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HOW SEXUAL MINORITIES MAY USE THE
INTERNET TO FOSTER RESILIENCY

BY

PHILLIP HAU

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HOW SEXUAL MINORITIES MAY USE THE INTERNET TO FOSTER RESILIENCY

Submitted by

Phillip Hau

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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The thesis examination committee certifies that the thesis
and the oral examination is approved

Supervisor:
Dr. Paul Jerry
Athabasca University

Committee Member:
Dr. Jeff Chang
Athabasca University

External Examiner:
Dr. Karen Cook
Athabasca University

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Dedication

I dedicate my thesis to my family who have encouraged me to go after my goals.
You have provided me with time and space for me to focus on my education without
needing to worry about finances and what I will have for supper. You inspire me to better
myself and work hard. You have brought me up to be the man I am today and I am
forever in your debt.

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Abstract

Sexual minorities' strengths, skills, and resources are often overlooked within the dominant social discourse. While this community may experience individual and systemic barriers, they also possess many positive attributes to overcome adverse situations. This study followed the lived experiences of seven gay, White, cis-gender men between the ages 18-29 to learn how they demonstrated resiliency on the Internet. I used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as a research method to analyze the lived experiences. Participants disclosed the importance of finding their community online. Participants spoke to the importance of having their experience validated by their peers. I also explored with the participants what makes the Internet an appropriate medium to foster resiliency. While many positive themes were disclosed, some negative attributes of using the Internet were also examined. This study provides evidence for the mental health profession on the importance of being culturally-informed and to validate people's lived experiences.

Key words: sexual minorities, Internet, resiliency development, Positive Psychology, strength-based research

Preface

This study explored the resiliency development of seven sexual minorities. I used a strength-based theoretical framework to outline my research process. I believe all individuals possess strengths, skills, resources, and other positive attributes that aid oneself through adverse situations. I often hear a dominant social narrative that sexual minorities are at higher risks of suicide, anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns. In addition, the research I read on about this community often focused on the deficiencies of sexual minorities without also attending to the pathways sexual minorities explore to traverse the life obstacles.

In this research, I hope to provide an account of the positive qualities sexual minorities demonstrate to overcome aversive situations. I am mindful that this perspective reflects one field of discourse within the academic literature. I recognize that not all individuals understand resiliency the same way or apply resiliency within their lived experiences.

Please enjoy my research on how sexual minorities may use the Internet to foster resiliency development.

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How Sexual Minorities May Use the Internet to Foster Resiliency

Chapter I: INTRODUCTION

In my study, I explored how Internet use fosters resiliency for sexual minorities. The Internet is a modern invention that has helped connect people globally and culturally. In particular, when a cultural group is considered as a nonvisible minority (i.e., being LGBTQ) it can be isolating to perceive that one is alone in their experience. However, having access to the Internet can expand one's social circle. I am intrigued by how sexual minorities create their identities online in order to foster a sense of self and community in the virtual space. My primary goal is to find out how sexual minorities use the Internet to foster resiliency by exploring the experiences of cis-gender, White, gay men between the ages of 18 and 29. In this research project, I also explored what my research participants do online that creates this pathway towards resiliency development. Using semi-structured interviews, I explored: a) how sexual minorities consider the Internet as an appropriate medium to foster resiliency development and b) what activities were engaged to facilitate resiliency development.

Resiliency, in this research project, is defined to encompass the actions one engages in to help themselves in difficult environments (Ungar, 2011). This definition emphasizes the interaction between personal agency as well as environmental factors. Estegan and Roughly (2013) also highlighted that resiliency is intrinsically interwoven into the experience and story of the person. Using the Internet to foster resiliency development has implications on online and offline experiences. Resiliency development online and in-person has an impact on the individual's lived experience.

Why is it Important to Study Resiliency Development

It is important to focus on resiliency for many reasons. Resiliency is important within counselling conversations with clients and is often a central focus. In addition, conversations around resiliency development foster hope and confidence for the future. This aspect is important to nurture within vulnerable populations. Finally, the larger social narrative of "being at risk" within the sexual minority community overshadows a strength-based narrative of the community. Thus, my emphasis on resiliency development in this project will help contribute to the strength-based research within the academic field that works with sexual minorities.

Promoting Resiliency is a Core Goal in Counselling with Clients

Vossler (2012) suggested the goal in counselling is to promote resiliency development in clients. Clients come in to see a therapist to overcome a personal or interpersonal issue; in the process, clients hope to demonstrate personal growth and overcome an obstacle (be it addictions, anxiety, depression, grief, relationship conflict, career counselling, academic demands, and more presenting concerns) (Bernard, 2008; Maree, 2015; Zamani, Nasir, Desa, Khairudin, & Yusooff, 2014). Furthermore, Reynolds (2003) identified that sexual minorities are more likely to access counselling services compared to other non-dominant cultural groups. When clients overcome their presenting issue(s) within counselling, they become more resilient.

Positive psychologists are at the forefront of promoting resiliency development in their clients (Smith, 2006). The Positive Psychology movement prioritizes clients' strengths and emphasizes personal resources to obtain resiliency (Smith, 2006). The aim of Positive Psychology is to focus on the conditions that contribute to the optimal

functioning of individuals and groups (Gable & Haidt, 2005). In other forms of counselling there is also an emphasis on resiliency development (Vossler, 2016). For example, Cognitive Behavioural therapists (Beck, 2011a) aim to change to maladaptive cognitions and/or behaviours so the clients become more adaptable in the environment. In addition, Solution Focused therapists (de Shazer, 2005) highlight the strengths and resources clients have to overcome personal barriers. Narrative therapists (White & Epston, 1990) aim to change problematic narratives into positive narratives of change for the clients to make sense of life circumstances. Furthermore, Family Systems therapists (Minuchin, 1974) focus on the family structure which is an ecological support system for the clients. Each of these different counselling approaches focuses on resiliency development from different angles but nonetheless the counsellor supports the clients in becoming more resilient in face of the present adversities.

Importance to Focus on Strength and Hope

The concept of resiliency development is grounded in the exploration of one's strengths and capacities (Short & Russell-Mayhew, 2009). All individuals possess degrees of strength and protective assets against hardships (Richardson, 2002). These aspects are important components towards hope building. To focus on resiliency is to also explore how individuals not only encounter adversities but how they have coped with such events. When individuals are oriented towards their ability to overcome adversity, they begin to perceive greater self-efficacy and confidence towards making positive life changes (Kitano & Lewis, 2005). Therefore, conversations around resiliency development may foster hope which is an important conversation to have with vulnerable populations, such as sexual minorities.

Overemphasis on Deficit Approach

Resiliency development is a topic that interests me because I often hear people approach situations from a deficit perspective (i.e., identifying risk factors, emphasizing the hardships and the struggles minorities encounter without also identifying the strengths, and resources this community have created for themselves). For example, traditionally researchers highlighted the problem-saturated narratives and vulnerabilities of being sexual (Anderson, 1998; Grace & Wells, 2015; Saewyc, 2011; Savin-Williams, 2008; Theriault & Witt, 2014). Copious researchers compared heterosexual with their sexual minorities counterparts, and highlighted how sexual minorities experience increased rates of sexually transmitted infections (Everett, Schnarrs, Rosario, Garofalo, & Mustanski, 2014), problematic substance use (Newcomb, Birkett, Corliss, & Mustanski, 2014), and alcohol abuse (Talley, Hughes, Marshal, et al., 2014). Sexual minority youths were also noted to experience more fighting in school, skipping school, and having their property stolen or damaged (Russell, Everett, Rosario, & Birkett, 2014).

These results contribute to a bleak picture of the lived experiences of sexual minorities. Furthermore, this bleak picture is only a partial picture of sexual minorities lived experiences (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Notably, the stories of strength and resiliency are left untold. Researchers focusing on a deficit approach to health fail to indicate preventative measures for sexual minorities to engage in to promote their personal wellbeing (i.e., accessing local community centres and resources, creating safe communities for each other, as well as self-advocating for civil rights). King and Biro (2006) commented that sexual minorities face a constant swim against the currents of heteronormativity. This experience speaks to layers of systemic factors at play, such as

privilege and power, that influences lived experiences (Collins, 2010). One's sexual

minority identity may result in varying degrees of oppression from the larger dominant

cultural identities (Alderson, 2010). Interestingly, deficit-oriented research fails to

identify these contributing forces that lead to the vulnerability of being sexual minorities.

Colpitts and Gahagan (2016) also commented that deficit-focused research may

contribute to identification, mitigation, and treatment of poor health outcomes within the

LGBTQ community. Furthermore, a risk-focused approach in research perpetuates

misrepresentation and reinforces the negative perceptions of sexual minorities' health

(Colpitts & Gahagan, 2016). Despite challenges, many sexual minority individuals

demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity.

While the academic field has focused on the problem-saturated narratives of being

sexual minorities, Russell (2005) noted the need for researchers to also promote the

positive developmental pathways of sexual minorities. Researchers are beginning to

explore how sexual minorities are traversing difficult life obstacles (Grace & Wells,

2015). Pascoe (2011) identified that with the growing accessibility of using the Internet,

sexual minorities are beginning to connect with other sexual minorities online. In

addition, Asakura (2016) noted resilience research to identify factors and processes to

promote the wellbeing of sexual minorities. This information also provide mental health

workers with research-informed evidence on effective interventions. Grace and Wells

(2015) indicated the importance of exploring asset building and indicators of thriving in

face of stressors and risk taking amongst sexual minorities.

Estefan and Roughley (2013) identified that:

Caught within the complexities of growing up same-sex attracted, it is likely that

resilience and vulnerability go hand in hand for young people as they negotiate

their sexual differences…The diversity of contexts within which resilience can

feature means that different experiences offer new insights into what could be

thought of resilience for [sexual minorities]…It is important to further examine

how resilience might assist [mental health workers] to understand more fully how

young people of sexual difference experience their worlds, learn ways to manage

internal and external stressors and thrive in the face of adversity (p. 32).

In sum, I believe it is important to explore this research topic for the following

reasons. First, resiliency is a topic that is central within the counselling field. Counsellors

aim to promote resiliency development for their clients regardless of the presenting issue.

Second, resiliency development is a concept that is grounded on hope and strength-based

conversations. These dialogues promote hope for the individual. Lastly, within the

current academic literature, there is an over-saturation of problem-focused narratives of

sexual minority development (i.e., emphasizing the hardships and at-risk factors). There

needs to be more research that explores how sexual minorities overcome adversities,

Why am I Interested in this Topic

I practice counselling from a Solution-Focused orientation. Solution-Focused

counsellors focus on the strength, skills, and resources that clients possess (Warner,

2015). I have witnessed the empowerment process through engaging in strength-based

conversations. Furthermore, I have worked with LGBTQ clients from vulnerable

backgrounds who made tremendous growth in therapy—not because of the skills they

learned, but through being reminded of the skills they already possessed. A focus of

Solution-Focused therapy is to build hope (Reiter, 2010). Specifically, the counsellor helps the client look for a way through the problem situation. Within the Solution-Focused counselling orientation, strength-based conversations are the mechanisms of change (Warner, 2015). As such, resiliency development is the core focus within counselling.

Throughout my experience with this community I have seen the growth process of many of these individuals. I have heard stories of challenges but also stories of prevailing through these challenges. I reflect on the identity development (and at times, multiple minority identities) and the unique trajectories that sexual minorities go through. Interwoven in these stories are themes of connection with their peers and how these supportive individuals bring hope in dark times. Relatedly, the Internet is a tool that can bring about identity validation. For example, someone may read an article on Reddit that really resonates with personal experiences—it may foster social connectedness despite not knowing the author of the article.

The Internet is a prevalent tool in our lives—we use it within different domains in our daily lives, for personal reasons (i.e., check email), professional reasons (i.e., research information for work and school), entertainment reasons (i.e., watch videos, read news stories) and so much more. Because the Internet is such a prominent tool in our daily lives, I am curious about how using the Internet can be used to foster resiliency development. Is the Internet the new venue to foster identity development and resiliency development? This project's research findings may provide insight into a pathway towards resiliency development within sexual minorities.

Summary

Sexual minorities are often stereotyped to experience hardships (Saewyc, 2011). Yet, these hardships are only one aspect of their totaled lived experiences. Simply focusing on hardships does not provide a complete picture of one's lived experiences. When researchers approach experiences from a deficit perspective, one may overlook the strengths, skills, and resources one has access to overcome the problem; however, everyone has access to various strengths and skills. Sexual minorities may be at greater risk compared to their heterosexual counterparts for greater life adversity, yet it cannot be denied that many LGBTQ individuals survive through these adversities and thrive in their life experiences. Thus it is critical to have conversations that focus on one's strengths and assets. Exploring resiliency is a means to cultivate positive identity development within sexual minorities. This strength-based conversation will highlight the resourcefulness of sexual minorities.

As stated earlier, I believe it is important to explore resiliency development within this vulnerable population because a) counselling is a field that is grounded on fostering resiliency development for clients, b) resiliency conversations is grounded on the strengths one possess, and c) conversations about resilient identity development will provide a refreshing perspective among the plethora of deficit-oriented perspectives in the academic literature within LGBTQ research. Lastly, I hope this research on resiliency development with the sexual minority community will contribute to the counselling literature by exploring how the Internet can be used as a medium to foster resilient identities.

Overview

In Chapter Two I will discuss the literature on resiliency development, Internet use, and how sexual minorities have used the Internet to foster resiliency. Models to explore resiliency development for sexual minorities within the online environment will also be described. Methodological decisions about the qualitative research approach, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, research design, the recruitment process, and data analysis will be discussed in Chapter Three. In Chapter Four, the research findings and excerpts of the interview transcriptions that support my analysis are outlined. In Chapter Five the results from this research will be connected with the findings in the literature. In my final chapter, I will discuss the clinical implications of my research.

Chapter II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This section addresses the theoretical background and relevant literature related to my thesis topic. Key concepts such as Positive Psychology, resiliency development, and Internet usage will be defined. Furthermore, pertinent research on Internet usage within the sexual minority community are highlighted.

Theoretical Background: What is Positive Psychology

Psychology is not solely the study of pathology, weakness, and damage; it is also the study of strength and virtue (Seligman, 2000). Likewise, counselling is not just about attending to the ailments but also nurturing what is good for the client (Seligman, 2000). Unfortunately, within the disciplines, much more attention has been paid to the psychopathology of health (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Positive Psychology on the other hand prioritizes contentment in the past, hope and optimism for the future, and happiness in the present (Seligman, 2000). Positive Psychology has been broadly defined to encompass improvements in quality of life (Schrank, Brownell, Tylee, & Slade, 2014). Linley, Joseph, Harrington, and Wood (2006) defined Positive Psychology as "the scientific study of optimal human functioning" (p. 8). Similarly, Gable and Haidt (2005) defined Positive Psychology as "the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions" (p. 104). Schrank and colleagues (2014) conducted a systematic review in 2011 and found 53 published definitions of the Positive Psychology. These definitions encapsulate six core themes: 1) virtues and character strengths, 2) happiness, 3) growth, fulfilment of capacities, development of highest self, 4) good life, 5) thriving and flourishing, and 6) positive functioning under stressful conditions (Schrank et al., 2014). Seligman (2000)

suggested that the field of Positive Psychology can be applied at the individual level and group level. At the individual level, Positive Psychology emphasizes positive individual traits (capacity for love, courage, perseverance, forgiveness, etc.). At the group level, Positive Psychology focuses on civic virtues, responsibility, altruism, and work ethics (Seligman, 2000).

Within counselling, clients often come in asking the therapist how to be happy (Rashid, 2009). Subsequently, the therapist examines the ailments to ease symptoms; however, this approach does not necessarily address or enhance the clients' happiness (Rashid, 2009). Positive psychology, on the other hand, is an inclusive psychotherapeutic approach that examines both the weaknesses and strengths of clients (Lindely et al., 2006; Rashid, 2009). Rashid (2009) argued that counselling is not just a place where problems are discussed but is also a place where clients' strengths are discovered, where positive emotions are cultivated, and optimism fostered. In the process towards achieving resiliency, Positive Psychology does not rely on wishful thinking, or minimizing the negatives; it adapts what is best, as identified in scientific methods, to the address the presenting concern (Seligman, 2000). Rashid (2009) indicated Positive Psychology does not imply that all other psychotherapies are negative; a central premise of Positive Psychology is to understand the negativities but also to attend to what is going well and to build on these positive qualities (Lindely et al., 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive Psychology acknowledges the distressing, unpleasant, and/or negative experiences as well as encouraging the clients to explore their strengths to overcome the adversity (Rashid, 2009). Positive Psychology does not deny the distressing, or negative aspects of life, nor does it see these events through rose-tinted lenses; but rather, Positive

psychologists acknowledge these human sufferings but attend to how the individuals may find joy and to create healthy communities (Gable & Haidt, 2005). Positive Psychology gives more space and attention to the positive qualities of what is going on (strengths, skills, supports, resources, and personal agency) (Seligman, 2000). Gable and Haidt (2005) argued that attending to environmental conditions and personal strengths help professionals become better equipped to help those who are suffering to utilize assets that buffer against illness.

Seligman (2000) and Gable and Haidt (2005) indicated that Positive Psychology is a response to the medical model of human functioning. The focus of Positive Psychology is to attend to the assets that facilitate thriving individuals and communities (Seligman, 2000). Lindely and colleagues (2006) suggested that Positive Psychology is an attempt to redress the imbalance in the study of psychopathology to the study of positive aspects of human functioning and experiences (i.e., strengths and resiliency). Focusing on "what is broken" "what is not working" and "what needs to be fixed" has its allure but Positive Psychology focuses on "what works" "what is right" and "what is improving" (Sheldon & King, 2001, p. 216). In expanding this line of questions, Lindely and colleagues (2006) asked "how can we take what we have learned here, generalize it, and apply it more broadly to enable more people to improve their lives" (p. 7)?

Critics of Positive Psychology

While the field of Positive Psychology has generated much momentum and interest from therapists and public consumers, there are, nonetheless, critics of this discipline. A main critic of the field is that the name "positive" suggests that all other psychological approaches are negative (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Schrank et al., 2014). In

practice, many psychological applications are neither positive nor negative, but neutral (Schrank et al., 2014). Relatedly, a second criticism of the field is that Positive Psychology fails to acknowledge the negative side of life (Gable & Haidt, 2005). Once again, this assumption is unfounded. Positive psychologists acknowledge the distress individuals experience but approach the presenting issue from a hope building perspective as opposed to pathologizing the issue (Seligman, 2000 Rashid, 2009). The goal of Positive Psychology is to build resiliency, strength, and growth (Gable & Haidt, 2005).

Resiliency

Resiliency is a difficult concept to define. Within the academic literature, a range of definitions have been used to capture this phenomenon. A common feature of resiliency entails the ability to withstand or overcome significant stress or adversity (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). It is the ability to "bounce back" from negative and/or challenging situations (Singh, 2013). This feature is also captured in Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker (2000) definition of resiliency development: the "dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity" (p. 543).

Singh and McKleroy (2011) further identified a behavioural growth aspect to understand resiliency development; resiliency according to these authors entails "a set of learned behaviours and interpersonal relationships that precedes one's ability to cope with adversity" (p. 34). On the other hand, Herrick, Stall, Goldhammer, Egan, and Mayer (2014) argued that resilience is an ongoing process that is constantly growing and evolving with life experiences. Similarly, Estefan and Roughly (2013) defined resiliency to be "intrinsically woven into the experience and story of the person as it is lived and

told in places that have topographical and social features" (p. 30). Herrick and colleagues (2014), as well as Estefan and Roughly (2013), understood resiliency to be an ongoing development of lived experiences as opposed to fixed events or behaviours. This definition emphasizes that resiliency is beyond a personal trait but underscores a dynamic growth process—ongoing experience. Ungar (2011) further described resilience as a social ecological process which is contingent on two factors: 1) individuals' ability to help themselves as well as being in an environment where help is available and accessible, and 2) resilience promoting resources are often population-specific and context-dependent, which are unique to each sociocultural community. Despite the emphasis on different resiliency developmental features, common within the different sets of definition—and perhaps at the core of resiliency development—is the aspect of personal growth in the face of adversity. An individual that develops resiliency is one that can bounce back from adversity as well as experience personal growth.

Scholarly researchers recognize the multifaceted aspects of resiliency. However, because resiliency is a multifaceted concept, it is difficult to succinctly define. There are behavioural components to this phenomenon (i.e., what one does in the face of adversity), and personal growth aspects (i.e., what one learns from the experience). As well, there are the ecological factors to consider (i.e., how the environment facilitates the actions and personal growth of the individual). In my research project, resiliency is defined to capture each of these aspects of resiliency.

In my current research, I operationally defined resiliency to capture the behavioural as well as developmental growth one engages in when facing an obstacle. I contextualized the participants' experiences within their lived environment. This

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definition incorporated elements of the intricacy of resiliency development within the everyday life (Estefan & Roughley, 2013; Ungar, 2011), and it captured the active agency of the individual in trying to overcome the obstacle (Herrick et al., 2014; Singh & McKleroy, 2011). Specifically, I explored the Internet and what individuals do in this environment to facilitate personal growth. Most importantly, I explored the individuals' personal narratives in how they perceived the Internet to be an environment that supports identity development and personal growth. I believe it is important to understand the individual's agency to overcome difficult situations but also how the larger socio-context facilitates or constrains one's development. Ungar (2011) also identified that resiliency development is population specific. The individuals in my study will focus on the experience of gay males.

Studies of Resiliency with LGBTQ Individuals

In Asakura's (2016) study with 16 LGBTQ youths ages 16-19, five themes emerged in relation to how these individuals experience resiliency. Firstly, the participants identified ways to navigate safety across contexts. That is to say the participants "examined their social contexts and assessed their own physical and emotional safety level in each context" (p. 17). Relatedly, the second and third themes respectively were that participants asserted their personal agency and cultivated meaningful relationships with supportive individuals. A fourth theme Asakura (2016) identified was that the participants took on an advocate role to un-silence their social identities—to take actions to embrace their marginalized social identities. The final theme Asakura (2016) noted was the engagement in collective healing and action. These themes highlighted the personal strengths LGBTQ youths demonstrated in face of adversity. As

such, the themes reflect the behavioural component as well as the personal growth component in resiliency development. These youths engaged in personal advocacy and showed agency to work towards personal and collective healing. It is also important to note that resiliency development occurred between the interplay between the skills and actions the youths took and the environmental factors that facilitate the actions; it requires multilevel support and resources (Asakura, 2016; Ungar, 2011). This distinction is important in clinical implications for mental health practitioners because it provides a guideline to how we can support vulnerable youths. Asakura noted to:

a) assist youth in cultivating skills to assess and navigate safety across contexts, b) capitalize on youth's personal agency in identifying needs and accessing helpful resources, c) support youths' efforts in navigating experiences of oppression related to their LGBTQ and other intersecting social identities (p. 18).

Taking up Ungar's (2011) social ecological approach to building resiliency within vulnerable populations requires attention to the individuals' micro, meso, and macro environments. This ecological approach also incorporates the individuals' personal strengths while attending to personal cultural competency skills (i.e., personal knowledge, attitude, and skills) when working with vulnerable communities. I will be using such approaches to explore resiliency development in my study. Notably, I will aim to understand how my research participants use the Internet to facilitate social and connections online. In particular, the Internet can be used to locate safe spaces within the local community, as well as reduce the physical distance to access national and/or international resources (Szulc & Dhoest, 2013).

In another study, Colpitts and Gahagan (2016) conducted a literature review that explored resiliency development within the LGBTQ population. The authors found several factors that contributed to resiliency development among LGBTQ people. At the individual level, LGBTQ individuals demonstrated many positive attributes (such as positive self-esteem, self-efficacy, cognitive ability to mediate stress, self-acceptance, pro-active coping, self-care, shamelessness, and spirituality). Within the interpersonal level (meso and macro environment) factors included: perceived social support, social connectedness, positive LGBTQ role models, positive representation of LGBTQ populations in the media, family acceptance, positive school and/or work environments, having access to safe spaces, connection to LGBTQ communities, and social activism. Once again, this study utilized an ecological approach to understand resiliency development. This study underscores the importance of taking into account the personal agency of the individual. As such, another component to include within my working model of resiliency development is to explore not just the social environments but also the personal characteristics my participants possess to engage in the online spaces.

These studies highlighted the personal growth LGBTQ folks experience within their community. On the other hand, my current study addresses resiliency development through the use of the Internet and to facilitate an identity within the online environment. This environment provides a unique feature of anonymity for its users as well as its ability to connect individuals across the globe. This unique environment may foster different pathways towards resiliency development compared to the lived, in-person environment.

Models Used to Study Resiliency Development

Bowleg, Craig, and Burkholder's (2004) research on Black lesbian coping mechanisms highlighted a resiliency model. The authors focused on two domains: internal factors and external factors. Internal factors consisted of self-esteem, race identification, and sexual identity identification. External factors consisted of social support and perceived availability of LGBT resources (Bowleg et al., 2004). Similarly, my operational definition of resiliency (personal agency, demonstration of personal growth, and the interconnection between individual and environment) encapsulates the facets of resiliency in Bowleg and colleagues' (2004) research. Pertinent to my current research, Bowleg and colleagues (2004) also identified that the internal psychological factors were more predictive of active coping compared to the external factors. This finding signifies the importance of exploring personal agency within my research. This finding is also consistent with Colpitts and Gahagan's (2016) literature review on resiliency development for the broader sexual minority community.

Another point of consideration in regards to resiliency development is the consideration of the social identities of the participants. Individuals with multiple minority statuses (i.e., Black lesbians) may highlight unique pathways towards self-growth and integration of these different aspects of identity into a composite of "self". Colpitts and Gahagan (2016) also concluded that "adopting an intersectionality lens allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how health outcomes and resilience of LGBTQ populations are influenced by the intersections of LGBTQ identity and race and class, for example" (p. 6). There is vast diversity within the sexual minority community; being a member of the sexual minority community occurs across all cultural groups (i.e.,

ethnicities, socio-economic standing, abilities, etc.). In my study, I will be attentive to the identities of my participants and how these social identities factor into the overall resiliency development. After all, I am interested in the process of how accessing online websites foster a sense of personal and/or community resiliency within sexual minorities.

Gamarel, Walter, Rivera, and Golub (2014) further emphasized the relational dimension of resiliency development. These authors described four elements of growth-enhancing relationships: empowerment, authenticity, perceived mutual engagement, and conflict tolerance. This concept is consistent with Ungar's (2011) social ecological understanding of resiliency development. These four qualities promote the exploration of personal identity which enacts personal growth. There are elements of personal connectedness within the immediate (such as friends) and larger community (such as service agencies). This model is particularly relevant when applying to work with the sexual minority community because LGBTQ individuals may encounter structural adversity such as homophobia, biphobia and/or transphobic discrimination (Herrik et al., 2014). Grace and Wells (2015) identified a resiliency typography that begins with stressors and risk factors, but through these adverse elements, individuals access their personal inventory of assets (personal skills, strengths, and resources) and show indicators of thriving (i.e., community supports, engagement with social justice advocacy, etc.).

Together, these researchers highlighted how personal agency influence personal growth within a specific context. There are elements of adversity and personal agency to traverse these barriers. Growth is not an isolated incident but a process of transformation across time. Relatedly, Estefan and Roughley (2013) identified that resiliency

development is interwoven across one's lived experiences. It is through listening to these personal narratives that researchers can learn how these individuals develop their sense of resilient-selves. The model of resiliency development I utilize in my research is guided by the exploration of the social ecological environments within the online community. I will also be attentive to how participants actively seek out resources online and what, as well as how, they use these resources to foster positive identity development.

Summary

There are many definitions used within the academic literature to define resiliency. Nonetheless, there are key components that researchers agree upon. Overarching the concept of resiliency is the ability to withstand or "bounce back" from significant stress or adversity (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Singh, 2013). Resiliency development is also recognized as an ongoing, dynamic process and not a static trait (Grace & Wells, 2015; Luther et al., 2000). Estefan and Roughley (2013) also commented that resiliency development is intricately interwoven into the lived experiences of the individual—it is not a single act that defines resiliency but rather the process towards overcoming the obstacle. Furthermore, resiliency is multi-faceted; Singh and McKleroy (2011) described a behavioural component towards resiliency development; Ungar (2011) described an ecological process whereupon there needs to be available resources for the individual to draw upon to overcome the obstacle; Herrick and colleagues (2014) also described the personal growth element in regards to resiliency development. Therefore, resiliency development is a complex construct to study. Within my research project resiliency is understood as the growth and actions one engages in to traverse a difficult situation. This definition encapsulates the behavioural component as

well as the growth components of resiliency development (Herrick et al., 2014; Singth & McKleroy, 2011). Yet, these actions and growths need to be understood and framed within a specific context to provide meaning to the lived experiences. Therefore, I am also intertwining elements of Estefan and Roughley (2013) as well as Ungar's (2011) understanding of resiliency development into my research.

Previous research in resiliency development with sexual minorities revealed some important themes relevant to this research project. Asakura (2016) identified that sexual minorities engage in active agency to create a safe environment for each other as well as to build supportive networks within the community. Colpitts and Gahagan (2016) also identified that supportive relationships are an important element towards resiliency development. Grace and Wells (2015) indicated a list of developmental assets that contribute to the growth towards being resilient individuals.

Within the resiliency literature, there are several models of resiliency development. Central to this research will be Bowleg, Craig, and Burkholder (2004), as well as Ungar (2011), in understanding resiliency development. This model frames resiliency development within the micro (personal), meso (immediate environment), and macro (larger environment) contexts. It is important to consider the interactions between and within these environments to understand how participants experience and make sense of their resiliency development. On the online platform, it would be intriguing to explore how these different spheres of environment play out as the Internet offers an environment where physical distance may be less important. Bowleg and colleagues' (2004) resiliency model also frames resiliency development within an intersectional lens to explore various facets of identity factors and how these elements contribute to the total lived experiences.

The Internet

Harris Interactive (2010) noted in their study that three-quarters of gay men used social networking sites more often than their heterosexual counterparts for blog reading, use of Facebook, Twitter, and Myspace. Bond, Hefner, and Drogos (2009) found that 70% of the LGB participants in their study used the Internet to gather information about sexual orientation. Furthermore, Kryzan and Walsh (1998) indicated 51% of their sample of LGB youth came out online before doing so in-person; 68% further reported the online medium helped with self-acceptance of their sexual orientation. The Internet is a medium that queer youth may utilize to affirm their sexual identity while also meeting and seeking support from their peers (Gray, 2009).

The Internet is a form of new media. New media, as defined by Craig and McInroy (2014), includes "Internet-based media including websites, web-based TV, web-based news, social media, social networking, and video sharing" (p. 95). This form of technology has presented a new landscape for sexual minorities to come out and express their identities. YouTube, an online video sharing and viewing platform, has become an environment where sexual minorities may record their coming out stories and share it to the larger community (Cover & Posser, 2013). On one hand, the video creator may express personal pride and share one's experience in one's own coming out journey. On the other hand, viewers—sexual minorities and straight peers—may express inspiration and create community support for each other. New media, such as YouTube and Facebook, has substantially shifted how these personal narratives shape understanding of personal development as well as communicating one's lived experiences.

The Fallacy of Dichotomizing Online and Offline Spaces

Sexual minorities may use new media as a medium to create opportunities to explore their identities that might be inaccessible offline (Pascoe, 2011). By virtue of how search engines are set up, a single Google search may yield tremendous LGBTQ-related information. That said, it would be inaccurate to dichotomize offline and online experiences as complete separate spheres of lived experiences (Craig & McInroy, 2014). Online experiences may have a ripple effect on how one perceives oneself offline. Hillier and Harrison (2007) described how sexual minorities use media to develop their confidence, which has an impact on their physical offline world. The activities one engages online interconnect with the activities one does offline. It is important to consider the interaction between online and offline experiences (Gray, 2009). Being online may create opportunities that may have further effects in-person (i.e., finding resources online to access in-person). Alternatively, it is also possible to have in-person experience that subsequently transgresses to online experience (i.e., being referred to an affirmative LGBTQ website that includes coming out stories of famous celebrities, for example, the "It gets better" website).

There are interactions between online and offline environments. Thomas, Ross, Harris (2007) commented that friendships developed online could be carried forward into real lives. A lot of research on sexual minorities and media usage noted how the participants would comment that they came out online before subsequently coming out in-person (Craig & McInroy, 2013; Etengoff & Daiute, 2005; Thomas et al., 2007). Craig and McInroy (2013) commented how coming out digitally was a good place to start the coming out process because of perceived lower level of risk. Subsequently, participants

would come out in-person after sensing that it is safe online and after developing a network of support online for fallback should coming out in-person result in fallout with the person one is coming out to. Conversely, DeHaan, Kuper, Magee, Bigelow, and Mustanski (2013) noted in-person experience might also influence how one uses online spaces. For example, some participants use the Internet to maintain in-person relationships or become more connected with particular communities.

Online and offline experience may also create some tension within sexual minorities. Taylor and colleagues (2014) noted how Facebook had become an important tool for identity construction, in both personal and public persona. The authors in this study reported that participants noted how they managed identity by omitting information on their Facebook page. While some of the participants chose to omit certain information within their Facebook page, they reported experiencing internal conflict (Taylor et al., 2014). Thomas and colleagues (2007) similarly reported how some participants described themselves to be living a double life—they were out online but not in-person. When sexual minorities take precaution to hide their online activities and sexual orientation to protect against being rejected by family and friends it can create stress. This dual identity between online and offline experiences is a negative drawback of using online websites.

Gray (2009) noted how participants focus on the intersectional aspects of personal identities (i.e., being Black and gay). Participants negotiated how coming out would influence their connections within their cultural communities. At times, participants sacrificed coming out in order to maintain bond within their ethnic community. Gilbert and Forney (2013) identified that technology (including the Internet) has the ability to shape the human identity. Using the Internet is intricately interwoven into the daily

living. We use it without even thinking (i.e., watching videos on Netflix, listening to music on Spotify, readings news on an online newspaper). We also have occupations that solely interact with the online community (i.e., YouTubers, and Bloggers). The growing phenomenon of using the Internet has perpetuated into our daily living, and at times beyond our conscious awareness.

The Internet can also have an influence on one's psychosocial wellbeing. Teller, Murphy, and Gilbert (2013) explored online participation in a virtual reality game with participants that self-reported social anxiety disorder. The authors found that interacting online has demonstrated to reduce social anxiety in real life for these participants. Furthermore, Gilbert, Murphy, Krueger, Ludwig, and Efron (2013) reported psychological benefits of interacting online. Participants in the study showed significant improvement in their experience of depression, anxiety, positive emotions, life satisfaction, and social connectedness (Gilbert et al., 2013). Kleban and Kaye's (2014) research also corroborate on the positive effects of using online mediums to promote psychosocial wellbeing. Taken together, experiences online create ripple effects that influence other domains in life. It is difficult to isolate "online" as opposed to "real life" experiences because there are bidirectional effects in everything that we do in-person and within the online environment.

The Advantages of Using the Internet as a Medium to Develop Resiliency

There are many advantages of using the Internet for the sexual minority community to develop resiliency. To begin with, the Internet has been commonly recognized as a safe place to engage in social interaction with peers and allies thus providing a support network for sexual minorities (Szulc & Dhoest, 2013). The Internet

has the ability to connect individuals globally, which may be a useful tool for sexual minorities in rural or homophobic areas to receive support. Baams, Jonas, Utz, Bos, and van der Vuurst's (2011) study demonstrated corroborating results. Baams and colleagues (2011) also noted that younger participants (16-24 years old) were likely to use the Internet to form social relationships online compared to counterparts (25-59 years old). In this study, Baams and colleagues (2011) continued to highlight that in times of stress, there were no differences between the younger and older participants in how they used the Internet to seek out support. Through accessing new media mediums, sexual minorities may also create safe spaces for each other to share personal stories and create an online community presence for each other. Perhaps, a key factor that facilitates the Internet as a safe place is that the Internet offers a sense of anonymity for its users (Bonds et al., 2011; Craig & McInroy, 2014; Sells, 2013; Szulc & Dhoest, 2013). Online participants may manage their identity by having user names and profile pictures of their choice for their accounts as well as provide descriptions to better represent themselves (Sells, 2013). Online connection may also facilitate a sense of "queer realness" that is not achieved through other mediums such as television shows and movies (Gray, 2009). In some cases, the Internet may be the primary, and only, medium where sexual minorities may form social relationships with other queer peers (Bond et al., 2009).

Sexual minorities can also access safe places online that is otherwise not available in-person. Craig and McInroy (2013) noted perceived stigma impedes access to in-person resources/services (i.e., sexually transmitted disease testing clinics). Therefore, looking for resources online provides a more appealing avenue.

Another advantageous feature of using the Internet is its accessibility to users. DeHaan and colleagues (2013), and Szulc and Dhoest (2013) indicated that some sexual minorities use the Internet not only for the ease of communication but also because they can find information they trust. Bond and colleagues (2009) noted that 72% of their study's participants used Internet sources to gather information during the coming out process. The participants spoke positively about their information-seeking experiences using the Internet and that this medium provided a safe and anonymous environment to foster identity development. Both Bond and colleagues (2009) and Baams and colleagues (2011) identified that sexual minorities were motivated to gather information online and to develop supportive networks. These qualities of the Internet are important to note because they provide the foundation for minorities to foster a sense of self and to grow into resiliency. The Internet may also offer a greater range of information compared to in-person community resources. Taken together with the perceived safety online, Internet resources thus become an important component towards resiliency development.

Taylor, Falconer, and Snowdon (2014) also noted additional advantages of using the online space to come out. Participants in Taylor and colleagues' (2014) study mentioned coming out to family members or close friends online to delay subsequent potential awkward discussions. The physical divide of being online afforded participants a welcome relief to process their action and to delay potential conflicts that are otherwise not possible had it been in-person (Taylor et al., 2014). Furthermore, Taylor and colleagues (2014) concluded that "Facebook and online networking can provide forums for queer religious youth who during their identity transition feel neither comfortable in LGBTQ scene nor attending church" (p. 1149).

Sexual minorities may use the Internet as a means to foster resiliency because of its unique properties. Some of these unique features include perceived safety, anonymity, and accessibility. Based on these findings, there are many advantages of using the Internet.

While the Internet offers many benefits and protections, there are critics of this platform (Sender, 2012). Doring (2009) reviewed earlier literature on the Internet's impact on sexuality and found that studies highlighted the risk of online pornography and sexual predators. Additional factors such as online bullying and exposure to age inappropriate content may have negative consequences too (Guan & Subrahmanym, 2009). These perspectives do constitute a minority in using new media as tool to facilitate sexual identity development. Technology is not prepackaged with a set of "good" or "bad" traits, but rather how people use the new media to meet their needs (see Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2010; Deters & Mehl, 2012 research on Facebook usage and its effects on social connectedness). Taylor (2013) also indicated that technology (including the Internet) goes beyond the "good or bad" arguments but also includes the users' education about the medium and previous experiences on the medium. Overall, Internet studies on coming out note the opportunities and positive experiences of the Internet for queer individuals (Szulc & Dhoest, 2013).

Summary

Internet usage consists of many different activities. This research project will utilize Craig and McInroy's (2014) Internet use definition to include browsing websites, watching television and news online, accessing social media, networking, and video sharing. The modern day Internet is accessible and provides a new platform for sexual

minorities to learn and express their identities (Baams et al., 2011; Cover & Posser, 2013). Various studies indicated sexual minorities access the Internet to gather information about sexuality and to come out online before doing so in-person (Bond et al., 2009; Gray, 2009; Harris Interactive, 2010; Kryzan & Walsh, 1998). While many sexual minorities access online spaces, it would be considered a fallacy to dichotomize online and offline spaces—both domains have overlapping influence for its users. Friendships may develop online that carry forward in-person, and vice-versa. Furthermore, there are many advantages of using the Internet as a medium to foster resiliency. Features of the Internet, such as the ability to protect personal identity may provide a sense of security to come out online (Bond et al., 2011; Craig & McInroy, 2014; Szulc & Dhoest, 2013). Another feature is that the Internet has the ability to connect individuals across the world. Thus, it can promote connections for individuals in rural areas or individuals with homophobic living spaces (for example) to reach out for support (Gray, 2009). While there are many benefits of using the Internet to foster resiliency development, there are critics of using this medium. For example, Doring (2009) cited that there are risks of online pornography and sexual predators. Guan and Subrahmanym (2009) also noted that there is online bullying and at times users may be exposed to inappropriate materials. Nonetheless, Szulc and Dhoest (2013) identified that the opportunities and positive experiences of using the Internet for sexual minorities outweighs the negativity of this medium. Burke and colleagues (2010,) as well as Deters and Mehl (2012), indicated that the effects of Internet usage are a direct result of how users use the medium to meet their needs.

The Internet is an avenue to explore sexual minorities' experiences. The following section will summarize current research in the area of new media and sexual identity formation.

New Media and Resiliency Development

Braquet and Mehra (2006) argued that the Internet is a space invisible minority groups can utilize to empower themselves through various methods, such as connecting with other individuals with shared experiences, and in turn, developing a support system. In addition, they can seek information to assist with coping or coming to terms with sexual orientation.

Changes in Internet Usage: Before, During, and After Coming Out

Grace and Wells (2015) used the term "growing into resiliency" to describe the progress of becoming more resilient. It is a process with no endpoint. Resiliency is also not a dichotomous term where one does or does not have resiliency. Likewise, resiliency varies from person to person. Resiliency development can be tracked through how one uses the Internet. Participants in Szulc and Dhoest's (2013) study used the Internet to a lesser degree after coming out. This pattern was consistent across four different categories of Internet usage (i.e., seeking information about sexual identities, visiting sexual minorities-related websites, seeking contact from other sexual minorities, and to find a partner). Szulc and Dhoest (2013) also noted that younger participants continued to use the Internet more often in comparison to the older participants. It appears that sexual minorities sought LGB-related information online more when they were coming to terms with their sexuality. Thomas, Ross, and Harris (2007) also reported similar findings—the participants used chat rooms to connect with other sexual minorities, come to terms with

one's sexuality, and to affirm one's sexual identity. This behaviour may be viewed as an active effort to gain information that is otherwise unavailable in-person. As previously noted, many sexual minorities view online spaces as safe and trustworthy. Thus, the active agency to seek out information may be viewed as a part of resiliency development because participants are actively overcoming the lack of information available in-person by accessing information online.

Building Connections

Grace and Wells (2015) also noted additional indicators of resiliency, one of which includes building connections with the LGBTQ community. Thomas, Ross, and Harris (2007), and Craig and McInroy (2013) commented the online environment might facilitate a safe space for sexual minorities to feel connected to a group of people who share commonalities (i.e., sexual orientation) and to care for one another. In Thomas and colleagues' (2007) study, friendships were developed online that were also carried forward into their real lives. Similarly, Etengoff and Daiute (2005) found that religious gay youths used Internet sites, such as Facebook, to seek out support from other religious gay individuals. This medium provided the participants a unique opportunity to seek connections online without outing oneself in-person. Likewise, Craig and McInroy (2013) noted similar findings of sexual minorities finding comfort to be able to connect with each other online. Etengoff and Daiute (2005) also noted that participants actively search for alternative family structures (i.e., chosen family) online. Participants commented that the web was a critical place for them to reach out and find support. Friendships developed online may be carried forward in-person that may result in forming romantic relationships (Thomas et al., 2007). DeHaan and colleagues (2013)

further mentioned online websites not only help with facilitating an environment for social connections but also connections to health facilities (i.e., safe places for sexual minorities to get HIV testing without experiencing discrimination as well as accessing affirmative health centres). Sexual minorities may also access websites to check out local events that celebrate the queer communities (i.e., LGBTQ parades, parties, and rallies) (DeHaan et al., 2013).

While there were narratives of creating connections online, there were also narratives of feeling isolated. Gray (2009) study of sexual minorities in rural areas noted the contrast between the online connections and the isolation felt in-person. On one hand, participants were able to find a community online, but this experience only provided temporary refuge from the experience in-person. This experience speaks to the power of active agency and effort to overcome a difficult situation (lack of support in-person) by reaching out online.

Introspection and Identity Development

Personal growth is an important component of resiliency development. In and of itself, it is not a sufficient condition to merit being resilient. That said, resiliency is an ongoing process (Estefan & Roughley, 2013; Grace & Wells, 2015). DeHaan and colleagues (2013) identified that while there was a dimension of using the Internet to connect with others, using the Internet also helped some participants to reflect on their own identities. Sexual minorities may learn from each other and gain better insight into one's own identity. DeHaan and colleagues (2013) suggested the Internet is a helpful medium to research information to connect to the larger LGBTQ community while also promoting introspection on one's sexual identity. Gray (2009) similarly reported that

participants used new media to gain better personal understanding of what it means to be gay for themselves; participants gained introspection. Craig and McInroy (2013) further identified some sexual minorities use the Internet to explore, develop, and rehearse their LGBTQ identities online before coming out in-person. Participants would create a script of how they would come out and what they would say to people about their sexual identities.

This learning process once again resonates with Grace and Wells' (2015) concept of growing into resiliency. The resiliency typography Grace and Wells (2015) highlighted indicates the process of becoming resilient. Learning about oneself is part of the process of becoming a resilient individual.

Summary

New Media is an environment sexual minorities can access to empower themselves. Szulc and Dhoest's (2013) research demonstrated that sexual minorities use the Internet for different purposes, as well as for varying length of periods during the different phases of coming out. The research shows that sexual minorities use the Internet to come to terms with their sexual identity by doing research online—an environment they perceive to be safer, compared to in-person research (Szulc & Dhoest, 2013; Thomas et al., 2007). Furthermore, Craig and McInroy (2013) identified that online environments (i.e., Facebook, Reddit, and other platforms) might be used to develop online communities. These online platforms allow the user to reach out to the sexual minority community without outing oneself in-person (Braquet & Mehra, 2006). Friends developed online were also demonstrated to carry forward offline too (Thomas et al., 2007). Through the process of reaching out to others online, Grace and Wells (2015)

reported that sexual minorities also experience personal growth through self-reflection.

That is to say, sexual minorities who use the Internet to learn and reach out to the

community also learn about themselves in the process. As the literature has demonstrated,

there are different ways that sexual minorities use the Internet to foster their personal

resiliency. Each individual experiences resiliency uniquely; nonetheless, each individual

experiences positive growth in face of adversity (Grace & Wells, 2015).

Chapter III: METHODOLOGY

This study addresses the question: "How do sexual minorities experience the Internet as a means of fostering resiliency in their lives?" I have recruited a small number of sexual minorities who identify as cis-gender, gay, White men between the ages of 18-29 to learn about their experience in Internet usage and resiliency development. I used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to guide the research and analyze the data.

What is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Jonathan Smith (1996) developed interpretative phenomenological analysis. At its inception, IPA was grounded in health psychology, but it has since expanded to the clinical and counselling fields of psychology (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This qualitative research approach aims to understand lived experiences, events, relationships, and process (Larkin, Eatough, & Osborn, 2011; Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005) and how participants make sense of these experiences (Biggerstaff, & Thompson, 2008; Smith, 2004). Increasingly, within the past decade, IPA has become a popular qualitative research method to research a breadth of topics centering on participant's lived experiences (Smith, 2004, 2011).

Theoretical Assumptions

Interpretative phenomenological analysis draws upon an inductive approach to research (Reid et al., 2005). The researcher does not formulate hypothesis and then subsequently affirm or reject such hypothesis; rather, in IPA, the aim is to create understanding through data (Smith, & Osborn, 2007). In addition to being an inductive

research approach, IPA has three foundational principles: phenomenological, hermeneutics, and idiography (Pietkiewicz, & Smoth, 2014).

First, the researcher acknowledges that the participants are the expert in their experiences. It is through working with these participants and learning about their experiences that the researcher begins to make sense of the phenomenon of interest (Reid et al., 2005; Roberts, 2013). Only those individuals who have experienced the phenomenon are able to communicate their experiences (Roberts, 2013). The researcher explores in detail the participants' personal experiences and their personal accounts of the situation (Smith, & Osborn, 2007).

Second, the researcher takes a step beyond simply describing the lived experiences to interpret this lived account (Callary, Rathwell, & Young, 2015; Smith, 2011). Lived experiences are subjective; this assumption guides the epistemology of IPA (Reid et al., 2005). Since experiences are subjective, to understand or come close to understanding that experience, it requires the researcher to interpret what the phenomenon entails and how the participant makes sense of the experience (Reid et al., 2005).

It is more accurate to describe the interpretation process as double hermeneutic. That is to say, when the participants try to make sense of their experience, the researcher also attempts to make sense of the how the participants embody these experiences (Smith, 2004; Smith, & Osborn, 2007). There are two processes of interpretation involved—the personal accounts from the participants and the researcher's interpretation of the experiences. Hermeneutics is the analysis of the words one used and the way one expressed oneself to convey one's understanding of the experience (Roberts, 2013).

Interpretation involves understanding the meaning of the lived experiences and how it is expressed by the participants (Larkin, Eatough, & Osborn, 2011). Hefferson and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) noted that the quotations should be embedded in the report and be contextualized to offer an interpretation of the quotation. The quotation needs to be explained, thus interpreted (Hefferson, & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011).

Third, idiography refers to the in-depth analysis of lived experiences (Pietkiewicz, & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2004). The researcher recognizes each participant's experiences are unique. The researcher attempts to understand the participants' rich experiences (Smith, 2004). Therefore, a smaller sample size is used in IPA research (Smith, & Osborn, 2007). IPA research offers both descriptive findings and interpretative results. The researcher conducting IPA is cautious to contextualize the experiences by providing thick descriptions and providing contextual and cultural understanding of the phenomenon.

Rationale for Engaging in IPA Research

The research question guides the overall focus of the research (Pietkiewicz, & Smith, 2014). Smith and colleagues (2009) indicated the interpretative phenomenological analysis method is suited for researchers who want to learn about people's experiences—particularly how they perceive the experience. Central to the IPA research question is "what it is like to be experiencing this, for this particular person, in this context" (Larkin et al., 2011, p.330). There are two processes involved in understanding a person's lived experiences. First, the researcher needs to identify and describe the phenomenon within a person's world; second, the researcher interprets the experiential understanding the individual has in regards to the particular phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). That is to say,

the participant first describes their experience in relationship to the desired phenomenon. Then the researcher attempts to make sense of the participant's experiences. The objective is for the researcher to create a coherent outsider's description of the lived experience (Larkin et al., 2006). These two steps are guided by the theoretical assumptions of IPA.

I believe the current research is appropriate to draw upon the IPA research method. My research aims to understand how sexual minorities experience the Internet to become resilient. The complex nature of being sexual minorities subsequently enforces the appropriateness of drawing upon the IPA research approach to work with this research sample. In this research, I aim to understand: a) the activities sexual minorities engage online to work towards resiliency development and b) how participants understand their embodiment of resilient identity.

Sampling

Purposeful sampling (Roberts, 2013; Smith et al., 2009) was used in this research. The aim of purposeful sampling is to recruit participants based on defined criteria to whom the research questions will be pertinent (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Furthermore, in IPA research, participants are recruited to participate in the study because they can provide insight into the particular phenomenon of interest based on their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

In addition to the above requirements, it is ideal to have a homogenous sample for the research (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2007). The homogeneity of the sample will be dependent on a) the desired degree of similarity between individual experiences and b) the practical considerations of the research project (i.e., ease of locating

participants, time and financial constraints, and the prevalence of the lived experience) (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Roberts (2013) recommended a small sample size for IPA research. Sample size in IPA research is kept relatively small because the aim is to understand the perspectives relating to a phenomenon, not a population (Reid et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2007). Smith and Osborn (2007) indicated the number of participants in a study is dependent on several factors: a) the desired depth of study, b) the richness of participants' experiences, and d) the limitations of the study (i.e., time constraints and access to participants). A sample size within three and fifteen participants is sufficient based on the richness of the participants' responses (Smith et al., 2009). A small sample size is selected to ensure data analysis is manageable (Reid et al., 2005; Smith, 2004). Data analysis is a systematic and rigorous process that involves examination of both within and between cases; too large of a sample will create difficulty in making sense of the information. Smith and colleagues (2009) continued to note new researchers using IPA may choose to select three participants for the target sample as to not become overwhelmed and to gather research depth, as opposed to breadth. A smaller sample size thus enables the researchers to focus on the individuals' experiences and subsequent detailed case-by-case analysis (Pietkiewicz, & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009).

For this study, I recruited participants through flyers posted in LGBTQ-friendly establishments that provide programs or services to the sexual minority community. Participants met the inclusion criteria of being White, cis-gender, gay male between the ages of 18-29. These criteria were selected to provide homogeneity to learn about the

experience of resiliency development online. A total of seven participants signed up to participate in this research.

Data Collection

Smith and colleagues (2009) recommended data collection to be carried out using in-depth interviews. This format will provide opportunities for first-person account of the feelings and thoughts in regards to the phenomenon of interest. Adhering to a semi-structured interview format will allow data collection to appear more conversational and flexible (Hefferson, & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). Semi-structured interviews are the most commonly chosen method for collecting data using IPA because it allows the researcher and participant to explore the interested phenomenon in depth (Reid et al., 2005; Smith, 2004). Thus, the researcher cannot rigidly adhere to personal agenda (Fade, 2004; Hefferson, & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). Data collection needs to be flexible in order to record unexpected narratives when it occurs during the interview process (Pietkiewicz, & Smith, 2014).

Hefferson and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) also recommended the interview to begin with broad questions and allow the participants to lead the interview—the participants guide what the topic would come next (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). The role of the researcher is to facilitate, rather than dictate what is covered in the interview (Smith & Osborn, 2007). This procedure is to ensure the researcher does not impose his or her understanding of the phenomenon onto the participants' lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, using a semi-structured interview process allows the researcher to focus on the interested phenomenon while also enabling the participants to focus on their important aspects revolving around the chosen phenomenon.

There are some benefits of collecting data through one-on-one interviews. First, this process enables the researcher to develop better rapport with participants. This process will also allow the participant to describe their lived experience in detail; thus, facilitating insight into the lived experience and the interested phenomenon. Other benefits associated with one-on-one interviews are that the participants may feel they are heard, and they may reflect on their own experience simultaneously (Reid et al., 2005). Rapely (2001) also mentioned a drawback of conducting interviews. The main drawback is that interviews may feel contrived and the conversation is not natural. However, Smith and Osborn (2007) mentioned that conducting the interview in a comfortable location for the participant may be beneficial and enable the participant to feel at ease.

A semi-structured interview schedule was adapted for this research study. The interview consisted of 17 open-ended questions (see Appendix B). These questions guided the research participants to talk about their experience in resiliency development online. Because the interview schedule was semi-structured, vague or unclear responses were followed up with prompts to ensure the researcher understood the response and to provide depth to the initial response (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The interviews occurred face-to-face and lasted between 60-90 minutes. The interviews took place between August to October 2017 within a classroom setting at a university at a time that was convenient for both research participants and researcher.

Data Analysis

Smith (2004) emphasized that IPA is not a prescriptive methodology—there is no one true way of doing IPA research and data analysis. While there is a suggested guideline, Smith and colleagues (2009) identified that qualitative analysis is a personal

process and data analysis requires interpretative work. Researchers pay attention to participants' (descriptive) responses and then subsequently to make sense of the participants' lived experiences (Reid et al., 2005; Smith, 2004). To summarize, Smith and colleagues (2009) suggested six steps for data analysis: 1) reading and rereading transcripts, 2) initial noting, 3) developing emerging themes, 4) searching for connections across emerging themes, 5) moving on to the next case, and 6) identifying patterns across cases.

Reading and Rereading Transcripts.

This step requires the researcher to immerse oneself in the data (Smith et al., 2009). Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) suggested the researcher to read over the transcripts a few times to gain familiarity with the content. This process and examination of data may reveal new insights with each review (Smith & Osborn, 2007). During this step, the researcher is encouraged to make notes of initial impressions of the data (Smith et al., 2009).

Initial Noting

In this stage, the researcher thoroughly examines the semantic content and language used by the research participant (Smith et al., 2009). In this stage, the researcher aims to understand how the research participants reflect about their thoughts and their understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher now goes beyond noting initial impressions and to make notes and underline significant passages (Smith et al., 2009).

Developing Emerging Themes

At this stage, the researcher attempts to reduce the amount of initial notes developed from the previous stage (Smith et al., 2009). Thematic analysis involves identifying meaningful phrases participants has used to describe their lived experiences. Smith and colleagues (2009) noted that themes are chosen to reflect the participants' original words and thoughts. It is also important to be able to provide verbatim excerpts to support the theme (Hefferson & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011; Reid et al., 2005). There is no set amount of themes to develop during data analysis (Hefferson & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). These themes may reflect commonalities across participants' experiences, but may also reflect the idiosyncratic lived experiences (Reid et al., 2005). In addition, the frequency of themes does not imply one theme is more important than other themes. The aim is to explore the richness of the participants' experiences (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008).

Searching for Connections Across Emerging Themes

The researcher now searches for connections between the emerging themes (Smith et al., 2009). Smith and colleagues (2009) identified that themes can be organized into: abstraction (categorical importance), subsumption (relevance to different themes), polarization (contextual elements, similarities, and differences), frequency (the amount of times certain phrases has occurred during the interviews, and function (significance of phrases to participants).

Moving on to the Next Case

The researcher conducts a thorough, detailed analysis of the participants' response before moving on to the next case (Smith, 2004). After completing the first four steps in the data analysis process for the first transcript, the researcher may move on to the next

transcription. The researcher repeats the same systematic process of data examination for each research participant (Smith et al., 2009). While the researcher may be influenced by the information from previous data analysis and emerging themes, the researcher continues to engage in bracketing as much as possible.

Identifying Patterns Across Cases

At this step, the researcher identifies connections and differences between the different transcripts (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2007). The researcher looks for themes that are most important, emerged most frequently, and most poignant for participants, or generated the most questions (Smith et al., 2009). Smith and colleagues (2009) continued to emphasize the importance of paying attention to the similarities, differences, and nuances between themes. This method aims to highlight the participant's experiences and to give voice to participants. In addition, it is important to explore how these themes are connected to one another and/or influence other cases.

While the researcher attempts to understand how participants make sense of their experience, there is a balance of emic (insider's account of the phenomenon) and the etic (looking into the phenomenon) within data analysis (Reid et al., 2005). As such, during this stage, the researcher organizes the identified themes while also offering interpretations of the lived experiences (Reid et al., 2005).

The final task requires the write-up and presentation of these themes (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher recognizes the importance to contextualize the research findings and that these findings are not reported as the absolute truths but a reflection of the participants' lived experiences. Furthermore, the findings are grounded and supported by the data (Reid et al., 2005). Interpretations are referred back to the direct quotations

(Hefferson, & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). It is also important that the interpretation is a plausible explanation (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011).

Demonstrating Reflexivity. Pietkiewwicz and Smith (2014) noted researchers to demonstrate reflexivity in qualitative research. Likewise, reflexivity is key in IPA (Reid et al., 2005). Researchers need to demonstrate reflexivity throughout the research process (Reid et al., 2005). Researchers should also be reflecting on their role and how they, as the researchers, influence data collection and their interactions with research participants. While, IPA research aims to understand the phenomenon of interest, the researcher should also acknowledge that one's own experiences influence the research (Smith, 2004). The researcher is the research instrument. It is not possible to completely remove biases. Demonstrating reflexivity thus enables the researcher to explicitly acknowledge one's interpretative role. Smith (2004) noted researchers are influenced by their personal experiences and the knowledge gleaned from the literature review. Therefore these factors filter the lens through which the researcher interprets and understands the participant's accounts.

Credibility in IPA

Credibility, or the trustworthiness, of any research is important. It can be achieved when the researcher provides an auditable account of the research process (Roberts, 2013). Yardley (2000) suggested a set of criteria to assess for the credibility within qualitative research. These criteria relates to the sensitivity to context, commitment to rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance (Yardley, 2000).

Sensitivity to Context

Sensitivity to content refers to the researcher's awareness of the contextual aspects of the study, including foundational theories and existing literature (Smith & Osborn, 2007; Yardley, 2000). In IPA research, the researcher demonstrates sensitivity to the context from the onset of the research—beginning with the appropriateness of the research question, existing literature, and methodology (Yardley, 2000, 2008). Furthermore, it is important for the researcher to demonstrate reflexivity to become aware of the values and biases that drives the research (Pietkiewwicz & Smith, 2014). It is important to attend to the socio-cultural identities of the research participants as well as where and how the research is being carried out in a culturally-sensitive manner (Yardley, 2000). It is also important to attend to the relationship between research participants and researcher. Smith and colleagues (2009) indicated that the researcher conducting the interview must attend to the participants' emotional needs and ensure they feel comfortable and at ease during the interview. A good IPA researcher also acknowledges and attempts to minimize the power difference between participants and researcher (CPA, 2000; Smith et al., 2009; Yardley, 2000).

Commitment and Rigour

Commitment refers to the amount of work one puts into the research (i.e., developing competency in research method, and familiarity with the data) (Smith et al., 2009; Yardley, 2000). The researcher can demonstrate commitment by being attentive to the participants during the interview process and analysis of data. Field notes can be used as well as making notes of participants' nonverbal communication during interviews

(Fade, 2004). This information will be helpful for the researcher to reflect back during data analysis because memory is subjected to biases and forgetfulness (Creswell, 2013).

Rigour refers to the researcher's diligence to the study (Smith et al., 2009; Yardly, 2000). Did the researcher recruit a sample that is appropriate for the study? Does the interview yield high quality responses? Is the data analysis thorough and detailed? It is also important to ensure that the interpretation of the data is sound (Yardley, 2000).

Transparency and Coherence

Transparency refers to the clarity, details, and disclosure of the research stages (participant selection, interview process, and data analysis, etc.) (Smith et al., 2009; Yardley, 2000) as well as the self-reflection on the researcher's biases, values, and procedures (Roberts, 2013). Coherence refers to the clarity of the description and defense of the study (Yardley, 2000). These two processes can be attended to through the practice of reflexivity (Roberts, 2013). The IPA researcher is attentive to these processes and features in the study (Smith et al., 2009).

In order to be transparent and coherent, I have recorded my thoughts in a research journal throughout the research stages. The journal detailed the research process and initial thoughts and plans within the study. I have also used the journal to note reactions during the interview, during data analysis, and write-up. This process is helpful because I can reflect on my experiences throughout the progression of the research study. In keeping with transparency, I have delineated my analysis procedure to demonstrate the findings are grounded in the data and not based on personal opinion (Roberts, 2013).

Impact and Importance

Impact and importance refers to the considerations of the research findings has for the general community, as well as professional institutions. Is the research relevant or contribute theoretical knowledge to policy makers, practitioners, or public members (Smith & Osborn, 2007; Yardley, 2000). The impact of this research study is to contribute to the body of Positive Psychology research to work with sexual minorities. The aim of this study is to foster awareness for mental health workers to utilize a strength-based lens to work with sexual minorities. Resiliency development is foundational within counselling practices and as such, it makes sense to draw upon the strengths, skills, and resources to nurture this quality in sexual minorities as well. Detailed description on the relevancy of this research has been addressed in the introduction and conclusion sections in this thesis.

Ethics in Research

Ethical considerations are at the forefront of any research project. Smith and colleagues (2009) indicated that researchers need to attend to ethical conduct across all aspects of the research study. In accordance to the regulatory body of research studies (Tri-Council Policy Statement, 2017), participants' welfare, respect, and justice are upheld. These objectives can be accomplished through adherence to participants' confidentiality, anonymizing data when possible, secure storage of data, and ensuring participants provided informed consent. Researchers must ensure the research maximizes the benefits for participants and minimizes harm. These regulations are also consistent with the principles within the Code of Ethics for Psychologists (CPA, 2000). Specifically, the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists requires the research to offset harm in any

activities carried out by the individual. If it is not possible to offset harm, then the researcher needs to terminate the project.

       In this study, to minimize and eliminate the potential for harm, participants were provided with informed consent on the topic and the questions that the researcher would ask in the interview. Participants were given time to read and sign the informed consent document (Appendix A) and to ask questions. Furthermore, it was explained to the participants (in written format and verbally) how the data would be kept secure and how their confidentiality would upheld. Participants also had the right to withdraw from the study between the onset of data collection up until November 2017 when data analysis commenced. Participation in this research is voluntary and the researcher recognizes the participants' autonomy to refuse to answer certain questions (Truscott, & Crook, 2013). During the results write-up, participant's names are replaced with a pseudonym to protect participants' confidentiality (Creswell, 2013). These procedures are consistent with the codes of ethics within psychology (CPA, 2000) as well as the procedures outlined by Smith and colleagues (2009). In addition, this research project has received ethical approval from the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. All relevant Acts and Codes were adhered to during the research.

Chapter IV: RESULTS

In this section I present the research findings from the interviews with the research participants. This section begins with the descriptive data to provide contextual information, followed by participants' Internet usage patterns to provide background on how often they are online. Most importantly, I will describe the themes that emerged from the interviews with the participants.

Participants' Characteristics

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Information

	Age	Ethnicity	Job Status	Student Status	Living Situation	Financial Status	Religious	Sexual Orientation
P1	22	Caucasian	No	Yes	Alone	Not in debt	No	Gay
P2	24	Caucasian	Yes	No	Roommate	Not in debt	No	Gay
P3	24	Caucasian	Yes	Yes	With family	Not in debt	No	Gay
P4	29	Caucasian	Yes	No	With partner	Not in debt	N/A	Gay
P5	23	Caucasian	Yes	Yes	With family	Not in debt	Yes	Gay
P6	29	Caucasian	Yes	No	With partner	Not in debt	No	Gay
P7	18	Caucasian	Yes	No	With family	Not the best	Yes	Gay

Note. P stands for Participant

A total of seven participants completed interviews for this research (see Table 1). Participants' ages range between 18 years old to 29 years old (mean age is 24 years old). All of the participants identify as Caucasian and gay. The majority are currently employed and are not currently a student. In addition, the majority live with their family (either biological family, or with a significant partner). Two participants identify being religious (Christian), one did not disclose about religion, and the rest identify as non-religious.

Internet Usage

All of the participants identified that they use the Internet every day. The number of hours ranged between two hours to twelve hours of Internet usage. A number of participants indicated that it is difficult to differentiate between "active" Internet usage and "passive" Internet usage. For example one participant indicated that he listens to music using Spotify. Spotify is an application that uses the Internet to select popular music playlists. Listening to music in and of itself is not related to the Internet, but accessing the playlist does require the Internet. Another participant also commented about checking email notifications. The act itself takes a few seconds so it is difficult to account for an accurate measurement of the number of hours spent online. Furthermore, another participant indicated that it is difficult to dichotomize Internet usage and the real world because interactions online with friends would also result in meeting with the individuals in-person. Therefore, it is difficult to quantify the amount of Internet usage per day.

In terms of the activities one enjoys engaging online, all participants commented about using social media. Common social media accessed include: Tumblr, YouTube,

Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Participants also used the Internet for professional

purposes (i.e., for school, and for work). Some participants used online dating sites,

Netflix, blogs, music, news, Pinterest, shopping, and to find living accommodations.

Unique Understandings of What it Means to be Resilient

All participants have their own unique understanding of what resiliency means to

them and how they apply it to their lived experiences. Participant 1 indicated that to be

resilient is to have a thick skin and know that one has the same rights as anyone else

despite being a sexual minority. Participant 1 highlighted the importance of getting back

up when one has been knocked down.

> I think that I would define resiliency as knowing that there are a lot of people who
>
> disagree with you, who don't accept you, and just saying 'you know what, I still
>
> have a right to exist. I have just as much right to breathe this air and live in this
>
> country and take up space just as you'. And perhaps just because my lifestyle is
>
> not necessarily mainstream, I still have the right to live the way I choose… even
>
> though you have been knocked down and people who do not agree with you, to
>
> just get up the next morning is… you know… resiliency. (Participant 1)

Participant 2 highlighted a different understanding of resiliency. He used the

phrases "being ok with pain…being ok with the uncomfortable" as well as "having the

tenacity to get through something". These phrases appear to speak to the experience of

being comfortable with being uncertain in difficult times. When we encounter obstacles

we may need to demonstrate grit and brace against the aversive situation. Participant 2

accentuated the embracement of adversity and to "ride it out". Likewise, he also

commented about demonstrating perseverance in difficult times.

Participant 3 has a similar understanding of resiliency development with both Participants 1 and 2.

> I guess I define resiliency as, at the very least in this context, to stand up for who you are, what you want to be, what you want in life, and…I mean…you need to be strong…resilient…kind of to be able to stand up because there will always be something pushing back regardless…It doesn't matter who you are, there will be someone pushing you, or pushing your rights or being an asshole in general and you just got to have that and have the strength to be able to handle it. It doesn't even mean to have to fight back, just be strong enough to push through it. (Participant 3)

Participant 3 underscored about having the right to be who he is and to have the strength to embrace aversive situations, which is similar to Participant 1's response. It may not mean to fight against the obstacles, but to have the strength to withstand and to stand up for oneself. This statement resonated with Participant 2's experience of resiliency. The salient aspect of this definition is that he emphasized the right to be who he is, which is also participant 1's core understanding of resiliency. In each of these three participants' understanding of resiliency they provided a sense of perseverance (tenacity, as Participant 3 puts it) and to keep on moving forward.

Participant 4 worded his understanding of resiliency differently from Participant 3 and 2. He used the words "to overcome obstacles…to fight through challenges and just [having] strength and being strong and coming out on the other side". Participant 4 used the words "fight" while Participant 3 and 2 implied that it is possible to embrace the aversive situation and still come out stronger on the other side. While each of these

participants used different wordings, all participants so far imparted the meaning that to be resilient is to come through the situation, if not to come out even stronger as a result of the lived experience.

Participant 5 succinctly described being resilient is to have the "mental and emotional strength to make your way through adverse situations" (Participant 5). I believe this definition captured the essence of each of these participants' understanding of resiliency as well. While, Participants 1 through 4 did not use the words "mental and emotional strength", they each described the qualities of strength, perseverance, and grit.

Participant 6 added that resiliency "would be having a good quality of life and holistic health in spite of barriers and set back in your life" (Participant 6). This definition added a new layer of understanding of resiliency from the first five participants. "Having a good quality of life" captured the idea of "mental and emotional strength" but also imparted being happy and healthy in spite of aversive situations.

Finally, Participant 7 summarized the tenacity, perseverance, and embracement of obstacle that the above participants have described.

An ex-friend of mine struggles with serious psychological issues, ranging from PTSD to ADHD to Bipolar disorder, while also being trans. Their life has rarely been in a place that they would define as being a happy one. Yet, they continue to push forward, always working towards that light at the end of the tunnel and not giving up. That is resiliency to me. That [is] an extreme example, but it [is] that concept of continuing on despite how the odds may not be in your favour. (Participant 7)

Salient in Participant 7's understanding of resiliency is to have the strength to keep on moving forward and have hope that things will be alright in the end even when "the odds may not be in your favour". Each of these definitions of resiliency reflected the participants' lived experiences and how they have overcome and/or withstood aversive situations. Common across all participants is the message that resiliency is related to personal strength (be it tenacity, fighting back, emotional and mental strength, and getting back up).

Resiliency Development

Table 2

Superordinate Themes for Pathways Towards Resiliency Development

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
Using the Internet has fostered a sense of resiliency	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ALL
Internet usage normalize/ validate experiences	YES	YES	YES		YES	YES	YES	6
Building community/ Support	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ALL
Engaging in social justice actions	YES		YES			YES	YES	4
Overlap of in-person and online experiences	YES	YES	YES		YES	YES		5

Note. P stands for Participant. For readability purposes, blank cells means that the theme does not apply for the participant

The above section highlighted how each participant understood resiliency for oneself. This section highlights the pathway towards resiliency development and how using the Internet has fostered this positive development of self. Four superordinate themes were identified by the participants in this research in regards to how they develop resiliency online (see Table 2). These four themes include: 1) experience of validation and normalization online, 2) building a community and support group for each other, 3) engaging in social actions and 4) overlap of in-person and online experiences. Furthermore, the research participants also demonstrated their own idiosyncratic ways to be resilient. How they go about demonstrating such resiliency will be illustrated in this section too.

Experience of Validation and Normalization through Online Community

Validation refers to the experience of being recognized and affirmed that one's feelings are valid and worthwhile. Normalization refers to feeling that one is not alone in one's experiences. Participant 2 conveyed the importance for him to receive "hearts on Instagram posts…[and] comments on Facebook pages" and online friends reaching out to say "'hey, you matter'". These statements may build up one's self-worth in a society that favors the heterosexual norm. Participant 6 equally conveyed that "the more [LGBTQ] people [he] met the more normal [he] felt with [his] identity". In contrast, Participant 3 spoke to the impact of the lack of normalization on his experience growing up.

> I was really little and I was trying to figure things out and if I had seen more of [the LGBTQ] community to begin with I would not have felt so alone or afraid of it and I think a lot of the self-loathing…I think it would have been reduced to some extent, even though you don't have it [referring to the positive affirmation

of being gay] or don't have it in your immediate life, you know that it is possible.

(Participant 3)

Participant 3 conveyed that if he had a supportive community to refer to when he

was growing up, he would experience less self-loathing. The words Participant 3 used

identified that he has overcome some of the self-loathing and that he has found a

community where he feels that he belongs. Participant 3 continued to mentioned that

When you see this person is gay and out in the world and happy or getting

married or kind of going after their dreams and just… I guess there is something

positive in seeing that…it is kind of reaffirming. (Participant 3)

There is an experience of kinship when Participant 3 sees and/or hears about a

fellow brother in the LGBTQ community being successful. The success is shared.

Participant 1 also poignantly stated:

Kind of what I said having the community is really important, seeing that people

are going through their struggles, and the trauma they have gone through and

seeing how people have gone through these really painful times and come out

stronger and not as stronger, but survived it, and are still alive and just seeing

people rallying around. People who are killed because they are transgender, or

because they are gay and are beaten. People rally around people who are hurt can

create a sense of resiliency. Even though there are people who wants to do this

harm and people who see us as a threat to whatever society they want to live in

we will still exist. I see this phrase 'we exist' and I think that it is a really resilient

thing to say even though people have been so prejudice towards people who are

on the LGBTQ spectrum and continue to be…we still exist and we will still be
here. (Participant 1)

Participant 5 also identified that it was hopeful in his experience to "see that there
are literally thousands of other queer people in the world and that everyone has their own
struggles—individually but also as a collective[ly]—struggling for equal rights"
(Participant 5). Likewise, Participant 7 also imparted the importance normalization has
on his own experience as a gay male.

It really all comes back to normalization from using the internet and seeing

millions of other people like me. That helped [me] keep going and to be quite

honest, if it weren't for the Internet, I might not be around today. That's why

normalization of our community in media is so important. Because it is normal to

be gay, and just like how I needed to see millions of other people who were gay in

order to feel normal, the rest of the world needs to see that as well so they realize

we're normal.. I grew up in a conservative Christian home where that sort of thing

was never talked about and if it was it was incredibly negative. The Internet

normalized gayness to me and that being gay was normal. (Participant 7)

I believe these quotations powerfully illustrated the importance of having a
community to validate lived experiences and to help each other feel that one is not alone.
Being a sexual minority can be an isolating experience because it is a non-dominant non-
visible cultural identifying characteristic. Unlike ethnic identity where the physical
attributes helps one to identify kinship and thus establish community, sexual minorities
would need to out themselves in order to receive support. When sexual minorities are not
ready to come out they may experience isolation and lack of support. The Internet, as

identified by Participant 7, helped him establish a community where he did not have one in his immediate household.

Building a Community and Support Group for Each Other

Similar to experiencing validation and normalization, building a community and support group for each other refers to practical and emotional help one gives and receives online. Having community support was important for the participants. Participant 7 identified that

> Being exposed to the community online and then meeting other LGBTQ folks has dramatically changed my perspective. Being [gay] is normal. It's the same as being straight, you're just born that way, and that's okay. (Participant 7)

Similar to experiencing normalization and validation, Participant 7 received emotional support from the community to develop self-acceptance. Through his interactions online he was also able to learn more about the community "[for example about the] drag and the trans community…along with the rest of the alphabet of course!". Participant 5 also used the Internet to learn more about himself to figure out what he likes. His friend had come out on Facebook which provided him with courage to come out as well.

Participant 6 used the Internet to search for local queer events to attend as well as perform his music. He wrote a song that was explicitly queer related to provide queer visibility and support to the community. His song has been played across various radio stations and online. It was important for him to write this explicitly queer song because he feels there are not many music currently available that speaks to this community.

I like to listen to music. I often find that lots of musicians would not identify their

queer identities…there is this really famous singer…he is a gay man and he has

this song and not once was there a male pronoun used in the love song…that kind

of encouraged me to create something explicitly gay in the music industry…there

is no media that speaks to my identity so that I wanted to create something that

spoke to my personal experience that is [publicly] gay. (Participant 6)

Participant 4 talked about his interests in fashion, flowers, and Pinterest. He

connected with other individuals that shared his interests in these subjects. He talked

about how friend groups will interact and "their friends become my friends and my

friends their".

Community supports can take many forms from providing emotional

confirmations (i.e., normalization and valuation) to creating friend groups related to

shared interests to taking actions to support each other. Participants have clearly

articulated how the online community has impacted their development. In turn, some

participants also shared how they have supported the community online.

Engaging in Social Actions

It was important for some participants to engage in social actions online. Social

actions refers to activities to promote justice within the LGBTQ community and online

when participants identify acts of injustice. For example, Participant 6 identified that he

engaged in petitioning online to remove the blood donation policy that states men who

have sex with men cannot donate blood. It was important for Participant 6 to feel that he

is an equal member of society with equal access to service and contribution.

For Participant 1, learning how to be a better ally was important. Participant 1 used Tumblr to read up on ways to become a better ally for the community. Similarly, Participant 3 commented on blogs when he feels strongly about certain social issues (i.e., same-sex marriage).

These participants wanted their voices heard and they work towards making change within their community through online networks. Their actions speak to their personal sense of justice where they feel that there are systemic barriers that need to be addressed to improve the quality of life for sexual minorities.

Overlap of In-person and Online Experiences

Five participants identified that their online experience overlaps with their in-person experience as well. That is to say those online and in-person experiences are not mutually exclusive. Three participants used dating apps. The apps themselves are bound to the Internet and while initial communication occurs online, eventually the participants met in-person.

Dating is part of one's resiliency development because these participants showed a degree of personal growth, first to come out, second to connect with other sexual minorities, and third to find a romantic interest. For these steps to occur, internalized homophobia needs to be at a minimal. Internalized homophobia was unfortunately experienced and expressed by a few participants. Participant 6 noted "part of understanding my sexuality was unlearning homophobia. And I think internet helped me connected me to resources and LGBTQ community". Participant 5 also echoed the comments.

I had my struggles with queerness, especially before and immediately after

coming out (i.e., a fair bit of internalized homophobia) but with time and I

suppose probably a general social progression around the world I just feel more

comfortable with who I am. I am sure that the internet played a role in it,

especially when it came to my romantic relationships and exploration of that.

(Participant 5)

These participants also demonstrated resiliency in unlearning these beliefs.

Through the process of self-acceptance, participants were able to come out and find

romantic partners. Participant 2 used Facebook to come out to friends and family. He

expressed that he used Tinder to find his first date. Participant 3 also used dating apps.

Yet from his experience he finds that the queer community is still living in the closet. He

recounted how people on these apps will want to talk but not meet in-person. Participant

3 identified that

It is extremely shallow…like come on…like regardless if it was online or go meet

for coffee…it's like they are petrified…it's like even when you are out you are

still closeted…the weird thing about being online…the people far away that I can

connect with alright, but those who are close…they want to hide or not want to

meet and see each other...in my experience…I know people will disagree with me

on this…it feels like when you try to connect with people, there is so much

hostility…I don't know…I don't understand it…and it really I just find it really

frustrating. (Participant 3)

The experience that Participant 3 recounted appears to describe internalized

homophobia experienced by the queer community. The community seeks intimate

relationships yet is afraid to make connections with others. Participant 3's experience

speaks to a need for community building and to build community resiliency. Nonetheless,

Participant 3 was able to also recount how pride is expressed during pride week within

the city but he hopes that the community can continue to be open year round.

The Internet experience and in-person experience were not dichotomous also in

the sense that friend groups may be facilitated online but eventually ends up in-person

and vice versa. Participant 1 described how a group of them went online together because

coincidentally each of them were exploring their sexual identity and they encouraged

each other in their identity development. Likewise, Participant 4 described how friend

groups build off of each other's relationships "you meet one person and that person

introduces you to more friends". Participant 6 also described that through the Internet he

was able to learn about queer events to attend in-person. It is difficult to begin to identify

what is online and what is in-person because the two dimensions are inter-related. An

event may be posted online but the event itself is in-person.

> I think you have to think of it holistically. It's not like one without the other—like
>
> I will get invited to a friend's party via Facebook; it is easier to invite your friends
>
> through an event rather than to text each person individually or phone each person
>
> individually. I think the Internet is so pervasive in my world that I can't really
>
> look at them separately. (Participant 6)

Pathways Towards Resiliency

All participants' lived experience contributed to their resiliency development.

Participant 4 spoke of his experience growing up in a low-income family and to "worry

about your next pay cheque, your next meal, your bills. It is really hard to think about the

future and being resilient and looking forward when you have all of these extra stress on your back". He continued to describe how the Internet can be used as a tool to imagine a brighter future "you can pretend that you live that life and then you do become that person. It can be something as small as liking a pair of shoes and then eventually wearing that pair of shoes" (Participant 4). Participant 4 used Internet searches as a form of motivation to do better and get out of the cycle of poverty. Participant 6 also talked about poverty in his lived experiences and, likewise, to escape this cycle was a form of resiliency development for him too.

Participant 1 spoke of living in a small town where "everyone knows everyone" and the pressures to fit in.

There are people in my family that disagree with the way I live, the way that I dress, and the people I love. And I think that for me personally being resilient is to say 'you know what, I see your opinion, and I choose to reject your opinion. I choose to live the way I choose to live regardless of what you think' (Participant 1)

Participant 1 addressed the difficulties of being different in a small town. Resiliency for Participant 1 is to be true to oneself and not succumb to other people's standards. In being true to oneself however, Participant 1 experienced hostility online and in-person

I have been in stores and I had people physically turn in line and stare at me and look me up and down because they do not like the way I look. I also have family dinners where people would make snide comments about me and things that is not cool and I think it can be really hard to hear. (Participant 1)

Nonetheless, Participant 1 indicated "my wellbeing and happiness is more important than [other peoples'] opinion…it is important to just keep carrying on". Participant 1 used the Internet to learn how to cope with these hostile individuals as well as seek community online through validation and support. Similarly, Participant 3 and 6 also grew up in small towns and they spoke of using the Internet to connect with the queer community. Participant 3 also experienced hostility and homophobia where people he knew would use homophobic slurs against him. Yet he noted during the interview that he grew from the experiences and became tougher: "I believe I have come up stronger…I have experienced it, dealt with it and survived it".

In addition to seeking support online, while living in a small town, these participants used the Internet to figure out their identities. Participant 6 noted that "[he] did not drive [at that time] and there was not a lot of queer culture or not many out people" therefore, the Internet was a go-to resource to learn about the queer community. Participant 1 indicated "when I was first coming out to try to understand my identity, I was watching a lot of YouTube videos". Participant 3 also followed individuals who identified as LGBTQ on Twitter. In a sense, he used these figures as role models to connect with the queer community. It is apparent that these participants are resourceful in their active agency to develop a positive sense of self and to understand their sexual identity. Their agency is part of their resiliency development and process towards self-acceptance.

Part of self-acceptance and resiliency development is to also overcome internalized homophobia. Participant 3 commented that when he was younger he "[couldn't] even look at an article about being gay or bisexual or what this gay couple did

because that is 'too gay'". He described how he was afraid of being associated with the

gay couple in the article. He goes on saying "…it's not like anyone sees, knows, or cares

about what I am looking at the internet". Yet at that time it was terrifying for him to read

about LGBTQ information because that would lead to acknowledgement that he may be

gay. Now, he says that "…it's not like I feel like I need to hide it anymore". It is

apparent that Participant 3 grew from his experiences online and he has unlearned

internalized homophobia. As such, he showed qualities of becoming resilient (i.e.,

emotional strength, self-acceptance, and positive self-worth).

Positives Features of the Internet

Table 3

Positive Features of the Internet

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
Identified positive attributes/qualities of the Internet	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ALL
Accessibility to information	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ALL
Opportunities to meet people		YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		5
Safe space and Anonymity	YES	YES	YES	YES		YES		5
Coming out on own terms	YES	YES	YES			YES		4
Queer visibility	YES	YES	YES		YES	YES	YES	6
Connect globally while maintaining privacy		YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		5
Cheap and easy to use				YES				1

Note. P stands for Participant. For readability purposes, blank cells means that the theme does not apply for the participant

All participants have something positive to say about their experience online (see Table 3). Positive features of the Internet include: 1) access to information, 2) opportunities to meet people, 3) safe space and anonymity online, 4) coming out on one's own term, 5) queer visibility, 6) privacy online, 7) connection globally, and 8) cheap and easy to use.

Access to Information

To begin with, all participants noted that the Internet is a medium where information is easy to access. Participant 4 aptly described that "one of the positives of the internet is the ability to be in one city and have the ability to have the whole world at your fingertips". He continued to state that the Internet is "pretty cheap and pretty easy to expand your social circle to every corner of the planet". Furthermore, Participant 7 noted that "getting information offline is important. However, getting [the information] through the internet, in [his] opinion, in some circumstances, is much better, for example you can get information happening live at events kilometres away". These participants spoke to the power of information online. Information online is readily available and vast in content.

Each participant also access information in their unique ways to foster resiliency. To begin with, Participant 1 identified that accessing information helped with becoming an ally in the community. Participant 5 stated that growing up he only had one computer in the household. It was when he had access to a personalized phone that he began to research information on his own identity development.

> I had only one computer in the house growing up, [it was] in the middle of the
>
> living room, and [I] had no phone until the end of grade 11 so I really had no

way to research what gayness is or was or anything like that until the end of

grade 11…Once I had a phone, I sought out images of attractive guys but still

never realized what was going on for another 6 months maybe after that.

(Participant 5)

Participant 6 identified that the Internet provided niche information to specific

music genres that are queer friendly and by queer musicians. He disclosed that "before

the internet there is no way to access that sort of information and now there is a way to

access that kind of information for people" (Participant 6). Similarly Participant 7

accessed information online to find online resources.

In my internet browsing I stumbled upon [a LGBTQ friendly establishment

within the city] and for the longest time, both their online resources and the

Centre itself were incredibly important in learning about other aspects of the

community, like drag and the trans community…The Internet for me, became a

stepping stone in exposing myself to the queer community that for the longest

time was invisible, it felt like being part of an entirely new world. (Participant 7)

The participants used the Internet to access information contributed to an

important role in their development.

Opportunities to Meet People

It was also helpful for participants that there were opportunities to meet people

online. Participant 2 indicated that he used the Internet to meet dates and to find

roommates that are queer-friendly. Using the Internet provided a means to meet someone

online to ensure compatibility before meeting in-person. Participant 6 clearly highlighted

that the Internet is not dichotomous with in-person experience—there is an overlap where

the people one meets in-person or online interacts in the other domain as well. Likewise, Participants 3 and 5 used dating apps to find dates. This online feature expanded opportunities for the participants to find romantic partners in a society that is dominantly heterosexual which makes it difficult for queer individuals to find dates outside of queer bars and clubs.

Aside from using the Internet to find dates, Participant 1 used the Internet to learn from like-minded individuals. Participant 1 used Tumblr to read up on various forums and hear from a range of opinions on different topics. Similarly, Participant 4 has an interest in fashion, photography, and cooking and he connected with bloggers within these genres. Furthermore, Participant 6 has an interest in queer music and the Internet enabled him to research and connect with these musicians and fans, as well as radio stations managers.

Safe Space and Anonymity

Safe space is referred to an environment where no one tolerates discrimination of sexual identities and gender expressions and people come together to support each other. Participant 1 noted "the Internet is a really good way to talk about trauma in a safe setting…people who have gone through their own trauma and work through those hard times together". Participant 1 highlighted online community support is invaluable because it may not be available offline. Participant 4 also stated a similar response that the Internet is considered to be a safe space for LGBTQ individuals:

> For whatever reason, LGBTQ people do seem to prefer the internet … There are
>
> many places where [heteronormative people] can go and feel safe, but for a
>
> LGBTQ person that gets limited down so they go to the Internet because they

know that the blog is safe for them. I would say that 100% of LGBTQ people use

the internet as some form of community more than heteronormative people

because they feel safe and know that every other LGBTQ people is doing that so

that they will meet a larger population there as opposed to out in the world.

(Participant 4)

Related to safety is a sense of anonymity online. Participant 6 highlighted a

personal experience when he was growing up he accessed a service for queer youth that

required him to call a number to speak to a service provider. This experience required

him to come out to the service provider. He described the experience as a "cannonball

into a pool". The Internet is a space where users can create their own identity and avatars

and to disclose as much (or as little) information necessary for them to access information

and resources. This feature provides a sense of emotional safety.

Coming Out on One's Own Terms

Related to emotional safety online, the majority of participants also commented

that through using the Internet they were about to come out at their own pace. Participant

6 succinctly illustrated his experience as follow:

I want to emphasize the slow process because when you are coming out and

looking for information you can just Google [LGBTQ friendly] websites and just

look at the information without having to talk to someone. Now-a-days if you are

an introvert you can slowly adjust yourself to the coming out process so that it is a

slower and manageable transition where there are slower amount of change and

handle at a time. (Participant 6)

Using the Internet enabled participants to come out when they are ready. Participants 2 and 3 indicated they used Facebook to come out to friends and family members. They decided when they were ready and how they would come out. They were in charge of their coming out process.

Queer Visibility

The Internet also provided queer visibility. Queer visibility is referred to the presence of LGBTQ members. Being LGBTQ is an invisible minority status—it is difficult to determine who is LGBTQ based on physical appearance. As a result, seeking community becomes a difficult process. Having access to queer visibility fosters a sense of community and support. Participant 7 commented that:

I didn't really know how many people there were like me, so the internet really opened me up to the fact that how I was feeling was normal. The Internet for me, became a stepping stone in exposing myself to the queer community, that for the longest time was invisible, it felt like being part of an entirely new world. (Participant 7)

This participant found his community through the Internet and it provided him with much relief that he was not the only one going through his experiences. Without queer visibility LGBTQ individuals may feel isolated and alone in their experiences. Participant 5 also echoed Participant 7's sentiments that through accessing the Internet "it allowed [him] to see that there are literally thousands of other queer people in the world and that everyone has their own struggles but also as a collective, struggling for equal rights". These statements underscored the importance of community and social action. Participant 5 also actively pays attention to queer related news events and legislation (i.e.,

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same-sex marriage rights locally and internationally). Likewise, Participant 3 recalled the Orlando shooting within the LGBTQ community in the States which is a heartbreaking event for him. Furthermore, Participant 2 accessed LGBTQ channels on Netflix. It was important for these participants to feel their community is represented in media as well as to feel they belong with a community. Therefore, having queer visibility online was an important aspect towards resiliency development.

Connects Globally While Maintaining Privacy

Participant 4 indicated that you have the whole world at your fingertips when you use the Internet. It is possible to access information and events across the globe within one's own living space. Participant 5 noted that "physical location is not a barrier to access information". Furthermore, it is possible to maintain privacy online through anonymous settings. Participant 2 used the Internet to arrange for queer-friendly accommodation prior to travelling abroad. He does research online to ensure that when he arrives at his destination he will be in a welcoming environment. Similarly, Participant 3 used the Internet to read up on queer events across the globe. He shared his sentiments online when he heard about the Orlando shooting within the queer community. Likewise, Participant 5 read up on queer related news through BBC, an online news journal. Participant 6 used the Internet to research on more local queer-friendly events. Nonetheless, these participants used the Internet to research events and information, both locally and internationally.

Cheap and Easy to Use

Participant 4 also commented that the Internet is cheap and easy to use. Within our current Western, technological-driven society, many individuals are Internet-literate.

The Internet is widely accessible in many formats (on phones, computers, as well as household items such as televisions, GPS devices, and cameras). There are also WIFI-hotspots in many public spaces (i.e., libraries, restaurants, coffee shops, bars etc.) which further perpetuate the accessibility of this medium. The participants in this research represent an age-group that grew up with the Internet. These participants learned and had access to the Internet at a young age. As such, it makes sense to research how these participants make use of such a widely accessible medium in their resiliency development.

It is these features of the Internet that enable participants to use this medium to foster resiliency. These positive qualities provided a protective environment for participants to explore their identities online and to become more resilient. These qualities are unique online, that is not presented through offline mediums. Within the online platform, though, there are also caveats and exceptions to the positive qualities. The following section will address those features.

Caveats to Using the Internet

Participants also commented about some of the negative experiences online (see Table 4). The themes included: 1) questioning the reliability of information, 2) unrealistic portrayal of the body image and sexualizing the body, 3) trolling/nasty comments online, and 4) relationships lacking quality and experience of isolation.

Table 4

Negative Attributes of using the Internet

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
Commented on Negative experiences online	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ALL
Reliability of information	YES		YES				YES	3
Unrealistic portrayal and sexualize certain body images					YES	YES		2
Trolling/ nasty comments online	YES	YES	YES			YES		4
Isolation and relationships lacks quality	YES		YES	YES	YES			4

Note. P stands for Participant. For readability purposes, blank cells means that the theme does not apply for the participant

Questioning the Reliability of Information

Three participants commented on the reliability of information online. They recognize that anyone can posts opinions online without reference to facts. Participant 1 commented that on Tumblr people posts a lot of opinions. Some opinions are congruent and others are diametrically in opposition. Participant 7 best summarize how information online can be questionable.

The biggest advantage of the internet is also its biggest weakness. Anyone can post something on the Internet. Anything can be passed off as information. So it [is] important to keep that in mind. Also, the Internet, as I [have] mentioned, is an amazing tool, but that is also to be used with real life experience. Reading about

somebody's experience being trans, let's say, is entirely different than meeting

that trans individual in-person, sitting down with them, and talking with them.

The internet is perfect, if balanced correctly with real world experiences.

(Participant 7)

Relatedly, Participant 1 also commented about echo-chambers online. Echo-chambers refer to the repetition of information based on the algorithm of the Internet and how it provides results based on previous Internet usage history. Participant 1 noted that because of how the Internet is formatted, some information we see confirm how we feel and think because of previous search results.

I think that when you are on the internet, sometimes as a consequence of the

algorithm you use or the websites you frequent, echo chambers can result. I think

that it is really easy to find yourself in a loop…to hear the same opinions and to

find yourself gratify what you already believe and to confirm your own beliefs

without hearing other people's perspectives and taking into consideration that

there are other people's opinion— which I think it can be a really problematic

thing to get into. I think that with these echo chambers, it can be really easy to get

into a situation where you are thinking that everyone thinks a certain way and

when you are faced with people who do [not], it can be a really huge reality

check. (Participant 1)

Unrealistic Portrayal and Sexualizing Certain Body Image

Two participants addressed how the online community may reinforce unrealistic portrayal of body types and sizes. Both Participants 5 and 6 also commented that people online may sexualize certain bodies.

In the most basic sense, I suppose that when I talk about or say gay culture, I mean stereotypical gay, cis, White male culture. Which I take to mean the way that I see gay, cis, White men represented online and in pop culture the most often – as flamboyant, promiscuous, partially undressed, and perfectly attractive men who also simultaneously love shopping, dirty dancing, and pop divas. I know that this is nearly entirely false, and that there are gay men in many cultures all over the world, and each with their own uniqueness. That is just what I see/encounter the most often online and in pop culture. As an example, I Google "gay culture" in Google images and I see attractive, partially undressed White men, a drag performer, some pop stars, and lots of shirtless, attractive bodies. This is what I mean, and this is what I feel I don't necessarily fit into. (Participant 5)

Participant 5 highlighted how unhelpful it is to view these search results. Perhaps these results reflect a societal more of what is beautiful but these images represent a small minority. Similarly, Participant 6 echoed Participant 5's comments.

I think the image gay men that are portrayed in the Internet has hindered my relationship with my body in a negative way. I have suffered from body dysphoria and body image issues. One of the things I like to tell people is to do a Google search of gay men and all the images will shows super buff, mostly White [men]. I [have] never have been in a room where mostly or a small portion of them looked like the images. So I would say that one of the downside is that gay media on the Internet is a little bit too sexualized and idealizes certain body type. (Participant 6)

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In both instances, the Google results hindered their positive sense of self. These Google images do not represent their reality. Despite knowing that these images do not reflect reality, it nonetheless affected how they perceive themselves within the queer community.

Trolling/Nasty Comments Online

Trolling refers to deliberate offensive and/or provocative post online aimed at upsetting someone or to elicit an angry response. The online environment, perhaps combined with the ability to be anonymous online, provides an environment where people experience cyberbullying. Participant 1 commented that "people are coming to this safe space to get away from people who are bullying them [in-person] and they are getting cyber bullied". Participant 1 continued to note that on Tumblr people may be passionate about what they are speaking about and they may inadvertently tear people to shreds and are not cognizant that we are all growing and learning. "It can be very volatile…some people talk about trauma but it can cause trauma too…people would not be comfortable talking about their experiences because they have been shut down so harshly in the past" (Participant 1).

Relationships Lacking Quality and the Experience of Isolation

While the online environment may facilitate a space for community building, some participants commented on the quality of relationships developed online. For example, Participant 4 indicated that there are many gatekeepers online that you need permission to access specific community. In addition, often time, conversations are asynchronous which affects the quality of the relationship. Sometimes one person sends a message but does not hear back for a long time.

You would never really feel the human connection through the Internet. You can chat with someone online, in a forum, a chatroom but it is still missing that immediate connection and response. Sometimes the Internet goes quiet and it goes back on. It misses that connection of immediacy. (Participant 4)

Furthermore, Participant 5 identified that the relationship is "bound to the Internet". That is to say that the relationship does not exist off the Internet platform. Participant 3 also noted that he wishes to create in-person relationships with some of the people he talks with online but the other person wants to keep it online solely. There are limits to the dimensions and quality of relationships found online—it may not completely replace in-person contact. Participant 1 succinctly highlighted that it can be isolating to know there is this community online but when one walks down a hall one cannot readily identify who is part of the LGBTQ community.

You hear [from] all of these people and they have the same experiences as you, or similar experiences as you, but you are not actually seeing them. [If] there are people in the city or in your school [that are also LGBTQ] someone walking down the hallway [it] can be really empowering. (Participant 1)

Unfortunately, the online environment does not completely replace in-person contact. It can be isolating to be reminded that supports are only available online unless one is willing to out oneself in-person. Therefore, I believe this sentiment speaks to the value of having in-person queer visibility.

Participants commented on these drawbacks of using the Internet. These drawbacks affected their experience online. Nonetheless, the benefits of using the Internet to foster resiliency appear to outweigh the negative qualities.

Chapter V: DISCUSSION

In this section I will highlight the implications of the results. I will describe how the results are relevant for mental health workers.

Resiliency

Each participant has their understanding of how they have experienced resiliency that is informed by their lived experience. Overall, participants in this study conveyed the importance of persevering in face of a difficult situation. This understanding of resiliency relates to the accepted definition of resiliency within the academic field. The broad understanding of resiliency within the academic field is to overcome or withstand aversive situations (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). It is evident that participants in this study were able to overcome personal obstacles and "bounce back" from aversive situations.

Within this study, resiliency was operationally defined to include the activities one engages in online to capture the personal agency and the personal growth as a result of living through the aversive situation. The participants in this study demonstrate their agency through various avenues: seeking support online and providing support online, following queer individuals, seeking out relationships, and engaging in social justice actions. The participants commented about personal growth in that some participants came out online, others worked at becoming allies within the community, as well as demonstrating social justice through various acts (i.e., petitioning online, and standing up for what they believe in). It appears that resiliency development is an ongoing process for participants. Estefan and Roughly (2013) indicated that resiliency is intricately woven

into the life experience of the individual. Indeed resiliency is-multifaceted and it touches upon all areas of lived experiences.

Short and Russell-Mayhew (2009) identified that resiliency research focused on the developmental assets and protective factors within one's environment. Within this study participants identified positive adaptation to adverse life situations. They were able to flourish and be true to themselves. Qualities of resiliency include: sense of hope, positive self-worth, problem-solving skills, effective interpersonal skills, and coping strategies (Gardner, Dishion, & Connell, 2008). Similarly participants in this study demonstrated positive self-worth and self-acceptance. They also identified a community online they were proud to belong with to seek and provide support within this community. The participants were also able to navigate in-person (homophobic individuals) and online (cyber bullying) aversive situations and come out stronger on the other side.

Importance of Community

Creating and being part of one's cultural community is part of resiliency development (Ungar, 2011). This concept was consistently highlighted in the participants' interviews. Community is an important part of their resiliency development. Participants described community in different ways and the function of community varied for each individual. Participants commented on how using the Internet helped with dating, learning to be an ally, seeking support and providing support in turn, as well as validating and normalizing each other's experiences. These activities online appeared to help foster resiliency by providing a visible queer community. Many participants commented about growing up without knowing a queer person within their community.

As such, they turned to the Internet to find their community online. This activity also speaks to their personal agency in how they reach out for support when support was not readily available in-person.

Bowleg and colleagues (2004) and Ungar (2011) identified the importance of community as part of the resiliency development process. Community can be broken down into the micro, meso, and macro environments. Within the online platform, these concepts may take on a different meaning considering how the Internet is set up (i.e., one can access individuals across the globe). In terms of micro-environment, a few participants accessed information to learn about sexual identity. Having access to these information helped with personal development. Regarding the meso environment, a few participants looked up local queer-related events to access in-person. Others used dating apps to identify romantic partners. Some participants also sought friendship and connected with groups online that shared mutual interest (i.e., photography). In terms of the macro community, participants also accessed international news online that highlighted marriage equality and other human rights information. One participant shared the music he wrote on international radio stations.

Surprises

The participants in this study provided information on their resiliency development. It is noteworthy to highlight how participants experience resiliency in face of the adversity in their life experiences. Human beings possess strengths, resourcefulness, and courageousness when encountering hardships (Seligman, 2000). Short and Russell-Mayhew (2009) touched on how individuals overcome difficult life situations such as poverty, abuse, community and family violence and so much more.

Individuals draw upon their internal and external resources to overcome these difficult situations. Asakura (2016) identified that part of resiliency development is for individuals to examine a community where they feel safe and supported. Likewise, Colpitts and Gahagan (2016) addressed the personal agency demonstrated by sexual minorities when they encounter aversive situations. The findings from this research showed similar results. Participants in this research acknowledged the difficult experiences growing up (i.e., the bullying, homophobia, and internalized-homophobia) and how they continued to move forward despite swimming upstream against dominate cultural groups. Participants in this study accessed their supportive networks and actively worked to overcome their difficult situations.

This study provided information that is consistent with the literature. Participants in this study believed the Internet is a safe space to access information and resources. Baams and colleagues (2011) indicated that safe space is a critical factor for sexual minorities for self-exploration because it goes back to the basic need of emotional safety within a supportive community. Szulc & Dhoest (2013) also mentioned that safe spaces provide individuals with a place to interact with allies and to develop community. Supportive communities are identified as a protective factor for sexual minorities (Grace & Wells, 2015). It is apparent that participants in this study accessed their community online. Participants in this study also commented on other aspects of the Internet that provided a useful resource to foster resiliency development. These other features include the ability to be anonymous online, accessibility to information, and to come out to others. These themes were reflected in the literature as well. Taylor and colleagues (2014) explored identity construction online. For example, individuals can come out

online without coming out in-person as well as provide as little or as much information about themselves within profile descriptions. Participants in this study indicated the Internet (i.e., Facebook) provided a means to come out to a lot of people at one time via a single message post. For participants not ready to come out online, being able to explore information anonymously was an enormous relief. Anonymity is important because it enables individuals to accept themselves at their own pace (Bonds et al., 2011).

At the same time, there were also research findings that I had not anticipated. The literature identified the risks and vulnerability in mental health within the community. Mental health, however, was not a prominent theme discussed by the participants in this research. Mental health may be affected as a result of the adverse life experiences, but it is the result of life experiences. I anticipated themes of depression, yet poverty was more prevalent. This finding speaks to me about the importance of exploring development from an intersectional perspective. Poverty (as it relates to socio-economic standing) intersects with sexual identity development, age, gender, and other cultural identities to form the lived experiences. These identities cannot be separated from resiliency development. Khan, Ilcisin, and Saxton (2017) discussed the intersection of ethnic identity, sexual identity and multifactorial discrimination and its effect on mental health. A person's lived experienced is influenced through the totality of one's cultural identities. It is not possible to separate the different experiences of being gay, White, and male (for example). Bostwick, Meyer, Aranda, Russell, Hughes, Rirkett, and Mustanski (2014) also indicated that mental health risk for suicide varied by sex and ethnic identity, in relation to sexual identity, and that protective factors varied for each individual. One needs to

examine each of these cultural identities in relationship to each other and together to understand the individual's lived experiences.

I was also surprised by how many participants commented about their negative experiences online. I am aware that cyber-bullying is prevalent, yet there were also other negative experiences such as unrealistic portrayal of body images, and experience of isolation. The majority of participants seek to find their community online, and when the prevalent message is that everyone else has a "perfect" body, it can be discouraging to one's self-esteem. Blashill, Tomassilli, Biello, O'Cleirigh, Safren, and Mayer (2016) identified that gay and bisexual men with body dissatisfaction predicted elevated depressive symptoms, lower sexual self-efficacy, and elevated sexual anxiety. The idea that an attractive male is one with a sculpted body (six pack, no fat, and tall figure) does a disservice to all men. This body size is often glamorized in the larger social media but it is unachievable in real life. Perpetuating this ideal body image may result in men's body dissatisfaction. Further, while participants seek to find their community online, when they do find the community, they are reminded of the isolation they experience in-person. This contrast effect is notable to mention because it speaks to the importance of having in-person queer visibility.

Implications for Mental Health Workers

The results of this study provided insight into how sexual minorities used the Internet to foster resiliency. A core theme that emerged is the community support available online. Community support may be particularly relevant for sexual minorities because one's sexual minority identity is considered invisible thereby making it difficult to identify others who are also a sexual minority without first outing oneself. It may be

difficult to access support when one cannot readily identify other members of the same community. Within the theme of community support, it was important for participants to experience validation and normalization. When mental health workers work with sexual minority clients it maybe be empowering to affirm the clients' identities. Affirmative therapy embraces a positive view of sexual minorities and addresses the negative influences that homophobia and heterosexism have on sexual minorities lived experiences (Rock, Carlson, & McGeorge, 2010). It is important to affirm clients' identities when we do live in a society that privileges the heteronormative norms.

It is also important to remember that each person experiences the world through one's intersectional identity which is different for each individual. This aspect speaks to the idiographic experiences of each individual; each person's experience is unique. Participants in this study were able to describe their idiosyncratic experiences. For example one participant enjoyed that the Internet were able to provide results based on previous search history. Another participant, however, disliked the echo-chambers that result from the Internet's search history algorithm. On one hand, the algorithm benefited one participant but not the other. It is important for mental health workers to pay attention to individual differences and what is relevant for the individual and not generalize the experience of one individual across the whole community.

Furthermore, participants in this study spoke about their experience with homophobia, internalized homophobia and other specific issues related to being sexual minorities. Therefore, it is important for mental health care workers to have cultural training and be aware of pertinent issues that relates to sexual minorities. Singh and Moss (2016) addressed the importance of examining the influence of heterosexism on the

mental health of sexual minorities. Scherrer (2013) further indicated the importance for healthcare workers to provide culturally competent care to sexual minorities. Scherrer (2013) also indicated each sexual minority group (i.e., gays, lesbians, and bisexuals) presents unique cultural concerns. Therefore, it is important for mental health workers to be culturally competent when working with sexual minorities. It is also important to remember that there are within and between differences for each individual so that mental health workers do not generalize these issues to all sexual minorities.

Limitations

While this study has provided invaluable information on how sexual minorities may use the Internet to foster resiliency there are also limitations. It is important to note that this study is cross-sectional—the results only provide a glimpse in participants' resiliency development. Resiliency development is an ongoing process with no true end point. Utilizing a longitudinal framework may better provide information on how participants experience resiliency over time. It would be more informative to learn about the changes that occur over time.

It is also important to note that this study selected a specific population within the sexual minority community. The experiences described in this research pertain to the lived experiences of the participants. As noted, each participant has their unique understanding of what resiliency means to them. Therefore, it is important to note that each member of the sexual minority community will have their own understanding of resiliency development. The results pertain to this specific group and may not transfer to the whole sexual minority community. Nonetheless, from the themes derived from the participants, the Internet can be a helpful medium to foster resiliency development.

Future Directions

In this study I explored how cis, White, gay, men between the ages 18 to 29 used the Internet to build their resiliency. A common theme that emerged from this study is that using the Internet provided a means to connect with the queer community online when in-person queer visibility was not possible. I am curious how this theme may resonate with queer persons of colour. This aspect refers to the intersectionality concept as well, where individuals live in the intersection of multiple non-dominant identities. Individuals with multiple non-dominant cultural identities may experience more systemic barriers and it is thus important to explore their pathways toward resiliency development.

Chapter VI: CONCLUSION

Positive Psychology explores the hopes, strengths, and virtues one possess (Seligman, 2000; Schrank et al., 2014). Within counselling, a counsellor can hone in on the clients' resiliency to overcome the present situation. It is not necessary to delve on the past and problem-focused conversation to seek solutions and forward movement (Warner, 2015).

When the larger society refers to the sexual minority community, there has been a dominant emphasis on the vulnerability and risk factors that sexual minorities encounter on a daily basis (i.e., experience of homophobia, discrimination, and suicide). While, it is true that there are individual and systemic barriers that individuals from this community face regularly, it is also true that sexual minorities possess strengths, skills, and resources. It would be doing this community a disservice when the academic field and helping professions attend to the negatives without also referring to the positives (Grace & Wells, 2015; Luthar et al., 2000).

Researchers within the field of resiliency development emphasize the multifaceted qualities of resiliency (Herrick et al., 2014; Short & Russell-Mayhew, 2009; Singh & McKleory, 2011). Resiliency can be conceptualized as the qualities one demonstrates (i.e., positive self-worth, knowledge, and skills) as well as community support (i.e., positive regard from family and friends). On the whole, resiliency is described as the ability to bounce back from adverse situations (Singh, 2013). It is the ability to withstand or overcome a difficult situation (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Resiliency in this research focused on the behaviours participants engaged in online and the personal growth participants were able to recount from their experience of adverse

situations. In tandem, I was interested in how the Internet provided a medium for participants to foster resiliency.

The results from this study showed many important findings. Participants have described how the Internet is useful for fostering resiliency. There were many positive features of the Internet that facilitated an environment conducive to resiliency development. These positive features include: a space for anonymity, access to information, queer visibility, inexpensive, and easy to use. Participants in this study used the Internet in their unique ways to develop resiliency. Many participants used the Internet to find their community where they feel safe and supported. It was important for many participants to have their experiences validated and to know that they are not alone in their experience. Furthermore, participants recounted that they were able to locate many resources online (i.e., local queer-friendly events, romantic partners, information and news on local and international headlines).

While participants were able to recount how the Internet has helped with their sense of resiliency development, participants also noted some negative features that happen online. For example, participants commented how information online may not be reliable and that search results may fetishize certain body types. Furthermore, online bullying may occur in the form of trolling which is a person's attempt to post comments to get a reaction out of the participant. In addition, some participants identified that the relationships developed online lacked a sense of closeness.

Despite some of the negative experiences online, participants identified that using the Internet fostered resiliency. Most importantly participants were able to connect with their communities online because they did not feel they had an in-person support. From

this research, clinical implications for mental health workers are the importance of validating clients' lived experiences. When working with sexual minorities, it is important to be culturally-informed and demonstrate cultural sensitivity to pertinent issues such as homophobia, heterosexism, and awareness of clients' potential internalized homophobia.

It was evident in this research that participants experienced resiliency and have hope for a positive future. Going forward, it will be interesting to explore how participants from the intersection of multiple minority identities experience resiliency. Individuals with multiple non-dominant identities may experience greater structural barriers. Nonetheless, when mental health workers attend to one's strengths it can be empowering for the individual. This study has clearly shown that sexual minorities participating in this study are resilient people.

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Appendix A
Letter of Information/ Informed Consent Form

LETTER OF INFORMATION / INFORMED CONSENT FORM
How Internet Use Fosters Resiliency Development for Sexual Minorities

July 18, 2017

Principal Investigator (Researcher):   **Supervisor:**
Phillip Hau   Dr. Paul Jerry
Phillip.Hau@gcap.ca   Paul.Jerry@gcap.ca

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled 'How Internet Use Fosters Resiliency Development for Sexual Minorities'.

This form is part of the process of informed consent. The information presented should give you the basic idea of what this research is about and what your participation will involve, IF you choose to participate. It also describes your right to withdraw from the project. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research project, it is important you understand enough about the risks, benefits, requirements for you to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Take time to read this carefully as it is important that you understand the information given to you. Please contact the principal investigator, Phillip Hau, if you have any questions about the project or would like more information before you consent to participate.

It is entirely up to you whether or not you take part in this research. If you choose not to take part, or decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you now, or in the future.

Introduction
My name is Phillip and I am a Master's of Counselling student at Athabasca University. As a requirement to complete my degree, I am conducting a research project about ways sexual minorities use the Internet to develop their identity and grow into resiliency. I am conducting this project under the supervision of Dr. Paul Jerry.

Why are you being asked to take part in this research project?
You are being invited to participate in this project because you may qualify to participate in this research project. I am looking to recruit sexual minorities between the ages of 18-29.

What is the purpose of this research project?
The purpose for this research is to understand how Internet use can foster resiliency within sexual minorities. Having Internet access and using the Internet daily is a modern day phenomenon. Within the sexual minority community using the Internet can also afford the user anonymity to connect with peers and find resources online. For sexual minorities using the Internet to connect with peers can be an attractive medium to reach out while not disclosing about personal information.

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In this study I am hoping to explore how sexual minorities use the internet to overcome difficult life situations (i.e., navigating heterosexisms and homophobia). I am curious about internet usage patterns (i.e., favorite activity to do online, role of the internet has providing you with information, and how the internet is useful, or not, in providing information). More importantly, I am interested in ways sexual minorities use the internet to foster resiliency development. Resiliency development encompasses both elements of personal growth and how one traverses through difficult times/situations and "came through" stronger.

What will you be asked to do?
If you consent to take part in this research study, you will take part in a one 60-90 minute face-to-face interview. I will interview you to learn about your Internet use pattern (i.e., how often you use the Internet in a typical week, what you do on the Internet), your experience as a sexual minority (i.e., how out you are) and how your Internet use has influenced your resiliency . During this interview I will take hand-written notes as well as digitally record the conversation. The recording will only be in audio format, with your permission. The interview will take place within a private student study space within the University of Alberta (i.e., Cameron Library) at an agreed upon time and date.

After the interview I will transcribe the audio recording and provide you with a copy of the transcript. You may review the transcript and have up to a week to choose to modify any of your responses during this time.

What are the risks and benefits?
The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not need to answer questions you do not want to answer or make you feel uncomfortable. Involvement in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to share information you are not comfortable sharing.

The research will not benefit you directly. I hope to learn more about resiliency development. I hope that what is learned as a result of this study will help us better understand how the counselling profession can support sexual minorities.

Do you have to take part in this project?
As stated earlier in this letter, involvement in this project is entirely voluntary. If you decide to take part in this study, you can stop (withdraw), from the interview for whatever reason, even after signing the consent form or part-way through the study up until I begin analyzing the data (which I expect to occur during November 2017).

If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study.

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How will your privacy and confidentiality be protected?
The ethical duty of confidentiality includes safeguarding participants' identities, personal information, and data from unauthorized access, use or disclosure.

Your participation in this study is confidential. I will not use your name that would allow you to be identified. Every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality and privacy. Your electronic data will be password protected. Only the Principal Investigator will have access to the password. In addition, any paper copy data will be stored in a locked cabinet that only the Principal Investigator will have access to. However, with your permission, I may include your age within my results section to contextualize the findings.

All information will be held confidential, except when legislation or a professional code of conduct requires that it be reported. For example, if you report imminent danger of suicide or that another person is in imminent danger, I am required to report the information to the local authorities.

How will my anonymity be protected?

Anonymity refers to the protecting participants' identifying characteristics, such as name or description of physical appearance. I will anonymize your data by replacing identifying information, such as your name, with a pseudonym. Your name will not be associated with any of the published results. Every reasonable effort will be made to ensure your anonymity; you will not be identified in publication without your explicit permission.

How will the data collected be stored?
The information you provide will be kept in a locked cabinet where only I will have access to it. Information kept on a computer will be protected by a password. The computer itself will also have a password. Once the study has been complete, the data will be destroyed after the obligatory five year retention period, as per the Research Ethics Board guideline, by the means of shredding the paper data and deleting the electronic copies.

Only the Principal Investigator will have access the research data. I will however confer with my supervisor throughout the project. As such my supervisor will have access to the research report. The finalized report will be made available publically.

Who will receive the results of the research project?
The results of the research project will be disseminated in a research journal, when it is ready for publication, and at research conferences. Direct quotations, with your permission, will be used to support the research analysis. I will anonymize your identifying information by using a pseudonym.

The existence of the research will be listed in an abstract posted online at the Athabasca University Library's Digital Thesis and Project Room and the final research paper will be publicly available.

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Who can you contact for more information or to indicate your interest in participating in the research project?

Thank you for considering this invitation. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact me, (the Principal Investigator) by e-mail Phillip.Hau@gcap.ca or my supervisor by Paul.Jerry@gcap.ca If you are ready to participate in this project, please complete and sign the attached Consent Form.

Thank you.

Phillip Hau

This project has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns regarding your treatment as a participant in this project, please contact the Research Ethics Office by e-mail at rebsec@athabascau.ca or by telephone at 1-800-788-9041, ext. 6718.

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Informed Consent:
Your signature on this form means that:
- You have read the information about the research project.
- You have been able to ask questions about this project.
- You are satisfied with the answers to any questions you may have had.
- You understand what the research project is about and what you will be asked to do.
- You understand that you are free to withdraw your participation in the research project without having to give a reason, and that doing so will not affect you now, or in the future.
- You understand that if you choose to end your participation **during** data collection, any data collected from you up to that point will be retained by the researcher, unless you indicate otherwise
- You understand that if you choose to withdraw after data collection has ended, your data can be removed from the project at your request, up to November 2017.

	YES	NO
I agree to be audio-recorded	◯	◯
I agree to the use of direct quotations	◯	◯
I am willing to be contacted following the interview to verify that my comments are accurately reflected in the transcript.	◯	◯

Your signature confirms:

- You have read what this research project is about and understood the risks and benefits. You have had time to think about participating in the project and had the opportunity to ask questions and have those questions answered to your satisfaction.

- You understand that participating in the project is entirely voluntary and that you may end your participation at any time without any penalty or negative consequences.

- You have been given a copy of this Informed Consent form for your records; and

- You agree to participate in this research project.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____
Participant's name

Athabasca University

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Principal Investigator's Signature:

I have explained this project to the best of my ability. I invited questions and responded to any that were asked. I believe the participant fully understands what is involved in participating in the research project, any potential risks and that he or she has freely chosen to participate.

_____   _____
Signature of Principal Investigator   Date

Athabasca
University

Appendix B
Interview Questions

In this document I will highlight what I would like to learn about resiliency development in sexual minorities. Interviews will be one-to-one and will be open-ended questions. As a result, the exact wording may change a little. Sometimes I will use other short questions to make sure I understand the response or if I need more information (i.e., Can you clarify what you mean when you noted about…). I will attempt to make the interview feel as conversational as possible so the participants may feel relaxed.

The Principal investigator will first ask the participants for the demographic information Tell me about your:
- Age
- Ethnicity
- Employment
- Living situation
- Financial status
- Religion
- Sexual orientation

Next, a semi-structured interview will be employed. The questions that will be asked are as followed:

Part 1: Internet Usage
1. How often do you use the Internet (please specify the amount of hours per day).
2. Describe your information seeking practices online and how you went about dealing with your curiosity.
    a. What activities do you use the Internet for
    b. What are some of your favorite things to do online
    c. What do spend the most time doing online

Part 2: Internet Usage in relationship to sexual identity
3. Thinking about when you realized you were gay, please explain the role that the Internet had in providing you with information.
4. At times when you felt like you were trying to explore or understand your sexuality, how was the internet helpful
5. Where did you turn to for information on your sexuality or on LGB culture while online?
6. What are your thoughts/feelings about being gay?
7. How hast the information online influence how you view yourself/feel about yourself as an sexual minority?
8. Do you relate to LGBTQ related website (and if so, which ones and how often)?
9. How is your relationship with queer community in the real world?
10. How is your relationship with the online queer community?
11. What do you feel are the benefits of using the Internet for the activities that you do online?
12. What do you feel are the limits of using the Internet for the activities that you do online?
13. How does it compare with information that you might get offline?

Part 3: Identity development and resiliency

14. How does your Internet use differ, or similar, during the different time period of discovering your sexual orientation (i.e., Internet use before, during, and after coming out)?
15. How do you personally define resiliency?
16. How do you feel resiliency applies to you?
17. Please explain in details how Internet usage may have helped foster your resiliency development.

Is there anything important we forgot? Is there anything else you think I need to know about resiliency development for sexual minorities?

Appendix C
Tri-Council Policy Statement 2: Core

PANEL ON RESEARCH ETHICS
Navigating the ethics of human research

TCPS 2: CORE

Certificate of Completion

This document certifies that

Phillip Hau

has completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement:
Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans
Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE)

Date of Issue: **23 September, 2017**

Appendix D
AU Research Ethics Board Approval

Athabasca University
RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

The future of learning.

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (AUREB) has reviewed and approved the research project noted below. The AUREB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS)* and Athabasca University Policy and Procedures.

Ethics File No.: 22666

Principal Investigator: Phillip Hau, Graduate Student, Faculty of Health Disciplines

Supervisor (if applicable): Paul Jerry, Associate Professor, Faculty of Health Disciplines

Project Title: 'How Internet Use Fosters Resiliency Development in Sexual Minorities'

Effective Date: July 20, 2017   **Expiry Date**: July 19, 2018

Restrictions:

- Any modification or amendment to the approved research must be submitted to the AUREB for approval.

- Ethical approval is *valid for a period of one year*. An annual request for renewal must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date if a project is ongoing beyond one year.

- A Project Completion (Final) Report must be submitted when the research is complete *(i.e. all participant contact and data collection is concluded, no follow-up with participants is anticipated and findings have been made available/provided to participants (if applicable))* or the research is terminated.
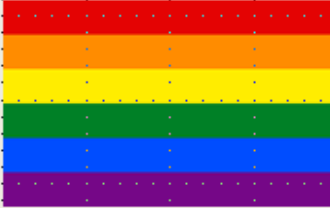
Approved by: **Date: July 20, 2017**

Simon Nuttgens, Chair
Faculty of Health Disciplines, Departmental Ethics Review Committee

Athabasca University Research Ethics Board
University Research Services, Research Centre
1 University Drive, Athabasca AB Canada   T9S 3A3
E-mail: rebsec@athabascau.ca
Telephone: 780.675.6718

Appendix E
Participants Recruitment Poster

Do you identify as a **sexual minority**? Are you interested in sharing your experience in **resiliency development**? Do you have time to participate in **one 60-90 minute interview**? Consider participating in this study!

What is this study about:
- This study is to learn about how internet can be used as a way to foster resiliency development

- I am looking for participants who identifies as:
    - Gay White cis-gender men between ages 18-29

What is involved?
- This study involves one 60-90 minute in-person interview
- The investigator will ask participants about their internet experience, what activities do participants engage in online to facilitate identity development, as well as how these activities help with personal growth
- Participation in this study is completely voluntary

What are the risk/benefit of participating?
- The investigator perceives minimum risk involved in this study
- You will be contributing to help understand how internet use can foster resiliency in sexual minorities

This study has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board.

Principal Investigator:
Phillip Hau

To ask questions, and./or participate in the research Contact:
Phillip Hau
587-921-2518
InternetResiliency@gmail.com

This study is supervised by:
Dr. Paul Jerry
Paul.Jerry@gcap.ca