

I decided to read through three articles regarding LGBTQ+ youth and their internet usage. The articles discussed how LGBTQ+ people use the internet to discover and develop their identities, how they cultivate community, and how they use the internet for guidance, education, help, and change.

In these articles, it is the Internet that is being examined. Issues (and solutions) are both brought on for LGBTQ+ youth from their use of the Internet. Many LGBTQ+ individuals experience online bullying ([hrc.org](http://hrc.org)), even more so among LGBTQ+ people of color and transgender youth. The issue here is the negativity and harmful impact the internet can have on an entire group of people who are already targeted by other privileged groups. These individuals are met with hate, death threats, and negative stereotypes regarding body image.

Yet, somehow, amongst the negativity found online, LGBTQ+ individuals find community. They use the internet to learn more about themselves and their sexuality, and then find a community of like-minded individuals to create friendships. According to the article on [hrc.org](http://hrc.org), 50% of LGBTQ+ youth have at least one close online friend, compared to 19% of non-LGBTQ+ youth. Perhaps, for many LGBTQ+ youth, the negativity on the internet is another representation of their experiences at home, but now has a bright side attached to it with the ability to create meaningful relationships and allow for self-discovery.

Truthfully, no one is truly “safe” on the internet. There are always trolls and online bullies who will be harmful for the sake of being negative. However, the internet, like most systems, is generally safer for people who identify with majority identities (white, cisgender, heterosexual, Christian, financially stable, physically able and fit, males). Cyber safety for LGBTQ+ people can never fully be guaranteed. I believe that this online bullying could not have been prevented, but it could have been (and should be) minimized. Until offline society becomes more accepting of these identities, and probably not even then, online societies will continue to perpetuate harmful rhetoric.

However, steps can be taken to minimize the harm experienced. With proper education and preparation, sites and consumers can be prepared to make areas more safe for LGBTQ+ youth. If programs, scripts, or code can be written to prevent, flag, and erase harmful language from being used, and if consumers are educated on and feel safe and free to report abusive and harassing posts and behavior, steps will already be taken to ensure safer areas. With technology advancing to allow readers to add more context to posts and companies removing posts with misinformation, perhaps we will begin to see some shift in the online realm for individuals. I still believe that the need for privacy online (bringing back the discussion of cookies) is still highly important, but I also believe that the concept of online anonymity creates a toxic and unsafe environment that will promote bullying of LGBTQ+ youth.

It then becomes difficult to moderate language usage without potentially interfering with someone's freedom of speech. This is why social spaces designed specifically for LGBTQ+ people are so necessary and vital for their online community. This includes spaces like TrevorSpace, a community for LGBTQ+ people between the ages of 13-24. Having these types of safe platforms allows for hate speech and bullying to be better regulated via “terms and conditions”. Thus, allowing for a better online experience and community for queer folks.