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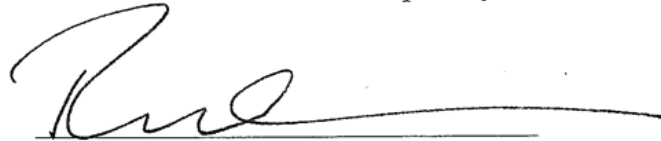
The Stages of Navigating Social Support towards a Positive Queer Identity

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts, Honours in Sociology, Major in Criminology

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Table of Contents

Section 1: Introduction

Section 2: Risk Factor Based Approach

Section 3: Resilience Based Approach

Section 4: Methodology

Section 5: Results

Section 6: Conclusion

Section 7: Bibliography

Section 8: Appendix

Abstract:

Growing the 'Seed of Doubt':
The Stages of Navigating Social Support towards a Positive Queer Identity

Many members of the queer community continue to sustain happy, healthy and successful lives despite the personal and social barriers initiated by homophobia. While queer individuals experience frequent homophobia and prejudice, this barrier is often overcome through navigating social support and relationships. The most frequent social relationships that either reject or embrace queer identities are: family members, formal organizations and peers.

This thesis investigates the lived experiences of queer people and how they negotiate their social environment to move away from experiences of prejudice and towards a positive internalization of a queer identity. For this thesis, I used a qualitative narrative approach. A total of ten participants were invited to share their experiences. A theoretical framework of resilience was used to articulate this connection. Resilience theory was able to account for the agency each individual expressed when facing barriers and ultimately navigating resources to overcome barriers.

The results of this study emerged in a story like account. This started from the beginning stages of the participants suspicion they claim membership to a queer identity, where a 'seed of doubt was planted'. Next, there was a movement towards finding support and social spaces where queer identities are embraced. This leads into the end result where the same 'seed of doubt' bloomed into a positive internalization of a queer identity, as a result of negotiating social spaces where a collective queer identity is shared.

Dedication

I would like to use this space to pay respects to a queer advocate in Halifax, Leighann Wichman, founder of the Youth Project, who recently and unexpectedly passed away. The youth project aims to make Nova Scotia a safer, healthier, and happier place for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth through support, education, resource expansion and community development. The Youth Project has had a lasting impact on my childhood, and there is no doubt in my mind that it has impacted the lives of many other young queer people for the better. Leighann was a key advocate for the queer community and the non-profit sector in Halifax and has successfully brought gay rights to the forefront of Halifax's political concerns. "This is a tremendous loss for the non-profit community," says Joanne Bernard, Community Services Minister (Gorman, October 7). "For the gay-lesbian-bisexual-transgender community, it's an extraordinary loss. She was a strong, steady voice and that loss will be felt for a long time to come" (Gorman, October 7). It is because of the advocacy and support of people, such as Leighann, that queer people are able to come together and create community space in which we are able to thrive.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and thank my thesis supervisor Dr. Augie Westhaver for providing me with unlimited inspiration and guidance throughout this process. My intellectual skills and ability to think analytically has grown tremendously as a result of his involvement in this project.

I would also like to extent my thanks to the faculty of the Sociology and Criminology department, as well as my peers in the Honours' program. I will never forget our early morning and late night conversations and the numerous other ways we supported each other throughout this year.

Last but certainly not least, I would also like to extent an acknowledgement towards the queer people that have shared their experiences with me. It is through the queer communities' participation and enthusiasm in my research that it has become what it is today. A huge thank you to the queer community as a whole for constantly challenging a society organized around heterosexual values.

Section 1:

Introduction

Introduction

"This one's for all the Pride organizers and the marchers, the loudmouthed activists, the shameless agitators and the quiet riot makers who form committees and plan parades knowing that celebration and community building have the power to heal."

Kate Reid, Queer Across Canada, 2013

This excerpt is from a song about queer people in Canada, and how they have come together to resist homophobia and heteronormativity in today's society. Despite the odds, members of the queer community continue to thrive and sustain personal well-being through social connections. The collaboration of queer people and their dedication to social justice has made it possible for me to address the positive development of a queer identity in this study.

Similar to the song-writer, Kate Reid, I have experienced both unprecedented degrees of prejudice and the strength to move beyond it. Growing up queer in a small fishing community was no easy feat. The degree of violence and verbal attacks I experienced during that time is something I wouldn't wish upon anybody. However, it was in the midst of these daunting times that I was able to form a core group of friends that all identified somewhere along the spectrum of queer. The strength and support we were able to find within each other has had a tremendous impact on who I am and the ways in which I am able to thrive in a dominantly heterosexual society. Not long after finding each other, we implemented the first ever Gay-Straight alliance (GSA) at a junior high in Eastern Passage. The impact of being afforded opportunity to declare our presence and challenge our homophobic peers was, until then, unheard of in this small community.

It is through my personal journey that I become compelled to investigate how social relationships and support contribute to the well-being of queer individuals. What is lacking in the

current academic conversation on queer identity is the ways in which individuals find the strength to move beyond verbal and physical attacks motivated by homophobia. For this reason, I introduce to you my undergraduate thesis that aims to investigate the ways that social supports, such as organizations, peers, and family members contribute to fostering resiliency. As a result queer people are provided with the resources to overcome the adverse outcomes that are associated with identifying as a sexual minority.

Terminology

It is important to bring attention to the terminology used in this study, which refers to the participants and the wider queer community. The terms and acronyms regarding sexual minority populations has been unclear and in a constant state of change. Currently, the official and rarely implemented acronym is LGBTQQIP2AA, which intends to represent lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, pansexual, 2-spirted, asexual, and allies. There is one key problem I would like to address in applying this overly complex acronym: It is exclusive in an attempt to be inclusive, at best. With good intentions nonetheless, complicated labels such as this one works to alienate both members of the community and heterosexual allies that fight alongside the community. I argue that this acronym alienates individuals because, not surprisingly, very few people have an adequate understanding of its meaning and who it seeks to represent. This creates a space for community members to question each other's knowledge and membership to a sexual minority status, which becomes further accentuated for straight allies. Nonetheless, it's important to consider the original intent of presenting such an extensive acronym. However, based on my experiences and interactions in the community, I argue that the intent is often lost in the space it creates to undermine one another's authenticity.

Therefore, with the original intention of creating a supportive and welcoming academic space this study will employ one simple word: queer. It's important to acknowledge that in the past queer has been used as a degrading term. However, in my personal experience, the term 'queer' has been embraced by the community as an umbrella term to include a diverse range of sexualities and gender identities. It could be argued that queer does not include transgender people who identify as heterosexual following transition. In my study, the individuals that identified as transgender or bi-gender expressed a sexual identity of queer or homosexual. Based on the expressions of my participants, queer is an appropriate term. It is by no means my intention to exclude any gender or sexual identification in the application of the term queer.

Section 2:

Risk Factor Based Approach

Literature Review:

I. Risk based approach

Queer individuals experience a wide range of vulnerabilities in health, building relationships, and social and educational outcomes. The most pronounced and serious challenges include suicide, mental health outcomes (D'Augelli, 1995; Mishna, Newman, Daley & Soloman 2009; Kosciw, Greytak & Diaz, 2009; Poon & Saewyc, 2009), homelessness (St. John et al., 2014), low academic achievement (Kosciw, Greytak & Diaz, 2009), and social isolation (Higa et al., 2012; Kosciw, Greytak & Diaz, 2009). Queer individuals experience challenges largely because they are the victims of prejudice and discrimination across various social contexts and institutions, particularly educational environments. While these are a part of many minority groups' experiences, the queer community has received the least support from the general public and people in positions of authority. Research investigating challenges faced by the queer community is dominated by experiences with family members, peers, and at school and, in rural communities. The result of interacting with these various risk factors often leads to ill mental health outcomes (Poon & Saewyc, 2009; DiFulvio, 2011; Russell, 2005; D'Augelli, 1992; Asakura & Craig, 2014; Mustanski, Newcomb & Garofalo, 2011; Walls, Kane & Wisneski, 2009; St. John et al., 2014 & Mishna, Newman, Daley & Soloman, 2009).

Family

Experiences of coming out as a sexual minority to family members can be unsafe and individuals often fear straining their relationships (Higa et al., 2012), being verbally or physically victimized (Mishna, Newman, Daly & Soloman, 2009; Walls, Kane & Wisneski, 2009), and becoming rejected or isolated at home (Higa et al., 2012 & Mishna, Newman, Daley & Soloman,

2009). A general lack of support from family members is reflected in the notion that 20% - 40% of homeless youth identify as queer (St. John et al., 2014). Experiencing marginalization from family members can be especially traumatic because of the nature of the relationship and the extent of financial dependence.

Peers

The majority of research points towards the frequency and intensity of victimization by peers towards queer people (D'Augelli, 1992; DiFulvio, 2011; Higa et al., 2012; Kosciw, Greytak & Diaz 2009; Poon & Saewyc, 2009; Mishna, Newman, Daly & Soloman, 2009; Walls, Kane & Wisneski, 2009 & Taylor et al., 2011). The likelihood that sexual minority youth will experience harassment on a day to day basis is alarmingly high, "Over three quarters (77%) had been verbally insulted; 49% had experience verbal insults more than once." (D'Augelli, 1992). However, this experience is certainly not homogeneous, queer individuals endure various forms and magnitudes of intimidation from peers. Physical attacks, threats of violence, property damage, homophobic comments, and social exclusion are just a few ways that this prejudice is manifested (D'Augelli, 1992; Mishna, Newman, Daley & Soloman, 2009; DiFulvio, 2011; Higa et al., 2012 & Poon & Saewyc, 2009).

School

While queer communities face discrimination in many different social contexts, it is perhaps discrimination in the school environment that is most insidious. This is primarily because school related victimization can lead to long term effects. For example, school related problems lead to low academic achievements due to truancy and dropping out (St. John et al., 2014; Walls, Kane & Wisneski, 2009; Kosciw, Greytak & Diaz, 2009). This is demonstrated in the first Canadian national survey on queer student's experiences, when asked "I don't like being at school so sometimes I

skip", 44% of queer students agreed (Taylor et al., 2011, p. 90). Even more disturbing, is the perception that teachers and authority figures are not addressing the homophobia and prejudice that makes the school environment unsafe for queer students (Higa et al., 2014; Mishna, Newman, Daley & Soloman, 2009 & Worthen, 2014).

Rural Communities

Discrimination against queer people often becomes more complex in rural communities where gay identity is excluded, or silenced (Higa et al, 2012; Kosciw, Greytak & Diaz, 2009; Kazyak, 2011; Mishna, Newman, Daley & Soloman, 2009; Worthen, 2014). According to Poon & Saewyc (2009) in rural environments conservative attitudes contribute to a heteronormative environment which contributes to more social exclusion, less access to supportive resources, and an increased concern for safety that accompanies the absence of less anonymity (p. 118). Traditional religious beliefs are common in small rural communities and often contribute to exaggerated victimization of queer people (Asakura & Criag, 2014; Worthen; 2014). Higa et al (2014) discusses the ways religion is used as grounds for the social isolation of queer people, "youth reported being harassed at their places of worship, and many had either left their faith communities or been forced out" (p. 677).

Mental Health Impact

As demonstrated above, queer individuals face significant challenges which lead to residual mental health impacts, particularly for young people. Allen, Hammack & Himes (2012) discuss the various ways queer youth react when prejudice is internalized…: "compared to youth who identify as heterosexual, GLBTQ youth experience more depression, substance abuse, suicidal ideation, and self-harm" (p. 1290). Of greatest concern is the alarmingly high suicide rate among queer people

(Poon & Saewyc, 2009; DiFulvio, 2011; Russell, 2005; D'Augelli, 1992; Asakura & Craig, 2014; Mustanski, Newcomb & Garofalo, 2011; Walls, Kane & Wisneski, 2009; St. John et al., 2014 & Mishna, Newman, Daley & Soloman, 2009). Essentially, the impact of continued discrimination can be detrimental to the well-being of queer people.

The present research dominantly focuses on defining and locating individual factors that suggest queer people are at a greater risk of poor personal, social and, mental health outcomes. Social scientists have now reached a consensus that 60-80% of the queer community experience frequent verbal harassment (D'Augelli, 1992; Mishna et al., 2009, Egale Canada Human Rights Trust, 2011 & DiFulvio, 2011). While some queer people become vulnerable to the obstacles they have been faced with, many other continue to thrive in a dominantly heterosexual society. Essentially, the risks factors have become blatantly clear and it is now necessary to shift towards solution based initiatives that aim to address the defined risk factors.

Problem statement

Discrimination against queer individuals is manifested across numerous social contexts by peers, role models and even family members. Understanding the extent and frequency of prejudice the queer community faces in a range of social environments (Harper, Brodsky & Bruce, 2012; Higa et al., 2014; Mishna, Newman, Daley & Soloman, 2009), is the overwhelming focus of the risk factor based research. The literature presented comes from a risk factor based approach. Risk factors refer to personal characteristics or experiences that put people in jeopardy of poor social development and increase the likelihood of becoming vulnerable to residual mental health impacts. Therefore, this risk based approach aims to identify personal and social characteristics

of queer people that infer they are less likely to become happy, healthy and contributing members of society.

While efforts to understand the challenges faced by queer people are clearly warranted, it is equally as important to consider how queer people exercise agency in the face of these challenges. The risk based approach is problematic because it cannot account for the agency that queer people exercise in navigating throughout various social contexts. Social environments such as education instructions, family life, peers groups and formal organizations can present both obstacles and opportunities for positive identity development. Very few research initiatives have recognized this tremendous personal agency that queer people have in navigating and negotiating their social surroundings. "Even less attention has been given to explain why the majority of sexual minority young people grow up to be healthy and contributing members of society despite widespread heterosexism and homophobia" (Russell, 2005, p. 8). In light of this observation it becomes clear that queer individuals are finding success in their daily lives. The current literature on queer populations is overwhelmingly focused on risk factors and as a result does not allow room to investigate the many ways that queer people are excelling in a heteronormative society. A shift towards resilience based research will provide the space to understand the complex ways queer people are overcoming the barriers they face. Additionally, offering explanations for the ways queer people move forward will provide the necessary tools to begin building on solution-based initiatives.

Section 3:

Resilience Based Approach

Theoretical framework

Resiliency theory provides a fresh perspective when attempting to explain the ways in which queer people can overcome a range of risk factors when equip with resources and guidance. This study will utilize a theoretical framework of resiliency (Meyer, 2003, Ungar 2010, Cohen, 2004 & Kwon, 2013). Resiliency is one way that sexual minorities can combat the adverse conditions they are faced with. Ungar (2012) defines resiliency as "[…] the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that build and sustain their well-being" (p. 253). Resiliency refers to the capacity to connect to, and sustain social connections and resources that benefit the individual's well-being. Community level resiliency can be fostered through social supports which can provide the best tools to move towards supportive social spaces and positive identity formation (Higa et al., 2012; DiFulvio, 2011; Worthen, 2014). Understanding the effects that social support has on the existing risk factors can provide opportunities to better understand the well-being of queer people.

Branches of resiliency theory focuses on individualistic factors of perseverance (Meyer, 2003 & Kwon, 2013), other conceptualizations emphasize social support (Cohen, 2004 & Kwon, 2013), whereas other models emphasize the social constructions of a successful outcome (Ungar, 2010). A focus on theories of social support offers space for policy change and tangible ways to improve access to queer related resources. Social support has the greatest potential to foster resiliency in the general population (Cohen, 2004 & Kwon, 2013). Support can be received in three different ways: *instrumental support* is offered through material or monetary aid, *informational support* involves an offer of information, and *emotional support* includes being able to express or vent about emotional distress (Cohen, 2004). Regardless of the type of support received, it will only be effective if the guidance being offered is perceived to be relevant to the event (Cohen, 2004). For example, having a

friend tutor you in math may be helpful if you are flunking but will not help you with avoiding the gym locker rooms because you fear harassment. This model suggests that support comes in various forms and for it to successfully relieve any emotional distress there must be a degree of relevance.

Resilience is also impacted by competing ideologies of what it means to be healthy or successful. It's crucial to understand that someone can experience many risks with few resources and still become resilient based on their personal and social surroundings. "The successful individual or family is the one that functions to a standard he, she, or it sets in concert with others whose opinions are valued" (Ungar, 2010, p. 13). There is an aspect of fluidity in resilience theory that asserts the expectations one person has of themselves should define the degree that the outcome is considered a success.

Kwon (2013) offers a queer specific framework that suggests higher social support, emotional openness, and optimism leads to lower negative reactions towards prejudice (p. 372). Considering this resiliency model: access to sexuality specific social supports such as GSA's will allow queer people to better cope with the challenges faced, specifically, incidents of physical and verbal harassment. The amount of social support (queer related access centres or social relationships) contribute to a better tolerance of emotional distress which in turn will decrease the long term effects that result from social isolation and marginalization.

Solution based studies on queer populations suggest that social support and connectedness, informal and formal, are the best way to ameliorate the range of risk factors queer people face (Kwon, 2013; DiFulvio, 2011; Mustanski, Newcomb & Garofalo, 2011; Hou & Lu, 2013; Asakura & Craig, 2014). Resiliency theory opens up a new perspective to analyze and begin to understand the experiences of the queer community through accounting for the degree of personal agency exercised in the face of challenges. The risk factor approach does not account for any variation of challenges

or opportunities that each queer person faces in their daily life through the social environments they interact with. However, a resiliency perspective does account for the multidimensional ways both challenges and opportunity can surface in everyday social interactions. This theoretical framework is an essential component of this research because it establishes an arena to seek out concrete steps towards combating the marginalization the queer community experiences.

Literature Review:

II. Resilience based approach

In the risk based approach, social relationships and environments where homophobia thrive were articulated. Many of the same social relationships and environments where homophobia is dominant, also have the potential to accept and foster queer identity. Teachers or authority figures, family members, peers and formal organizations all have the capacity to support queer people. The findings surrounding each social relationship and the ability to foster a positive queer identity formation will be discussed.

Teachers/Mentors

As highlighted in the risk based approach, teachers are often vilified by young people for their inaction against homophobia. However, there are experiences where teachers advocate for the acceptance and diversity of queer students. Teachers advocate for students simply by being allies, mentors, and providing resources to young gay students (Worthen, 2014; DiFulvio, 2011). DiFulvio (2011) demonstrates the impact of one teacher's support through her participants' voices: "So those faculty in very subtle ways also really supported me, asked me how I was doing and would check in with me" (p. 1615). In a heteronormative environment, such as High School, faculty are not always able to alter the larger social context but are able to provide one on one support to students.

Educational environments are often considered hostile for queer students, although, some young

people fortunately find support in teachers or guidance counsellors.

Family

Many of the social spheres, such as home, often represent challenges; however, some queer

people find their experiences at home very supportive and accepting of their sexual identity. Family

support has the highest likelihood to dampen the negative effects of homophobia for young people

(Shilo & Savaya, 2011). The acceptance at home from family members serves as a significant

stepping stone to resilience. Having your family member's acceptance and advocacy can provide a

safe venue to develop a strong and confident identity.

One of the DiFulvio's respondents remarked:

> "My mom… and you know my father… have been strong role models as they always would
> come in and advocate on my behalf […] and literally the first time anything negative
> happened and my parents were just shocked and they were like ' you can't be OK with that'"
> (2011, p. 1614).

In this excerpt, it becomes clear that having the acceptance of family members can result in having

access to guidance and support. Family support cannot undo the harms of prejudice on its own

(Asakura & Craig, 2014) but in conjunction with other protective factors there is a greater capacity

for favourable outcomes.

Peers

Informal social support, from gay and straight peers alike, also serves as a significant

protector against the daunting effects of discrimination (Higa et al., 2012; D'Augelli, 1992;

DiFulvio, 2011; Worthen, 2014). Sharing a social connection with peers that accept queer identity

and offer emotional support has the ability to foster resiliency. DiFulvio elaborates through her

participants' voices "They need someone to listen to them and just talk to them about it because, in the very beginning it is so important to have one person to listen to you […] I just wanted someone to tell me it was OK" (2011, p. 1615). This excerpt demonstrates the importance of having one key peer to confide in during the beginning stages of coming out. Social support and connectedness is the most effective way to ameliorate the range of challenges that queer individuals face at school, home, and in the wider public (Kwon, 2013; DiFulvio, 2011; Mustanski, Newcomb & Garofalo, 2011; Hou & Lu, 2013; Asakura & Craig, 2014).

Formal Organizations

Formal organizations are another viable way to foster resiliency and positive outcomes in the queer community. During the 2000's, GSA's became present in high schools across the United States and Canada (Worthen, 2014). Research on GSA's has discovered that their mere presence facilitates for a more inclusive environment (Worthen, 2014 & Walls, Kane & Wisneski, 2009). The presence of a GSA legitimizes homosexuality and other sexual minorities.

According to Micelli:

> These alliances further break down hegemonic forces by increasing the numbers of heterosexual people who have come to realize that the oppression of LGBT individuals is unjust and to start to understand the power behind social construction of inequality.
> (2005, p. 225)

Essentially, heterosexual and homosexual students alike begin to take a more critical understanding of homophobia. The forces of homophobia are broken down by the mere visibility and legitimacy of queer students. Beyond this, GSA's have the ability to connect queer students to the wider gay community, provide safe spaces, and access to resources (Worthen, 2014). As a result, students

experience reduced alcohol use, depression (St. John et al., 2014) and, higher academic achievement (Walls, Kane & Wisneski; 2009).

Research Question

The process of arriving at a positive identity formation involves both overcoming challenges associated with homophobia and developing social connections that support and accept queer identities. The journey of arriving at a queer identity can simply not be divided into risk factors and protective factors. This would never be able to account for the variation each queer person experiences in the various social environments they interact with. For this reason, applying resiliency theory opens up a new perspective when investigating the stages of developing a positive queer identity. Specifically, this perspective can account for the agency each individual expresses when facing challenges and ultimately navigating resources to overcome those challenges. Additionally, resiliency emphasizes the importance of solution based initiatives. Focusing on solution based initiatives has tremendous value because it attempts to clarify and explain how queer people navigate towards positive outcomes. Instead of focusing on positive or negative aspects of each experience, it is necessary to develop a larger picture of which barriers are overcome and which experiences are embraced in the process of sustaining a healthy and happy queer identity.

• How can resiliency theory provide new perspectives that aid in understanding how informal and formal social support fosters a positive internalization of a queer identity?

Section 4:

Methodology

Methodology

Style & Design

The qualitative methods applied will consist of narrative interviews in which participants have the opportunity to speak to their personal experiences. A qualitative approach is necessary to understand how queer individuals navigate their way to overcoming homophobia, and as a result, how they conceptualize their experiences. A qualitative approach was utilized for this study because the degree that participants experience distress from homophobia, and find the strength to move beyond, is ultimately defined by the individual navigating that journey.

A narrative interview style was utilized. This style is characterized by being loosely structured to allow research participants to frame their personal story. During the interview, each participant was guided through a process of telling their life story as pertaining to the theme that was most relevant, which in this case is gender and sexual identity. "Life stories are considered to be important expressions of one's identity and are shaped by personal, social and, cultural contexts" (Titon, 1980, p. 290). Therefore, a narrative style produces data that can represent each participant's journey by describing how they first began to understand themselves as queer, how they came out socially as queer, and as a result, the social and cultural experiences that have accompanied that process.

Because the interviews were loosely structured, only eight interview questions were used to guide the conversation (See Appendix IV). Instead of focusing on specific questions, I encouraged participants to include what was most important to them as a part of their experience in identifying as a sexual minority. The question I opened with was "Can you tell me how you happened to come out when you did?" This question provided participants with a direction to focus, while at the same

time allowing them space to construct their own story. Other questions focused on more specific social relationships such as family members, friends, or organizations. However, these questions remained vague. For example another question included, "Have you ever developed a relationship with somebody that offered you guidance?" The key feature of these questions, and of the narrative style, is that it reserves the space for respondents to include or exclude what they define as most essential to their experience. For the complete interview guide, see appendix IV.

Participants and Sampling Methodology

Much of the current resilience focused research has recruited participants using a convenience sample from formal support services (D'Augelli, 1992; Mishna, Newman, Daly & Soloman, 2009). This study used a combination of convenience and snowball sampling techniques to recruit participants. A convenience sampling method was utilized in the beginning. In order to start recruiting participants, I contacted existing contacts in the queer community. This was necessary because not all participants felt comfortable recruiting friends for the purpose of research. A major limitation of using a convenience sample is that participants may come from similar social settings, backgrounds, and locations. A convenience sample is least likely to provide a diverse group of participants. This demonstrates that the participants involved in the research represent a minority of queer communities; the minority that has reached out for support and is privileged to have continued access. Five of ten participants were recruited using a convenience method.

Five of ten participants were recruited using a snowball sampling technique. Not all participants in this study were recruited using this method because of time constraints. A snowball technique is characterized by recruiting additional participants from participants currently involved in the research. At the end of each interview, I requested from the participant that they provide me

with the contact information of someone else who would be interested and eligible to participate in my research. The snowball sampling method was used in this study because it is extremely challenging to access large groups of queer people without going through formal organizations. It was not desired to access queer populations via organizations because the participants would have an advantage because of current access to formal services. The advantage of using a snowball sampling technique is that the participants involved have not accessed the same support services. However, a disadvantage of this technique is that participants could be connected through social groups or have similar values.

The only exclusion criteria for research participants was if they do not identify as queer. There is a large spectrum of queer identities, and none were excluded from approaching this study: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer questioning, gender neutral and any other individuals interested will be included. The sexual orientations represented in this study are; queer, flexible, gay, lesbian, and bisexual. The gender identities represented are: female, male, female transgender, male transgender, and gender queer. The ages of participants ranges from nineteen to forty-six.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender identity	Sexual orientation
Aimée	43	Transgender female and/or bi-gender	Lesbian
Alice	21	Female	Bisexual
Casey	29	Female	Lesbian
Chad	21	Gender queer	Queer
Clarence	23	Male	Gay
Fantasia	19	Female	Lesbian
Sea	23	Female	Polysexual
Cherry	22	Female	Lesbian
Dylan	45	Male	Homo-flexible
Shadow	29	Transgender male	Queer

*All names used are pseudonyms. This is a random name selected in order to ensure the participant's identity remains confidential.

Ethical Considerations

Firstly, it is of utmost importance to be aware of the hostile social and cultural conditions that queer populations may have experienced. As a result of this, it is the role of the researcher to ensure that the participants involved do not experience further marginalization as a result of recounting their stories to the researcher. In order to ensure the participants will be treated with dignity, respect, and face no immediate risks, a number of ethical precautions will be followed.

A discussion of current and past experiences of prejudice has the potential to create emotional distress for participants. For this reason, an exhaustive list of formal support services in Halifax was provided. All of the services provided are available to the general population and free of charge. The resources offered to participants are as follows: Youth Project, Halifax Sexual Health Centre, dalOUT, SMUQ, Mount Pride and the GLBT 24/7 National Help Centre available via internet and telephone. The style of interview has, however, worked to minimize any potential risks of participating in this study. Allowing participants to represent their own experiences through a narrative interview style will decrease the chance of any negative psychological experiences and increase their role as active participants (DiFulvio, 2011).

An offer of confidentiality was promised to all participants. By ensuring all participants remain confidential, most risks associated with the involvement of this research were eliminated. Specifically, being 'outed' as queer in a place of employment or education is still a risk for many of the participants. Confidentiality was ensured with the use of pseudonyms. Additionally, the data will be transcribed and stored on a locked, external, storage device. As an agreement to the potential risks and the potential benefits, participants were asked to sign a consent form.

There are a variety of potential risks that come with participating in research of all varieties. In summary, all participants faced the potential risk of becoming emotionally distressed when they shared their personal experiences. However, there are also potential benefits that outweigh the risks. Benefits of this study specifically include applying the concept of resiliency to queer populations and expanding the conversation on solution based research.

Interview Process

Participants were primarily contacted via phone or e-mail. Each participant was informed of the purpose of the study and was then offered an opportunity to express interest in scheduling an interview. The majority of interviews were conducted in a community library. The three remaining interviews were conducted in the participant's home, primarily because of challenges with physical accessibility or transportation. The interviews lasted approximately forty-five minutes. The shortest interview was thirty-five minutes and the longest was approximately one hour and twenty minutes.

After the interviews were conducted, they were immediately transcribed. All interview recordings were deleted within a week of being completed. Interviews were not coded and analyzed until all ten were complete. In early March, interviews with all ten of the participants were completed, and then they were coded. The interviews were coded according to relevant themes such as support from peers, support from family, acceptance from family but not support or guidance, and fluid identity.

When I began coding and analyzing the data from the interviews a few over-arching themes became clear immediately. Firstly, the degree and frequency participants depended on friends or peers for support related to their sexuality became clear in the early stages during conducting, transcribing and coding interviews. The degree queer individuals depend on friends for guidance was

a very strong experience as it became well-defined before the process of data analysis. However, the process of data analysis offered some explanations for why peers were a favoured source for support. Specifically, because of a lack of support from other venues and a shared identity. Essentially, this theme emerged in the early stages of data collection which represents how important this experience was for the participants.

A second theme quickly became clear during data coding and analysis. This theme was that when participants experienced barriers in accessing support, they then navigated alternative environments to fulfill that need. This experience is particularly representative of the amount of agency participants exercised in their journey towards a positive queer identity. For example, when participants experienced a lack of acceptance from family members they navigated towards peers or when organizations did not fulfill their personal needs they would turn towards mentors or allies. The significance of this experience within the data represents profound levels of resiliency and agency in negotiating immediate social environments to find social spaces which embrace queer identities.

The experiences articulated above about peers and levels of resiliency became clear before, during and after coding the data. After the interviews were completely coded each concept was then separated into individual word documents that corresponded to the concept which emerged. The final step of data analysis was to summarize each concept that emerged in separate documents. This step prepared me to begin writing about the concept that emerged in an organized and efficient way.

Section 5:

Results

I. Discovery: *a 'seed of doubt'*

Discovery refers to the initial moment or moments when an individual first suspects that they may identify along the spectrum of queer. This result will be termed discovery because those who identify with a normative gender or sexuality do not have the burden of uncovering their sexuality, instead it is expected that they are heterosexual. On the other hand, individuals that identify as a sexual minority have the burden of socially declaring their minority status. This process typically happens in two steps, first, to discover a sexual identity on a personal basis, and then declaring this identity socially (more commonly known as 'coming out'). This section will discuss the significant impact that heteronormativity has on discovering a queer identity, the ways in which this concept emerged for participants, and how influences from peers and media accelerated the process.

If it were not for the rigid social norms of heteronormativity, it would not be necessary to discover a minority sexual identity. Therefore, heteronormativity refers to the rigid social norms that arrange most expressions of sex and gender around heterosexuality (Engel, Dhawan & Castro, 2011, p. 11). The powerful norms around sex and gender create a society where heterosexuality is not only dominant, but also desired. A society that normalizes heterosexuality and rigid gender roles fosters the assumption that all members within it are heterosexual, male or female, unless otherwise declared. This is, essentially, why queer people must not only discover their gender and sexual identity, but also 'come out'. First discovering a sexual identity and as a result declaring sexual minority status is a crucial step in accessing social support. One must socially transition from the expected sexuality or gender they are assigned towards the identity they desire before locating the social support that is key in combating heteronormativity and formulating a queer identity.

In this study, media played a key role in the participants' initial doubt that he identifies with a dominant sexuality or gender. Shadow recounts his first introduction to identifying as queer, in a small Cape Breton town:

> One of the things that influenced me in coming out was Ashley MacIsaac's book, cause he is from the same community I am, so it was kind of interesting having that because I didn't know a single queer person existed. (Shadow, 29, Transgender Male, Queer)

In this instance, Shadow had never met anyone who did not identify as heterosexual or did not conform to normative genders. Growing up in a rural community, Shadow had minimal access to expressions of non-normative sexualities and gender roles. It was not until Shadow read and understood accounts of identifying with a sexual minority that he then began to see the similarities in his gender expressions. Media can play a key role in breaking down the forces of heteronormativity. Hearing accounts of queer public figures breaks down rigid social norms by simply introducing the idea and opening up the possibilities of identifying with a sexuality that is not dominant.

Others faced further boundaries to discovering their sexual identity because of the way they understand themselves, and in exchange, their understanding of what queer is. Aimée first noticed that she didn't fit into a dominant gender or sexuality when she was fourteen and first tried on women's clothes. Aimée reflects back on when she accepted she was born the wrong gender – twenty years later:

> So you know because I wasn't gay I didn't see myself as trans[gender]. So when I first saw that episode [W5 documentary on transgenderism] it was like wait wait wait transgender people can have wives and it just kind of planted that seed of doubt. Something that I buried for a very long time ever since I was about 14 and I started to do some research and I finally understood that all these troubles I had of not quite being able to fit as a male in society was because I wasn't male. (Aimée, 43, Transgender Female, Lesbian)

For many years of her life, Aimée did not consider an alternate gender because she never heard of a transgender person that remained married to their now same sex partner. The moment that Aimée

discovered she could transition to the opposite gender, while retaining her sexual identity, a 'seed of doubt' was planted. The ways in which transgender identities are marginalized in society silences the presence of variations of transgender identity. Thus, the rigid societal norms surrounding gender and sexuality created significant boundaries for her to arrive at her true identity. However, when Aimée was introduced to the idea that transgender people do not have to be heterosexual, she made her decision to transition. Witnessing individuals that identify similar to us plays a key role in recognizing that gender and sexual identity can go beyond the typical binaries such as heterosexual, male or female.

The data begins to suggest that in a society where heteronormativity thrives one must first come to doubt their identity as retaining membership to a heterosexual orientation. Hetreonormativity creates barriers to accessing a queer identity because of a lack of exposure and conversation on marginalized sexual identities. Discovering a queer identity is often a process of witnessing an account of somebody in the public eye who identifies as queer. Being introduced to reflective accounts of queer identity works proactively to plant the intial 'seed of doubt'. The experience of witnessing somebody else's narrative of being queer opens up the possibility of alternate sexual identities, in the same way that a 'seed of doubt' will eventually bloom. The next step is often to begin navigating support or acceptance from the various social atmospheres one frequents.

II. Family

The next step in the journey towards a positive queer identity is to socially declare minority status. The first place that most queer people turn to present their sexual identity socially, and in ideal situations to navigate sources of support, is towards immediate family members. Therefore, a second stage in the process of accessing support and formulating a queer identity is coming out to family. Three participants in this study experienced a consistent lack of acceptance and support from immediate family members, specifically, parents. Fantasia experienced continued social isolation from her father and step-mother. Fantasia expresses that support received from her extended family could not relieve the prejudice that she faced from immediate family members; "The fact that my parents or somebody that I thought was my mother and my dad kind of ripped my family and my sisters from me that kind of overruns [support from extended family – aunt]" (Fantasia, 19, lesbian). This excerpt has significant implications for the impact of never gaining acceptance from immediate family members. As Fantasia explained, navigating further social support could not efficiently ameliorate the barriers that she faced with her mother and father.

This demonstrates that not gaining acceptance from immediate family builds further barriers to navigating social support. Fantasia was the only participant that did not sustain further support from peers or organizations. Fantasia, recounts her experience with an organization: "[but for me] I actually was in organization and they're very helpful now, but when I first joined there was people there that told me not to tell my story because it was a sad sob story" (Fantasia, 19, lesbian). Fantasia's initial experience of coming out to her parents has created additional barriers for her to access formal organizations. Not only did Fantasia's experiences with immediate family members result in no support or acceptance but this barrier has directly transcended into alternative sources of support. After learning that Fantasia was denied support from immediate family members and formal

support services, it comes as no surprise that she actively avoided confiding in friends for support. Additionally, Fantasia expressed a negative perception of the queer community as a whole due to her experiences with formal organizations. This represents a detachment from her identity as a queer person. However, Fantasia expresses a high level of comfort with her sexual orientation. Contrasted with the other participants, she does not embrace her identity as a minority status that connects her to other queer people and resources. Thus, Fantasia's personal identity formation is largely disconnected from a collective queer identity as a result of less interaction with organizations and peers. For other participants, their positive identity as a queer person was influenced by the people who they interacted with to navigate support.

As Fantasia explains above, navigating guidance in alternative environments could not make up for the prejudice she faced in coming out to her parents. This has significant implications for understanding how important acceptance from immediate family members is in further accessing support, and thus developing a positive identity. In contrast, this also has implications for the few participants that did receive support from family members. In experiencing rejection from her immediate family members, Fantasia did not find the other forms of support she received to be of any value. The opposite can be said for the participants that have ideal experiences when coming out to their parents. Perhaps, gaining acceptance and support from family members afforded the participants confidence to further navigate support in peer groups and formal organizations. Essentially, being rejected or supported by family members has the capacity to create significant barriers or resources in the process of developing a queer identity.

Support or lack of from immediate family members emerged as the most complex concept. In the initial stages of coming out to family members, the participants most often experienced an extensive lack of support, and even rejection. When the participants' sexual identities were rejected

from family members, they then faced a greater degree of difficulty in navigating further support sources. However, this was certainly not a homogenous experience. Other participants who did not find support from family members began reaching out to alternative social environments.

Most, but not all, participants eventually reach a stage of acceptance from immediate family members. This is perhaps because as time goes on family members become educated and as a result have a greater understanding of a queer identity. This was the most common experience for participants. It's necessary to acknowledge that acceptance is by no means equivalent to support. Acceptance provides a safe social space which eliminates challenges associated with prejudice but does not provide resources to combat negative social experiences of prejudice. A participant, Dylan, explains how he could not necessarily confide in his parents for guidance but by accepting and not problematizing his sexual identity they afforded him a safe space:

> I couldn't really talk to them about my break up I couldn't really talk to them about how weird I am. So it's almost like they were just a refuge for me to sit and know that I was fine […] so it was like passive acceptance. I could go there and I could just be and they were just happy that I was happy. (Dylan, 45, homo-flexible, male)

In the excerpt above, Dylan describes how his parents accepted his sexuality without problematizing it. This demonstrates that the participant is neither helped nor hindered by his immediate family. Although this is not ideal, the family members here are not contributing to the challenges that queer individuals face. By accepting but not offering support, family members are not creating further barriers while at the same time not providing support to overcome existing barriers. By having this space between support and utter rejection, the participant is enabled to begin navigating further social support while not being afforded any great barriers. Essentially, by not actively problematizing a queer identity family members afford the individual space to freely express their queer identity. Additionally, the individual can continue to navigate support elsewhere to overcome

challenges of prejudice faced outside the family environment. By not challenging a queer identity family members are allowing the individual to focus their resources on overcoming adversity faced in other social environments.

Overall, receiving or not receiving acceptance from family members perhaps has the largest impact on developing a positive queer identity. The few participants that did receive support in the family environment experienced better outcomes in accessing social support, and as a result developing a positive queer identity. However, the most common experience with family members is directly in between gaining support and becoming isolated. By not problematizing a queer identity the family members are allowing a space where the individual does not face additional obstacles. Although this is not an ideal experience, the queer individual is now able to focus their resources on navigating social support to overcome adversities outside of the family environment. When faced with a lack of support from family member's individuals are successfully navigating their social environments and locating that guidance in other areas. To be denied support from the social environment at home and to obtain that support in an entirely different social atmosphere, overwhelmingly demonstrates a significant amount of agency.

When queer individuals do not find efficient resources from family members they begin the process of disconnecting from the home atmosphere and connecting to formal organizations where queer identities are embraced. When queer individuals turn towards organizations, much like the initial 'seed of doubt', they begin the process of witnessing other queer people's positive identities. The experience of witnessing accounts of positive identity from other queer people has a profound impact on the individual navigating support because of the shared collective identity.

III. Organizations

For many, reaching out to organizations after declaring their sexual identity was the initial step in navigating resources and as a result becoming connected to the wider queer community. Some participants reported, with enthusiasm, that they met long term friends, key mentor's, and intimate partners through formal organizations. However, this experience was not homogenous. Other participants reported that they had no access what so ever to formal organizations, whereas others reported they are inactive, did not target adult populations, or perhaps more problematic is the notion that some organizations were not perceived to be a safe and supportive environment.

Lack of support

One participant had no access or knowledge of organizations. Alice, a twenty-one year old, bisexual female, grew up in a military family and as a result grew up in a number of provinces and countries. Despite spending time in a number of different places, she was never able to locate or access formal support sources:

> I went to [like] three high schools, two middle schools and they didn't have anything to do with your sexuality or groups like that. I never even heard of anything like that [organizations] […]I wish there was [like] I know, I hope there are many now not knowing how to be safe about your choice sucks. (Alice, 21, Bisexual, Female)

As the only participant that was unable to access support from organizations, Alice's internalization of a queer identity emerged in different ways, contrasted with the other nine participants that did find support via formal services. During the interviews, many participants offered personal opinions regarding how they experience a queer identity. When Alice did not offer opinions on how she connected to her identity, I asked "what is good about being bisexual?" When this probe was used in previous interviews participants offered a general account of how they connect with identifying as queer. In contrast, Alice described an account of one of her peer's experiences of identifying as

queer. In most of the interviews, a question investigating what is good about each participant's sexual orientation evoked expressions of positive identity. The absence of a discussion regarding identity, in Alice's interview, suggests that her connection to a queer identity was much less pronounced. This further supports the argument that locating formal support is a key step in internalizing a positive identity. Alice was the only participant that was unable to access any form of support services and as a result expresses a disconnection from her personal identity as one that retains membership to a sexual minority.

Nine of ten participants interviewed had been involved with organizations that provide support to the queer community. There was extreme variance in the degree of support received from organizations. Most participants are only involved for a short period of time, whereas other participants were consistently active in support organizations. Regardless of each participants social or personal investments in organizations, the notion that only one participant could not gain access speaks volumes about the presence and impact these supports have on the queer community.

Casey, a twenty-nine year old lesbian, speaks about how her interaction with a formal support system impacted her understanding of identifying with a sexual minority: "It's kind of the first people you meet that you're like oh, I'm not the only one." When Casey made the initial connection to social supports, she came to an understanding that she is not the only one that identifies with a sexual minority. Becoming connected to the wider community, for Casey, started to break down rigid social norms that infer being heterosexual is the dominant and desired sexuality. A simple introduction to organizations and peers that identify as queer, works efficiently to help young people 'coming out' understand that in being a sexual minority they are not alone. Meeting others in the community works actively to break down the forces of heteronormativity. There is no doubt that identifying as queer assigns you a minority status, but in the process of sustaining personal well-

being via support services, many of the participants begin to think critically about the right to a non-normative sexuality or gender identity.

Some participants were involved in formal organizations for a short amount of time but met friends or mentor's that played a key role in overcoming challenges associated with identifying as queer. The organization Aimée was originally involved in, unfortunately, became inactive and eventually discontinued operation after two years. Unlike the organization Aimée was involved in, the friendships and connections found there stood the test of time:

> They helped me get out in public and socialize more as myself and helped me feel more comfortable and one of the three women was a trans[gender] woman and she, like myself, transitioned later in life and so she helped and encouraged me that it was possible to transition outside of your 20's. (Aimée, 43, Transgender, Lesbian)

Although the organization that Aimée was originally involved in became inactive the peers met during her involvement there became a significant source of support. As a result of involvement in the organization, the participant was able to foster further social connections that contributed to her well-being as a transgender woman. The friends made via the organization served as a significant support for the participant for more than one reason. Not only did the peers she met support and encourage her transition but they also found commonalities in their gender identification. In other words, the peers that supported Aimée could offer specific guidance based upon their personal experiences. Three of five participants met peers at organizations that served as a source of support well after their involvement with formal support services.

In summary, most participants had success in accessing organizations that cater to the queer community. Yet, it is still evident that there is more work to be done in the non-profit sector. Only one participant could not access organizations at all, and three others faced barriers in accessing formal support. When Alice was unable to access formal organizations, it was reflected in her

capacity to connect to a queer identity in a positive way. An absence of discussion, regarding identity in Alice's interview, represented a less pronounced connection to her identity as a bisexual woman. On the other hand, Aimée, who was able to access organizations expressed positive formations of identity throughout the entire interview. These findings suggest that access and involvement with formal support services afforded participants the capacity to move towards accepting and embracing a queer identity.

According to participants, formal support organizations served two important purposes. First, an introduction to the queer community helped to break down forces of heteronormativity through offering an understanding that there are many other people out there identifying as a queer. Whereas on the other hand, three participants met new people at the organizations that served as a central source of support for them in the future. Essentially, organizations offered a deeper understanding of a sexual minority status through a connection to the wider community, while simultaneously fostering social connections with peers that remain in place as a support system.

Essentially, participants have described their first interactions with a collective queer identity as a result of a successfully navigating towards formal supports. From this experience, Casey and Aimée have witnessed other queer individuals who express a strong internalization of a queer identity. Furthermore, Casey and Aimée have become empowered through this interaction to express their identity as one that is simultaneously connected to their sexuality and to a collective identity. Many of the participants met peers that served as a source of support during or following involvement in organizations. Organizations are one of the ways that queer individuals come to be connected to the larger community and thus connected to a wider range of support systems.

IV. Peers

When experiencing lack of support from family members, many participants successfully found guidance in other places. Nine out of ten participants explained that they go to friends for guidance specific to their sexuality. Alice, a twenty-one year old, bisexual female, explains how she couldn't turn to her parents and instead confided in her friends. "Ya know my friends are my only support. When I was a teen [I didn't] I could never talk to my parents about anything like that they would be [like] just go away." This excerpt demonstrates that when the participant could not approach her parents in times of distress, she ultimately found support and guidance from friends. The reason that queer identifying individuals' chose to confide in friends as frequently as they do, as opposed to family members, is perhaps because of this lack of support. Additionally, if support is received from family members it may not be sexuality specific and in turn would not efficiently address the social challenges that accompany identifying as queer. Despite not being able to access guidance from family members, the participants are able to navigate this barrier by receiving an excess of support from friends and peers.

Support received from peers was without a doubt most successful when it was perceived to be relevant to the situation, sexuality specific, or when the person providing guidance shared a collective identity with the individual seeking guidance:

> I would say if I had a real issue if I went to one of my gay friends they would [be] support 100% of it and would have my back no matter what. It's like having a friend forever. 'I know what you are going through were gonna stop this together' it's very supportive. (Clarence, 23, Gay, Male)

For Clarence, it was clear that receiving support from other people who also identify as queer was perceived to be most comforting. When he states 'it's like having a friend forever', it appears the

participant has a built in support system for times of distress. Additionally, 'were going to stop this together', further supports the argument that receiving sexuality specific support strengthens the quality of guidance received.

Four out of ten, almost half, of the participants explained how they carefully form a peer group that is accepting, or themselves identify as queer. Shadow explains how he surrounds himself by peers of similar genders, or sexualities and as a result has obtained a sense of normalcy.

> I think it's completely intuitive if you don't have those things you feel you are always the other and it's really easy and I find with a queer friend base it's very easy to always forget that the other world exists and you can have a sense of normalcy very opposite to you. It's like constant[ly] trying to model your world to this place you fit in.
> (Shadow, 29, Transgender Male, Queer)

In this excerpt, the participant describes how he has essentially altered his social environment through constantly being surrounded by queer people and people who are supportive of non-normative genders and sexualities. This demonstrates not only that this participant has effectively navigated guidance but also that he has altered the larger social environment to eliminate the most frequent challenges associated with prejudice. The most frequent social challenges associated with identifying as queer are social isolation, verbal attacks and physical attacks (Mishna, Newman, Daly & Soloman, 2009; Walls, Kane & Wisneski, 2009 & Higa et al., 2012). This participant, along with three others, have located an optimal amount of support while also eliminating the presence of discrimination in the most frequented and immediate peer groups.

The data presented overwhelmingly showed that locating informal social support from friends and peers was by far the most common experience for queer individuals, with nine out of ten participants receiving significant guidance from their peers. Additional experiences emerged within the concept of support from peers, which suggest what forms of support are most helpful and how

positive identity is fostered within peer groups. Perhaps receiving support from friends is the most universal experience because of the frequency and intensity of the social interaction. In other words, peer groups are distinct from other social environments because they are the most common daily social relationships and share a group identity (whether it is sexual orientation, career choice, community membership or criminal engagement).

Additionally, the notion that queer individuals carefully navigate their peer groups, according to the social barriers that come with identifying as a sexual minority, has significant implications for personal levels of resiliency. The participants that have altered much of the social environment they inhabit have developed the ability to move beyond navigating formal resources to uphold their personal well-being within the most frequented social circles. These individuals have then moved towards eliminating the hostile social environment directly around them. Shadow and Clarence's experiences of navigating peer groups to access optimal support is directly related to surrounding themselves by other queer people which in turn demonstrates the strength they have found in experiencing a collective identity.

V. Constructions of identity

The final theme, identity, represents the outcome of successfully navigating social support and developing resiliency. The participants in this study demonstrated a positive identity construction that is strongly connected to identifying as queer. This positive construction of identity symbolizes a personal acceptance of a queer orientation. Furthermore, the acceptance of a queer identity represents the rejection of homophobic values in today's society. Essentially, the personal internalizations of identity that will be outlined in this section demonstrate that the participants have efficiently sustained their personal and social well-being.

Shadow explains how despite the challenges they have faced, as a result of identifying with the queer community, they would never want to change that experience.

> I find you can find strength in being 'other' and like there's this automatic community that isn't good or bad because of that otherness but I would never want to change. I feel like I don't want [to change] it is my identity and something I connect to really solidly. (Shadow, 29, Transgender Male, Gender Queer)

Shadow articulates that despite being a minority, he finds particular strength in identifying as queer. Shadow's connection to a queer identity is directly linked to the connections he shares with other queer people. This is articulated when he says 'there's this automatic community'. Shadow's journey through discovering his gender identity has been largely characterized by choosing to surround himself by other queer people, and being actively involved in formal organizations. Shadow has arrived at a positive identity construction through constantly being surrounded by other people who identify as queer or gender variant. Shadow has effectively overcome many of the barriers that accompany a queer identity and began to embrace his status as a sexual minority. Despite the odds, after relying heavily on peers' and members of the queer community, Shadow embraces and connects strongly to a queer identity.

Other participants expressed an identity construction that was central to combating homophobia and heteronormativity. This also represents a significant connection with a queer identity which is expressed in more subtle ways. Dylan articulates a complex identity construction that includes queer identity as a central component of the way he understands himself, while not wanting it to be a defining feature. Dylan finds his comfort in combating homophobia in a social justice context:

> I can't not be gay it's important that people know I'm gay because it configures how I understand the world. So that can never be forgotten but I don't want it to be remembered […] I accept that heterosexism and homophobia are problems and I want to do whatever I can in my complicated subtle ways […] (Dylan, 45, Homo-flexible, Male)

In this excerpt, Dylan first explains how identifying as gay is necessary for him because it articulates the way he understands the world, and in turn, his social and personal experiences. In contrast, Dylan does not want his sexuality to be a defining feature of his legacy. This notion emerges in rather complex ways for this participant. Because Dylan does not desire to be defined by his sexuality, yet identifying as gay is a central part of his identity, he combats the social norms that challenge non-normative expressions of gender and sexuality. This suggests that each participant is empowered via their queer identity in very different and multidimensional ways.

In the first section on discovery, it was clear that queer individuals faced boundaries in accessing their true identity because of the forces of heteronormativity. Throughout the stages of interacting with family, organizations, and peers it becomes evident that these supports aid queer people in facing challenges associated with a sexual minority status this further begs the question: How does navigating these supports foster a positive queer identity? The most frequented forms of support are received from peers, followed by organizations. The common characteristic shared by the most frequented social supports, organizations and peers, is a collective identity. Collective identity refers to a person's sense of belonging to a group and the idea that identity can transcend individual characteristics and become reflective of daily social interactions. Through accessing social support, similar to the 'seed of doubt' stage in the beginning, participants witness accounts of identity and find empowerment through others' positive queer identity. The idea here is that a person can find a positive sense of identity that goes beyond personal characteristics and is influenced by the groups from which social support is accessed.

This connection is best articulated by Chad when he describes the role their best friend had in navigating Chad's personal journey through formulating a queer identity:

All different friends and all different identities and all different attitudes to their identities. I mean well yeah [anon] has been the catalyst of people and I believe in getting as many people's opinions ideas as possible and [sic] would be the tipping point for me exploring life outside the binary. (Chad, 21, Gender Queer) *Chad identifies as gender queer and therefore prefers the pronoun them or they, which will be respected in the following discussion.

Chad explains in this excerpt how their best friend served as a catalyst for Chad's gender identity. At one point in the interview, Chad explains how his best friend has been the strongest source of support throughout their journey of arriving at a positive queer identity. This further demonstrates the link between social support and the influence those individuals' (those who are a resource for support) queer identity has on the participant's internalization of their personal queer identity. In summary, Chad displays resiliency in the numerous ways they navigate their social environments and as a result is ultimately influenced by positive queer identities that are interacted with through the places Chad accesses support. With this in mind, it becomes clear why Chad's greatest source of support, their best friend, has had such a profound impact on the ways they have developed a positive queer identity.

Discussion

There are a number of themes that emerged as a result of this study that are necessary in answering the original research question. To re-cap, the question proposed at the beginning of this study was; *"How can resiliency theory provide new perspectives that aid in understanding how informal and formal social support fosters a positive internalization of a queer identity?"* To answer this question, this study involved story-like accounts of queer individuals which started from the very beginning stages of discovering a non-normative gender or sexual orientation and continued throughout the journey of navigating social supports towards the outcome of developing a positive queer identity. The development of a positive queer identity is profoundly impacted by the social relationships that are navigated throughout the process of seeking support. Many of the participants experienced an outcome where they began to connect their sexual minority status to their personal

identity as a result of interacting with various sources of support. In the following discussion, I intend to outline four main themes. First, how each concept in the results connects intimately to form a narrative account. Secondly, how that narrative informs the ways in which social supports are available, accessible and the impact they have on the lives of queer people today. Thirdly, how previous research can be reflected and contrasted in this study. Last but not least, suggestions for future research.

Discovery

The first finding in this study was discovery. Discovery refers to the initial moment that an individual first suspects they identify as queer. The theme of discovery highlights the effects of heteronormativity. The individual must discover their orientation because most notions of sexuality are organized around heterosexuality, which limits exposure and understanding of alternative genders and sexualities. Being introduced to reflective accounts of queer people works to plant the initial 'seed of doubt' where an individual begins to question that they belong to a dominant sexuality or gender. In the same way that a seed will eventually bloom, witnessing an account of queer narratives propels the beginning stages of developing a queer identity. The initial discovery of membership to a sexual minority status is of utmost importance to the process of understanding the challenges and outcomes that come along with identifying as queer. Essentially, in order to begin the process of resilience through accessing and locating social supports the individual first must discover that they identify with the queer population. Simultaneously, the end result of a positive queer identity develops in very much the same way: queer individuals become influenced by the accounts of the people they have interacted with to access support.

Family

The first place that many queer people turn after discovering their sexual identity is towards immediate family members. This is often the first stage in declaring a queer identity socially, and in favourable situations to receive support as a result. Three common experiences emerged in this results section. First, the most universal experience for participants is that immediate family members were willing to accept their sexual orientation but did not offer support or resources. Although this experience is not ideal, gaining acceptance from family members does not present any further barriers to expressing a queer identity. By not challenging a sexual minority status family members are allowing the individual to focus their energy on navigating alternative social environments to sustain support.

Only one participant, Fantasia, experienced outright rejection of their sexual orientation from family members. The isolation she experienced as a result of her family's disapproval created tremendous barriers in sustaining social support and developing a strong sense of identity. Further, Fantasia experienced a lack of support from organizations and peers. Because Fantasia's interactions with organizations and peers is limited she doesn't express a positive identity that connects her to a collective queer identity. Although Fantasia expresses comfort with her sexuality, she does not connect her identity strongly to her status as a queer person. This finding suggests that the lack of support and social connections sustained throughout her journey as a queer person is reflected in the ways Fantasia expresses a disconnect from her membership as a sexual minority and her personal identity.

Other participants that did not find support from family members navigated alternative social environments to find resources. Specifically, when the participants could not access support from

family members they turned to organizations and peers. The ability to identify and access alternative support systems demonstrates a significant amount of agency to move beyond challenges that are associated with identifying as queer. Queer people display tremendous strength as they chose to move beyond failure and continue approaching alternative social environments to access social support. Moving towards organizations and away from family members is often the first step in accessing resources and navigating the process of developing a positive queer identity.

Organizations

After finding a lack of support from family members, queer individuals often detach from the home atmosphere and approach formal support organizations. Only one participant, Alice, was completely unable to access organizations and this was reflected in her disconnection to a queer identity. This suggests that some degree of formal interaction with the queer community works to foster positive connections of personal identity.

Another important experience that emerged within organizations is the way in which formal connections to other queer people breaks down barriers that are associated with a dominantly heterosexual society. Meeting and engaging with other queer people provided participants the tools to think critically about being their identity as a queer person. For one participant, Casey, becoming connected to formal organizations helped her understand that she is not alone in the challenges she faces as a result of identifying as a sexual minority.

Peers

The extent of support received from peers is without a doubt the most unexpected finding in this study. Previous research has asserted the exact opposite, stating that most prejudice and homophobia is received from peers (D'Augelli, 1992; DiFulvio, 2011; Higa et al., 2012; Kosciw,

Greytak & Diaz 2009; Poon & Saewyc, 2009; Mishna, Newman, Daly & Soloman, 2009; Walls, Kane & Wisneski, 2009 & Taylor et al., 2011). This is potentially because of the methods utilized when conducting research from a risk factor focus. The focus of previous literature has been on investigating victimization quantitatively (D'Augelli, 1992; Higa et al., 2012; Kosciw, Greytak & Diaz, 2009; Mishna, Newman, Daly & Soloman, 2009; Taylor et al, 2011). By employing a quantitative methodology, researchers would be unable to identify if this is a homogenous experience or if peers provide both guidance and discrimination, depending on the relationship. This indicates that more in-depth research is needed to investigate the relationships between peers and their queer counterparts. A research study asking specific open-ended questions about support and lack thereof, from peers is necessary. The narrative style employed in this study allowed the participants to speak to the experience that deemed most important. This suggests that support from peers perhaps outweighs discrimination from peers. It is apparent that there needs to be more research investigating informal sources of support in future research. In this study, participants relied heavily on informal sources of support and accessed formal organizations considerably less than anticipated.

Some of the participants met long-term friends and mentors through formal organizations. Aimée, fostered connections with peers met at an organization that served as a significant source of support for her well after her involvement in the organization ceased. The peers met had a significant impact of the way Aimée navigated the stages of her journey as a transgender woman, centrally because they shared a collective identification in their gender transitions. Like Aimée, her friends transitioned outside of their 20's. From this support system, Aimée became influenced by the accounts of her peers' positive identity development.

The most significant finding in this section was that the participants actively formed their peer groups with other queer people or with people who support non-normative genders and sexualities. This suggests that participants have negotiated and navigated their surrounding social atmosphere in order to optimize support and in an attempt to eliminate homophobia from their daily lives. Through this negotiation, the queer person is navigating the immediate social environment to locate support, however, this results in two additional process. First, the support received will be relevant which infers the guidance will be of greater value. Next, by choosing friends based upon personal values the peer group comes to share a collective identity. This creates a space where queer individuals become influenced by one another's collective queer identity, as a result of seeking support from each other.

While carefully forming a peer group represents the capacity and intention to connect to social support it simultaneously provides the queer person with access to relevant support. The theoretical framework for this study suggests that the more support is perceived to be relevant or specific to ones sexuality, the better the likelihood that support will have a lasting impact (Cohen, 2004 & Kwon, 2013). Therefore, peers are able to provide relevant support because of this notion of being 'chosen' by the individual who is seeking guidance. While interacting with like-minded peers provides support it also represents the larger process of developing and sustaining a positive queer identity. This process is accomplished largely through sharing a collective identity and as a result coming to internalize aspects of that group membership within an independent identity.

Identity

As a result of moving throughout these stages of accessing social support, the participants internalize positive constructions of queer identity. Many of the participants strongly embraced a

minority status and offered accounts of personal and social well-being. A glance back at the theoretical framework will inform why this is a central component of understanding the level of resiliency an individual retains. "The successful individual or family is the one that functions to a standard he, she or it sets in concert with others whose opinions are valued" (Ungar, 2010, p. 13). This ideology therefore infers that the level of success in developing resiliency is ultimately left up to the interpretations of the individual and those who they are surrounded by. This is a central reason that resiliency theory provides fresh perspectives when observing the process of developing a positive queer identity. The development of queer identity is reflectively shaped by the individual and the daily social relationships they retain.

In summary, resiliency is demonstrated by navigating numerous sources of social support. The most common and effective sources of support are organizations and peers. These social environments share one key element for participants: a collective identity. Collective identity refers to personal characteristics and belonging shared by a group. Similar to the 'seed of doubt' presented in the beginning, queer individuals witness accounts of positive queer identity as a result of navigating support. As a seed will eventually bloom, the queer individual becomes influenced by the collective identity and begins to internalize their own positive queer identity through a process of consistent interaction with social groups that share similarities in identification.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are similar to many of the boundaries that qualitative research presents. Most importantly, my position as a member of the queer community will no doubt affect this research to some degree. Throughout this project, I have aimed to reduce the effects of my positionality by being conscious of my membership to the community. This was accomplished by

employing a narrative interview style. During the interviews, I asked eight short questions and minimized my input. This ensured that my personal values would have less of an influence over the participants.

A second limitation to this research is that only five of ten participants were successfully recruited using the snowball sampling method. During interviews, I requested that participants offer me the contact information of anyone who would be interested in being involved in this study. Due to the time constraints of an undergraduate thesis, if I was unable to recruit additional participants within one week I would continue to recruit participants using a convenience technique. This was achieved by networking with current contacts in the queer community to recruit individuals that were interested in participating in this study. Furthermore, because of this sampling technique, I had pre-existing relationships with three of the participants. In these interviews, I was especially conscious to not use leading questions. An important part of conducting research, especially as a beginner, is that I understand and remain conscious of my position within the research.

Section 6:

Conclusion

Conclusion

When analyzing and discussing experiences in the queer community, heteronormativity and rigid social norms in today's society regarding sexual orientation and gender identity can simply not be displaced. A heteronormative environment creates barriers in the initial stage of discovering one's true sexuality and gender identity. It is only through social interactions and reflective accounts from queer individuals, which the 'seed of doubt' is planted eventually blooms, into the development of positive queer identity for other like-minded queer people. From the initial stage of discovery, to the outcome of a positive construction of identity queer individuals on a macro scale are actively working against these rigid social norms on a daily basis. It is without a doubt, that I conclude the participants involved in this study have embraced their identity, and by their mere presence in society, are continuously paving the way for more queer people to find profound strength in a collective queer identity.

One of the most compelling results revealed in this study is how the process of navigating social support leads participants towards a positive identity through a shared identity. This notion speaks volumes of the ways in which social relationships can contribute to the well-being of queer people. Additionally, the participants in this study displayed overwhelming levels of resiliency through creating supportive social spaces and avoiding hostile social environments. Essentially, participants in this study carefully sustained social connections with people who embrace queer identities, and by doing so, rejected hostile social environments (such as educational intuitions).

Last but not least, it is my intention that this thesis can expand the conversation on solution based initiatives within the queer community. As this is an undergraduate thesis, it is certainly limited in the ways in which it can become a part of the conversation around queer identity.

Nonetheless, it remains a reflective account of the narratives and realities of ten exceptional queer community members. It is my hope that this document can inspire others to think about the empowerment which can be found in collective queer experiences and the intimate social connections that create opportunities to find strength in a marginalized identity.

Section 7:

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Appendix I: *Recruitment Script*

Used via E-mail/Telephone

Hello!

My name is Kara Rooney and I'm doing undergraduate research for my Honours' Thesis in Sociology at Saint Mary's University. I would like to invite you to participate in my research. The purpose of my research is to understand how people of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning community in Halifax experience resiliency. The interview will only take one or two hours, and you can feel free to exclude anything you're not comfortable with talking about.

Location: Halifax Central Library, 5381 Spring Garden Road

Thanks for your time,

Kara Rooney

902-292-8513

Kara.l.rooney@gmail.com

Dr. Gene Barrett

902-420-5149

Gene.barrett@smu.ca

Saint Mary's Research Ethics board officer

902-420-5728

ethics@smu.ca

Appendix II: *Consent Form*

My name is Kara Rooney. I'm a student in sociology at Saint Mary's University conducting research into how lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ) individuals overcome challenges of prejudice. I want to understand how social interactions within family, peers, and educational institutions can be positive for the LGBTQ community. I will be interviewing about ten people that identify with the LGBTQ community in Halifax. This project is a part of my degree requirements for an undergraduate thesis in Sociology.

I would like to invite you to be a part of this study. The interviews will be conducted by myself, Kara Rooney, and will take about an hour of your time. Interviews will be recorded with your permission. As a valued member of the LGBTQ community, I would like to learn about any experiences, opinions or attitudes you have that you consider an important part of your sexual orientation. I will also request your assistance in finding other members of the LGBTQ community to interview.

A narrative style will be used during our interview. The defining feature of narrative interviews is that they allow participants to offer a story of their experience. More importantly, the story you tell me is completely framed by what you do and do not wish to include. This will minimize any potential emotional distress that could be done by asking questions about sensitive topics. If you struggle starting to tell me your story, I will offer questions like "tell me how you came out to family or friends" or "how did you experience being lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender or queer in High School".

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at Saint Mary's University. I would like to seek your signed consent as an agreement that the purpose and methods of the study, its benefits, how your information will be protected and, any potential risks that could result as a part your participation have been explained to you.

The benefits of your participation come from the information you can provide in terms of ways that the LGBTQ individuals overcome challenges. Much previous research has focused on negative experiences, and a discussion of the strengths of LGBTQ individuals could be beneficial. The potential risks to you for taking part in this research are minimal and relate to any emotional distress from discussing your experiences as someone who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning. I can offer four ways to minimize any potential risks;

1. **During the interview** you have a right to not disclose anything you do not feeling comfortable talking about, to decline my request to record the interview, to not answer questions asked. Additionally, you will be able to withdraw from this study up to a month after our interview.
2. **After the interview** any information you provide me with during the interview may be included in an Undergraduate Thesis. However, no identifying information will be included. Any data, recordings,

transcripts or notes will be kept in a locked office at Saint Mary's University. Only myself, and my thesis supervisor will have access to this information. The information will be deleted and disposed of in May 2015 when research is complete

3. **To ensure your identity remains anonymous** any research that is published will use pseudonyms for individual respondents. A pseudonym is name that is chosen at random to ensure your identity is not revealed. If you would like to, you can choose your own pseudonym.

4. In the case that you feel any emotional distress as a result of the interview, I will provide you a **pamphlet of well-respected resources in Halifax for the LGBTQ community**

If you are interested in my results, you can contact myself with the e-mail or telephone number provided, or the secretary of the Sociology and Criminology department at Saint Mary's.

Sincerely yours,

Kara Rooney, Undergraduate Thesis Student

Halifax, NS

Department of Sociology & Criminology

902-292-8513 – kara.l.rooney@gmail.com

Dr. Gene Barrett, Professor

Department of Sociology & Criminology

Halifax, NS

902-420-5149 – gene.barrett@smu.ca

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions or concerns about ethical matters, you may contact the chair of the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board at ethics@smu.ca or 902-420-5728

I understand what this study is and appreciate the risks and benefits. I have had time to think about this and have had the opportunity to voice any questions or concerns. I understand my participation is voluntary, I can end my participation at any time, or skip questions or subject I don't feel comfortable discussing.

Participant Signature: Date:

Appendix III: *Feedback Letter*

FEEDBACK LETTER
Enduring & Overcoming Challenges in the LGBTQ Community: A Qualitative Narrative Study
SMU REB File #15-102
Kara Rooney
Saint Mary's University
Department of Sociology
49 Sidney Crescent, 902-292-8513, kara.l.rooney@gmail.com

Supervisor: Dr. Gene Barrett
Department of Sociology
923 Robie Street, 902-420-5149, gene.barrett@smu.ca

November 19th 2014

Dear valued research participant,

I would like to thank you for your participation in this study.

As a reminder, the purpose of this study is to understand how members of the LGBTQ community face challenges of prejudice. The data collected during interviews will contribute to a better understanding of the positive factors of well-being and resiliency studies.

Please remember that any data pertaining to you as an individual participant will be kept confidential. Once all the data are collected and analyzed for this project, I plan on sharing this information with you. To do this, I will provide you various ways to contact me.

If you are interested in receiving more information regarding the results of this study, or if you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at either the phone number or email address listed at the bottom of the page.

If you would like a summary of the results, please let me know by providing me with your email address. When the study is completed, I will send it to you. The study will be completed by May 2015.

As with all Saint Mary's University projects involving human participants, this project was reviewed by the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns about ethical matters or would like to discuss your rights as a research participant, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at 902-420-5728 or ethics@smu.ca.

In the event that you experience any emotional distress as a result of this research, on the following page is an exhaustive list of support services for the LGBTQ community in Halifax. All resources except for the Youth Project are open and available to the public. The Youth Project serves young adults up until age 25.

Appendix IV: *Interview Questions*

1. In what year were you born?
2. Where were you born?
3. Where did you grow up?
4. What is your guardians' occupation or means of income?
5. What is your occupation or means of income?
6. If applicable, do you actively practice any religion or spirituality? Yes/no
a. Yes – Which religion do you practice?
7. What gender do you identify with? Please feel free to include your preferred gender. This may include gender neutral or your preferred term.
8. What sexual orientation do you identify with? *As stated above, feel free to use your preferred term.*

1. Please describe your experiences of coming out? Probe: can you try and formulate a story of your coming out process, who are you out with, who are you not out with, is there anyone in your life you felt it was most important to come out to, can you tell how you happened to come out when you did?

2. Have you ever developed a close relationship with someone that offered you guidance, specific to your sexual orientation? If so, how did that support impact your experiences in the coming out process? Probe: this could be a friend, relative, teacher or organization, anyone that may have offered support in times of confusion or distress / have you ever developed a relationship with somebody because of shared experiences based on your sexual identity

    YES NO

3. Do you depend on friends for support specific to your sexuality or relationships? If so, can you describe a situation in which you would turn to your friends for that guidance? Probe: Please feel free to include any situations you would turn to your friends for guidance in any situation / This situation or friend of yours does not have to be current you can include past situations that may have had a lasting impact

    YES   NO

4. Have relationships with your friends ever been impacted by your sexual preferences? If yes, can you explain how your sexual preference has had an effect on your relationships? Probe: have you perceived that effect to be positive, negative or neither / any there are situations or experiences that come to mind? / Have you ever developed a stronger or weaker relationship with a friend based on your sexuality?

    YES   NO

5. Do you depend on family members for support specific to your sexuality or relationships? If yes, can you describe a situation where you have went to relatives for that guidance. Probe: if you're having a hard time thinking of a situation like this feel free to include family friends or distant relatives / if you're still having a hard time recalling a situation like this feel free to include past or current events

   YES   NO

6. Have relationships with family members ever been impacted by your sexual preferences? If yes, can you explain how your sexual preference has had an effect on your relationships? Probe: have you perceived that effect to be positive, negative or neither / any there are situations or experiences that come to mind? / Have you ever developed a stronger or weaker relationship with a friend based on your sexuality?

   YES   NO

7. Have you been involved in organizations that cater to the LGBTQ community? (To clarify offer examples: GSA's, Youth project, SMUQ etc.) If so, please expand on your experiences? Probe: What did you take away from that experience? / Did you make any long term friends or partners there? / If you have not been involved in any organizations, is there a particular reason why, not?

   YES   NO

8. Are there any other experiences you would like to share with me that I haven't asked about? Probe: What advice would you offer to someone who is beginning the coming out process or has just discovered they are lesbian, gay, and bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning?

Appendix V: *Ethics Approval*

SAINT MARY'S UNIVERSITY SINCE 1802 | RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD
One University. One World. Yours.

Department Office
T 902.420.5728
F 902.496.8772
E ethics@smu.ca

Certificate of Ethical Acceptability for Research Involving Humans

This is to certify that the Research Ethics Board has examined the research proposal:

SMU REB File Number:	15-102
Title of Research Project:	Enduring and Overcoming Challenges in the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Queer Questioning) Community: A Qualitative Narrative Study.
Faculty, Department:	Arts, Sociology and Criminology
Faculty Supervisor:	Dr. Gene Berret
Student Investigator:	Kara Rooney

and concludes that in all respects the proposed project meets appropriate standards of ethical acceptability and is in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2) and Saint Mary's University relevant policies.

Approval Period: December 16, 2014 – December 16, 2015*

Continuing Review Reporting Requirements

ADVERSE EVENT
Adverse Event Report: http://www.smu.ca/academic/reb/forms.html
Adverse events must be immediately reported (no later than 1 business day).
SMU REB Adverse Event Policy: http://www.smu.ca/academic/reb/policies.html

MODIFICATION
FORM 2: http://www.smu.ca/academic/reb/forms.html
Research ethics approval must be requested and obtained prior to implementing any changes or additions to the initial submission, consent form/script or supporting documents.

YEARLY RENEWAL*
FORM 3: http://www.smu.ca/academic/reb/forms.html
Research ethics approval is granted for **one year only**. If the research continues, researchers can request an extension one month before ethics approval expires.
FORM 4: http://www.smu.ca/academic/reb/forms.html
Research ethics approval for course projects is granted for **one year only**. If the course project is continuing, instructors can request an extension one month before ethics approval expires.

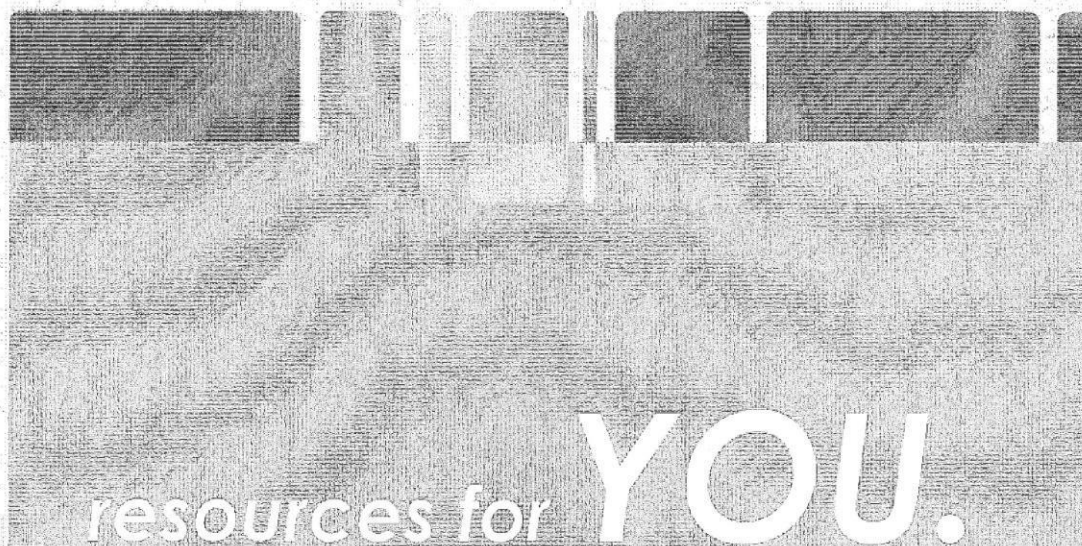**CLOSURE**
FORM 5: http://www.smu.ca/academic/reb/forms.html
The completion of the research must be reported and the master file for the research project will be closed.

*Please note that if your research approval expires, no activity on the project is permitted until research ethics approval is renewed. Failure to hold a valid SMU REB Certificate of Ethical Acceptability or Continuation may result in the delay, suspension or loss of funding as required by the federal granting Councils.

On behalf of the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board, I wish you success in your research.

Dr. Jim Cameron
Chair, Research Ethics Board, Saint Mary's University

923 Robie Street • Halifax • Nova Scotia B3H 3C3 • Canada • www.smu.ca • www.smu.ca/acedemic/reb/

Appendix VI: *Resources for Participants*

resources for YOU.

YOUTH PROJECT
The youth project holds weekly events for young adults under 25. There is also a food bank and nurse on site.
902-429-5429
youthproject@youthproject.ns.ca

HALIFAX SEXUAL HEALTH CENTRE
An open and inclusive health centre.
455-9656

GLBT National Help Centre
Provides peer counselling via internet or telephone. Available 24/7.
1-888-843-4564
http://www.glbtnationalhelpcenter.org

dalOUT
An award winning LGBTQ resource in Halifax, available to the public. dalOUT prides themselves on hosting fun and engaging events.
dalout@dal.ca
www.dalout.ca

SMUQ
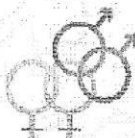A student driven society that provides positive support and education resources to the SMU, and larger, community.
info@smuq.ca
www.smuq.ca

MOUNT PRIDE
Events that Mount Pride will focus on in the next year include sexuality awareness, guest speakers, social events and more.
mountpride@mountstudents.ca

All resources are free of charge and available to the entire community. Specifically, you do not have to be a student to be involved in dalOUT, SMUQ or Mount Pride.