



**University  
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of Master of Art

of

**AUBREY BALDOCK**

BA (University of Victoria, 2008)

**“Reading Between the (On)Lines: A Discursive Analysis of Self-Harming,  
Suicidal and Helper Subjectivities”**

School of Child and Youth Care

Tuesday, May 3, 2016

10:00AM

Human and Social Development Building  
Room A373

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Jennifer White, School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Marie Hoskins, School of Child and Youth Care, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Anne Marshall, Department Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. George Tzanetakis, Department of Computer Science, UVic

## **Abstract**

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth in Canada and it is estimated that anywhere between 2-47% of North American youth among community and clinical populations have engaged in self-harming behaviours. As people turn to online communities to engage in conversations about self-harm and suicide, researchers and practitioners are curious about the implications for youth who engage in support-oriented Internet chat rooms and forum boards. The focus of most literature to date has been concerned with identifying the potential benefits and harms of online support for vulnerable individuals, and these studies have typically sought to measure outcomes rather than processes. The purpose of this thesis is to expand upon emerging poststructural queries about the implications of mainstream ideas about self-harm and suicide in order to invite alternate ways of responding to these issues. This study analyzed the discourses that made self-harm and suicide intelligible on an online support forum, examined how these discourses informed performances of helping, and reflected upon the subjectivities that became available to young people and trained helpers through these conversations. Excerpts from an inactive, public support-oriented Internet forum served as the site of analysis. The use of discourse analysis helped to illustrate several key findings that highlight limitations about current approaches to prevention and intervention with self-harm and suicide; namely, that psychological, pathological and professionalized discourses about self-harm and suicide locate the site of intervention within the distressed individual and conceal the sociopolitical and historical contexts that influence self-destructive behaviours.

Keywords: youth suicide, youth self-harm, identity, subjectivity, Internet, online, discourse analysis