to be victims of violence as compared to their lesbian, gay or bisexual counterparts.

The Internet, and specifically, mobile technology can provide a form of ‘safety net’ for LGBT people because it increases connection to safety and supportive others (Hillier, Mitchell, & Ybarra, 2012) This, however, does not eliminate the need for continued awareness of the types of messaging that is created, transmitted, and disseminated.

For LGBT people of color, contact with police can be an occasion for harassment and brutality rather than assistance and safety. One study finds that LGBT people of color are using their mobile phones regularly to either record police misconduct or to avoid contact with police; for both, respondents reported using their mobile phones this way: daily – 14%, several times a week – 6%, and at least once a week – 8%. (Daniels & Battle, 2012). **[add infographic here]** For vulnerable LGBT youth such as those who are marginally housed, mobile technology provides emotional support, access to social

services, and a connection to legitimate employment opportunities (Daniels, 2011). The research suggests that Internet access and civic media and technologies could play a key role in mitigating the disproportional violence directed at LGBT communities and individuals perceived to be a part of these communities.

Recommendations

1. Access to Thoughtful and Responsible Filtering Software That Respects Civil Liberties and Rights To Free Speech

Access to knowledge and information in a networked, information economy is fundamental to all other forms of access. For LGBT people, access to knowledge about their own identity, communities and health is often blocked when they search in public libraries and, for youth, in public schools.

We recommend policy changes that would redefine the “e-rate” benefits for Federally-funded IT so that they do not block LGBT-specific content and allow access to LGBT information in public libraries and schools.

2. Increase the Amount of Licensed and Unlicensed Spectrum Available for Broadband Internet Services

The Internet has become a critical tool for civic engagement and public service. As more and more government services move online, reliable, safe, and unfettered broadband access to the Internet becomes more critical to vibrant civic participation and community engagement. Addressing the specific needs of LGBT communities and individuals may be a route to better support a broad base of people who would benefit from access to economically available spectrum, regardless of their geographic location. All people deserve and require reliable Internet access for the health of our democracy.

And, unlike the trend to move to urban centers (e.g., Greenwich Village, The Castro) decades ago to find community support, research from a large national survey suggests that more and more LGBT-identifying people are living and raising families beyond traditional gay enclaves (*Kastanis & Wilson, 2014*). LGBT people of color, in particular, tend to “come out” and remain in the same geographical area. For many, this means living in rural areas. For LGBT people living in rural areas, the Internet is a vital mechanism for youth negotiating a LGBT identity in the rural United States (Gray, 2009).

Given the important role of access to the Internet and resources in the lives of LGBT-identifying people, it is clear this community would benefit greatly from policies that allocate additional licensed and unlicensed spectrum for usage. Additional spectrum would alleviate network congestion and increase the capacity of both cellular and WiFi-based networks for all users. The increase in spectrum will help ensure Internet connections to these networks are reliable,

robust and widely available. In addition, increases in spectrum should also allow for Internet availability to be economically accessible for all LGBT people.

[Call Out Box to describe licensed and unlicensed spectrum]

3. Increase Support and Training Particularly for Educators and Librarians Working with Youth and LGBT Adults

Education about usage, being good online digital citizens, privacy, confidentiality and online bullying are just a few but important components of digital literacy.

For LGBT youth, educators and librarians are often their first guides to information about their own identity and finding others like themselves. Yet, teachers and librarians often lack adequate training and digital literacy tools to be able to guide LGBT young people to the appropriate information. Similarly, older LGBT adults often turn to libraries not only for training, connection and basic classes, but also to find safe, accepting spaces.

We recommend developing and providing training in LGBT-specific digital literacy information for librarians, K-12 teachers and community leaders.

As our population continues to age we recommend that libraries, schools, community centers and LGBT centers continue to train staff and volunteers about LGBT-specific needs. We also emphasize the need for local community resources to support the LGBT individuals in their community by providing safe and welcoming spaces, programs and partnerships with LGBT organizations.

4. Expand Health Support via Mobile-Internet

Given the LGBT community's predilection to use the Internet to identify preventive health information, service providers and community resources, policy makers, medical providers, corporations, and social service and information providers should make sure that their services meet the needs of LGBT communities searching for health related information online and via mobile/smart phones. These information and service providers should be keenly aware of the unique characteristics of the LGBT community and understand the community is not a monolith but rather comprised of nearly every other community be it race, religion, age, class or geographic location. It is also important to note that each of the different communities within the LGBT community have unique needs, especially around health care.

5. Call on Public and Private Sector Commitments to Internet Users' Right to Privacy & Anonymous Use

In an ideal world, it would not matter if someone identified as or was perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Unfortunately, there are still very real, negative consequences for identifying as or being perceived as LGBT. As long as diverse communities of LGBT people need spaces and resources to address the discrimination they potentially face at school, in their homes, or at the workplace, they will need the privacy and anonymity to seek out support and information that could be, literally, the difference between life and death. We call on the Public and Private Sectors, from educators managing school records to companies that monetize private user data across commercial social media, to prioritize the right of citizens to use the Internet, as we do other modes of private communication, to share information freely and confidentially. Recent revelations of the National Security Agency's breach of U.S. citizens' rights to privacy are an opportunity to call on both the Public and Private Sector to grant users explicit rights to the data and content that they generate online and to commit to supporting the right to privacy and opportunities for anonymous use of the Internet. A policy that supports individuals and communities turning to the Internet to share ideas and assemble in private is fundamental to the health of our democracy and must take precedence over the commercial value of selling people's private communication with others. To do less would have a chilling effect on the value of the Internet as a source for democratic participation and exchange, not just in the United States but around the world. We call on government entities and commercial enterprises to request the right to use individuals' content and to be transparent when data is generated through individual use in one context is connected to data use in another.²

6. Expand Research Initiatives With and About the LGBT Community

From our research, what is most apparent is the general lack of research on LGBT communities. We implore public policy makers, companies and academic institutions to make funds available for greater research on LGBT issues and ensure that LGBT communities are included and a part of any trials, programs and studies. Specifically, these research initiatives should include studies of:

² Ahwaa.org is an open space to debate LGBTQ-related issues in the Middle East. They use avatars as a way of closeted Middle Easterners to communicate.

1. The specific privacy, confidentiality and security needs of LGBT communities;
2. On what LGBT individuals and communities are accessing online resources;
3. Health information and how LGBT communities, particularly youth and seniors can gain access to salient, timely and relevant health information and providers;
4. How filtering standards can be revised to ensure that LGBT communities have access to important and relevant information; and
5. How International LGBT communities are affected b various Internet polices.

7. Ensure that LGBT Specific Needs and Considerations are Taken into Account in Public Policy Conversations.

For too long LGBT communities have not been at the table with other communities as technological policy decisions are being made. As a result, how those policy decisions will affect the broad array of LGBT communities is not taken into account. Public policy makers at the Federal, State and local levels need to ensure that the specific needs and concerns of LGBT communities be taken into account when considering policy decisions

[Additional Infographic information: <http://zebrayouth.org/2012/08/20/a-visual-on-lgbt-youth-homelessness/>]

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Appendix A. Demographics: Gender, Age, Race, Education.

Demographic Profiles of Recent LGBT Survey Samples and the Adult Population of the United States

% among those ages 18 or older

	LGBT Respondents			U.S. Population
	Pew Research/ GfK Knowledge Panel 2013	Gallup Daily Tracking Survey 2012	General Social Survey 2008, 2010, 2012	American Community Survey 2011
Men	50	48	41	49
Women	49	52	59	51
Age group				
18-29	30	37	36	22
30-49	39	32	44	35
50-64	23	20	16	25
65 or older	9	10	3	17
Race/Ethnicity				
White	66	67	66	66
Black	10	15	14	12
Hispanic	17	14	16	15
Other	7	4	4	7
Educational attainment				
High school or less	33	40	31	43
Some college	36	32	30	31
Bachelor's degree or more	32	27	39	26

Appendix B. Demographics: Income, Region, Political Party

Demographic Profiles of Recent LGBT Survey Samples and the Adult Population of the United States (Cont.)

% among those ages 18 or older

	LGBT Respondents			U.S. Population
	Pew Research/ GfK Knowledge Panel 2013	Gallup Daily Tracking Survey 2012	General Social Survey 2008, 2010, 2012	American Community Survey 2011
Annual family income				
Less than \$30,000	39	---	39	28
\$30,000-\$74,999	39	---	32	35
\$75,000 or more	20	---	25	34
Annual household income				
Less than \$36,000	---	45	---	---
\$36,000-\$89,999	---	31	---	---
\$90,000 or more	---	16	---	---
Region of residence				
Northeast	20	19	14	18
Midwest	20	22	23	22
South	34	34	38	37
West	27	25	24	23
Party identification				
Republican	8	11	5	24*
Democrat	56	42	44	32*
Independent/other	36	47	51	44*
Sample size	1,197	6,004	188	2,436,714

Notes: Whites, blacks and others include only non-Hispanics; Hispanics are of any race. The GSS includes respondents who self-identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual only. Family income includes income from non-family households; "Independent/other" party affiliation includes independents, those who lean toward Democrat or Republican, but don't identify fully with either one of those parties, and those who did not supply an answer. Some totals may not add to 100% due to rounding and the exclusion of "Don't know" and "Refused" responses.

Sources: Pew Research Center 2013 LGBT survey; Gallup Daily Tracking Survey June-December 2012; Gallup data regarding race/ethnicity are derived from June-August 2012 Daily Tracking Survey, n=2,669; Pew Research Center analysis of the 2008, 2010 and 2012 General Social Survey and the 2011 American Community Survey (1% IPUMS); *U.S. population numbers for party identification are from Pew Research Center for the People & the Press 2013 aggregated polls (N=6,011)

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