AN INVESTIGATION OF ANTI-LGBT HATE CRIME VICTIMIZATION, NARRATIVE PROCESSING, AND MENTAL HEALTH

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

Building on the large body of research that examines the prevalence and severity of anti-LGBT hate crimes, researchers have recently shifted their focus to the intervening cognitive-affective processes that may protect against or exacerbate negative mental health outcomes experienced by victims. The current study contributes to this burgeoning area of research by examining the relationship between narrative processing and mental health. Thirty LGBT participants provided narratives of their hate crime experience and completed measures of posttraumatic symptomology and depression. The narratives were coded for coherence, redemption, and meaning making. Quantitative analyses revealed an inverse correlation between narrative coherence and the severity of posttraumatic symptomology. Qualitative analyses exposed the diverse ways in which victims redeem and find meaning in hate crime events. The significance of these results is discussed within the context of psychotherapy with anti-LGBT hate crime victims.
Acknowledgements

For helping me to make the story of my thesis journey coherent, redemptive, and filled with positive lessons and insights, I thank Dr. J. Roy Gillis, Dr. Michel Ferrari, Dr. Susan Hopkirk, Nic Weststrate, and my parents.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Criminal offences motivated by bias, prejudice, or hate against a victim’s sexual orientation or gender identity are considered hate crimes in North America (Criminal Code, 1995, s 718.2; Criminal Code, 2004, s 318-320; Hate Crimes Sentencing Enhancement Act, 1994; Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crime Prevention Act, 2009). Although federal statutes provide lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals a certain degree of protection and justice, anti-LGBT hate crimes continue to be a significant problem. Between 2008 and 2012, according to the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, anti-LGBT hate crimes were the third most prevalent type of hate crime in Canada (Allen, 2014; Allen & Boyce, 2013; Dauvergne, 2010; Dauvergne & Brennan, 2011; Dowden & Brennan, 2012), accounting for 13% to 18% of the total hate crimes during this time period. Furthermore, these studies reported that anti-LGBT hate crimes consistently had the highest rate of violent offences causing bodily harm, compared to any other type of hate crime (65% to 75% of these anti-LGBT hate crimes were violent). Similarly in the United States, between 2008 and 2012, anti-LGBT hate crimes were the second most prevalent type of hate crime, accounting for 18% to 21% of the total hate crimes committed during this time period (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2013, 2012, 2011, 2010, 2009). Again, similar to the Canadian data, these studies reported that anti-LGBT hate crimes in the U.S. had the highest rate of violent offences that ranged from 65% - 75% of all anti-LGBT hate crimes committed during this time period.
**Hate Crime Victimization and Mental Health**

The impact of hate crime victimization on psychological functioning is severe. The frequency of anti-LGBT experiences is positively correlated with the number of posttraumatic stress symptoms (D’Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002; Dragowski, Halkitis, Grossman, & D’Augelli 2011; Szymanski & Balsam, 2011), depressive symptoms (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, & Azrael, 2009; Lewis, Derlega, Griffin, & Krowinski, 2003), suicidal thoughts (Almeida et al., 2014; D’Augelli et al., 2002; Huebner, Rebchook, Kegeles, 2004; Mereish, O’Cleirigh, & Bradford, 2014), suicide attempts (House, Van Horn, Coppeans, & Stepleman, 2011; Mereish et al., 2014), and general psychological distress symptoms (Chae & Ayala, 2010; D’Augelli et al., 2002; Mays & Cochran, 2001; Szymanski, 2009; Szymanski & Gupta, 2009; Szymanski & Henrichs–Beck, 2014; Szymanski & Meyer, 2008)

Quasi-experimental studies that compare individuals who have and who have not experienced anti-LGBT discrimination have found that victims of anti-LGBT hate crimes scored significantly higher on measures of traumatic stress symptoms (D’Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2006; Dillon, 2001; Hatzenbuehler & McLaughlin, 2014; Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 1999; Herek, Gillis, Cogan, & Glunt, 1997; Rose & Mechanic, 2002), depression (Dillon, 2001; Herek et al., 1997, 1999), suicidal ideation and suicide attempts (Duncan & Hatzenbuehler, 2014), and general psychological distress (D’Augelli et al., 2006; Dunbar, 2006).

While the relationship between anti-LGBT victimization and negative mental health is well documented, individual variation exists in the degree of posttraumatic symptomology. The question is, what accounts for this variation? Why are some
individuals more resilient to anti-LGBT hate crimes? What intervening psychological processes determine variation in the experience of posttraumatic symptomology? Researchers in the field are now beginning to focus their attention on intervening cognitive-affective processes that buffer negative mental health outcomes associated with such victimization. This line of research is important because it can ultimately inform intervention programs and policies that provide support to anti-LGBT hate crime victims. **The Role of Narrative Processing**

Researchers in the field of narrative psychology have proposed that a significant determinant of mental health in the wake of adversity is the manner in which the traumatic experience is remembered (e.g., Adler, 2012; Greenhoot, Sun, Bunnell, & Lindboe, 2013; Pals, 2006; Pals & McAdams, 2004; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999). From this viewpoint, autobiographical memories of traumatic experiences are not merely replications of an event, but rather, they are narrative reconstructions of the experience that reflect, and possibly determine, psychological adjustment. This is consistent with the applied practice of narrative therapy (Angus & Greenberg, 2011; White & Epston, 1990), wherein a narrative therapist guides the client through re-storying problematic experiences in more psychologically adaptive ways, leading to improvements in mental health (e.g., Lieblich, McAdams, & Josselson, 2004; Lopes, Gonçalves, Machado, Sinai, Bento, & Salgado, 2014; Vromans & Schweitzer, 2011).

In general terms, the act of remembering and forming a story about a personally significant experience is called *narrative processing*. Narrative processing is multifaceted and can be decomposed into a number of structural, affective, and cognitive processes. Narrative psychologists examine autobiographical memories for individual
differences in narrative processing, and use this information to explain variation in psychological functioning. I propose that an examination of individual differences in the narrative processing of anti-LGBT hate crime events may further our understanding of the variation in the mental health outcomes associated with these events.

Before exploring this proposal further, I will first review research on narrative processing and mental health within the context of stressful, difficult, or traumatic experiences. This review is organized according to three significant narrative processes commonly studied in the field of narrative psychology, and each thought to affect psychological functioning: narrative coherence (structural process), redemptive sequencing (affective process), and meaning making (cognitive process).

**Narrative coherence.**

Simply put, *narrative coherence* is about whether the narrative makes sense to a storyteller’s audience (Baerger & McAdams, 1999; Bliss, McCabe, & Miranda, 1998; Habermas & de Silveira, 2008; Reese et al., 2011). In order for a story to be coherent, it must possess two basic structural properties. First, the narrator must orient the audience to the context of the story: Where does the story take place? When does it take place? Who are the main characters in the story? The second basic structural property required for coherence is a logical and causal sequence of events. Can the listener identify which action took place at the beginning, middle, and end of the story? If not temporally organized, the story may appear jumbled, digressive, and ultimately, unintelligible.

Not only is incoherence a problem for the audience who is trying to follow the narrative, it may also reflect a deeper problem for the narrator him/herself. Incoherent narratives that are fragmented, disjointed, and unrefined may signal a lack of effort spent
making sense of, or psychologically processing, the traumatic experience. Indeed, researchers have found a positive association between narrative coherence in personal memories and positive well-being (Baerger & McAdams, 1999; Frattaroli, 2006; McAdams, 2006; Pennebaker, 1997; Reese et al., 2011). For example, Baerger and McAdams (1999) elicited a series of autobiographical memories about significant life events from 50 diverse adults, and reliably coded them for their degree of narrative coherence according to a standardized coding scheme. Baerger and McAdams observed significant correlations between narrative coherence and measures of satisfaction with life, happiness, and depression (inverse relationship), suggesting that coherence is predictive of positive well-being.

**Redemptive sequencing.**

A second, primarily affective mode of narrative processing is called redemptive sequencing. A narrator produces a redemptive story by assigning an emotionally positive ending to an initially negative, stressful, or traumatic event (McAdams & McLean, 2013; McAdams & Reynolds, 1999; McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001). The positive ending can take the form of an explicit expression of positive emotions (e.g., happiness, satisfaction, excitement, love, gratitude); seeing oneself in a new and positive way (e.g., growth, positive self-development); or positively resolving the event on which the story is based (e.g., healing or recovering from illness; gaining greater intimacy in a relationship; celebration of an achievement or victory).

The positive link between redemptive sequencing and psychological well-being has been well-established in the literature (Adler, Kissel, & McAdams, 2006; Jennings & McLean, 2013; King, Scollon, Ramsey, & Williams, 2000, Lilgendahl & McAdams,
2011; Lodi-Smith, Geise, Roberts, & Robins, 2009; Mansfield, McLean, & Lilgendahl, 2010; McAdams et al., 2001; McLean & Breen, 2009; McLean & Lilgendahl; 2008; Pals, 2006). For example, McAdams et al. (2001) coded autobiographical memories from 74 mid-life adults and 125 undergraduate students for redemption sequencing. Both groups of participants completed measures of well-being, including satisfaction with life, self-esteem, and depression. Those individuals who told redemptive stories scored higher on the measures of satisfaction with life and self-esteem, and lower on depression. In another study, Pals (2006) asked 83 mid-life women to provide a narrative of the “…most unstable, confusing, troubled, or discouraging time” (p.1088) in their life. The narratives ranged in topics, including difficulties in a marriage, financial hardships, loss of a job, physical or mental illness, and death of loved ones. Pals observed that women who expressed an enduring positive change from these difficult life experiences also exhibited higher scores on measures of life satisfaction and subjective physical health.

In summary, redemptive sequencing is a style of remembering that emphasizes the positive emotional transformation of a negative event over the long-term. Research has shown that individuals who are able to find a ‘silver lining’ in a negative life event are more likely to experience well-being in the wake of adversity than those who fail to interpret their experience in redemptive terms.

**Meaning making.**

Meaning making is an effortful self-reflective process wherein past life events are analyzed for deeper meaning and personal significance (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Meaning making can refer to any cognitive process through which an individual analyzes, evaluates, or interprets the significance of a life event and subsequently
integrates the meaning into his/her ongoing sense of self. Through the process of meaning making, a narrator may learn a concrete lesson that can direct future behaviour or develop a transformational insight about him/herself, others, or the world. Of course, not everyone spontaneously engages in meaning making activity, and not everyone who does will arrive at a new meaning. As such, individuals differ in their proclivity to make meaning and the success with which they do so.

Results from research on the relationship between meaning making and well-being have been more equivocal than the direct relationships observed for narrative coherence and redemptive sequencing. While some studies have found that higher levels of meaning making predict positive well-being (Tavernier & Willoughby, 2012) and psychological maturity (McLean & Pratt, 2006), other studies have found no significant correlation between meaning making and positive functioning (Chen, McAnally, Wang, & Reese, 2012; McLean & Breen, 2009). Other studies have found meaning making to be inversely related to well-being, at least in the context of adolescence (McLean, Breen, & Fournier, 2010; Sales, Merill, & Fivush, 2013). While the relationship between meaning making and mental health appears to be quite complex, the potential benefits that can be derived from the search for meaning are plentiful and worth examining within the context of anti-LGBT hate crime events.

**The Current Study**

Building on the large body of research that examines the prevalence and severity of anti-LGBT hate crimes, researchers are now shifting their focus to the intervening cognitive-affective processes that may protect against or exacerbate negative mental health outcomes experienced by victims. The current study contributes to this
burgeoning area of research by examining the possibility that narrative processing in the context of anti-LGBT hate crime events is related to mental health. Specifically, I will examine the association between narrative coherence (structural), redemptive sequencing (affective), and meaning making (cognitive) and mental health. To my knowledge, no empirical study has examined whether narrative processing is associated with mental health among victims of anti-LGBT hate crimes (cf. Willis, 2008). Drawing upon adjacent research that examines narrative processing within the context of stressful or traumatic life events with other populations, I propose the following three hypotheses:

- **Hypothesis #1:** Narrative coherence in anti-LGBT hate crime event memories will be positively associated with positive mental health.
- **Hypothesis #2:** Redemptive sequencing will be positively associated with positive mental health.
- **Hypothesis #3:** Meaning making will be positively associated with positive mental health.

Given that this is the first study to examine narrative processing of anti-LGBT hate crime experiences, a qualitative examination of the content of the hate crime event memories would further illuminate the role of narrative processing, and perhaps help to explain quantitative discoveries between narrative processing and mental health. Taking a sequential mixed-methods approach (Morse, 1991), I will conduct an exploratory qualitative analysis of the narratives (McAdams, 2012), with the goal of identifying and describing the ways in which anti-LGBT hate crime victims redeem and find meaning in their hate crime experiences. Thus, my qualitative analysis is guided by the following two research questions:
• Research question #1: How do individuals redeem anti-LGBT hate crime events?
• Research question #2: What types of meaning do individuals find in anti-LGBT hate crime events?
Chapter 2

Method

Participants

Participants included 30 self-identified LGBT individuals (19 men and 11 women). Twenty-three participants identified as gay or lesbian, four participants identified as bisexual, and six identified as transgender (three participants identified as both transgender and gay/lesbian/bisexual). The average age of the sample was 37 years old and the majority identified as white/Caucasian (80%). They were recruited in 2001 through posters that advertised the study in venues and community spaces that were frequented by members of the LGBT community in Toronto, Ontario. To be eligible to participate, the participant must: (1) be at least 18 years old; (2) be able to read and understand English; (3) self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or two-spirited; and (4) have experienced an anti-LGBT hate crime within the past five years. Participants received $25 as compensation for their participation.

Procedure

The present study was part of a larger research project lead by Dr. Joseph Roy Gillis from the University of Toronto, which broadly examined the psychological consequences of hate crime victimization among LGBT adults. Participants completed an in-depth interview (conducted by doctoral students) that was divided over two days. Participants also completed a questionnaire booklet that they took home with them between the two interview sessions. The second interview was conducted within a month of the first. At the beginning of the interview, the interviewer explained the study’s purpose, procedures, and obtained informed consent. The interview and questionnaire
booklet consisted of various measures related to participant demographics, anti-LGBT hate crime experiences, trauma history, LGBT identity, and mental health. Only those measures that are relevant to the present study are described here.

**Measures and Task**

**Posttraumatic symptomology.** The Modified PTSD Symptom Self-Report scale (MPSS-SR; Falsetti, Resnick, Resnick, & Kilpatrick, 1993) measures the frequency and severity of posttraumatic symptoms in the past month. This measure has 17 items, each of which are rated on a 4-point scale for frequency (0 = ‘Not at all’ and 3 = ‘Five or more time per week/very much/almost always’) and 5-point scale for severity (0 = ‘Not at all distressing’ and 5 = ‘Extremely distressing’). Total scores were calculated separately for frequency and severity by summing the items for each dimension. Cronbach’s alphas for this sample (.95 for frequency and .96 for severity) were comparable to those found by Falsetti et al. (1993).

**Depressive symptomology.** The Beck Depression Inventory – 1A (BDI-1A; Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979) is a 21-item self-report scale that measures the presence and severity of depressive symptoms over the past week. Each item describes a different symptom of depression and is rated on a 4-point scale (0 = absence of the symptom and 3 = a peak experience of the symptom). Cronbach’s alpha for this sample was .89, which is comparable to Beck & Steer’s (1984) alpha coefficient of .86.

**Anti-LGBT hate crime event memory task.** During the first session, each participant provided an anti-LGBT hate crime event memory within the context of an open-ended interview, which was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviewer read the following script to the participant:
Now I would like to ask you some questions about the hate crime you experienced. Please tell me what happened during this incident. Although many of the questions in this interview only involve short answer responses, this question now is designed for you to tell your story. Please take some time to recall and tell me about this incident. I will be recording this portion of our interview only. Tell me anything you think might help us to understand this experience.

**Narrative Coding**

I jointly conducted narrative coding with a senior doctoral student in developmental psychology. During coding, we were both blind to the participants’ scores on the posttraumatic symptomology and depression measures. We coded all 30 hate crime narratives for coherence, redemptive sequencing, and meaning making. To achieve reliability, we practiced coding on five randomly selected transcripts, agreeing on final scores by consensus. We then independently coded the remaining 25 transcripts, which we used to compute inter-rater reliability coefficients (reported below). All disagreements were resolved through discussion and final scores were assigned on a consensus basis.

**Narrative coherence.** Narratives were scored for contextual and chronological coherence using the *Narrative Coherence Coding Scheme* (NaCCS; Reese et al., 2011). Contextual coherence concerns how well the setting and main characters of the narrative are established. Narratives were scored on a scale from 0 to 3 based on the following scheme: A score of 0 was given if the participant did not provide any information about the time, location, or characters involved in the hate crime experience; a score of 1 was
given if the participant provided one of the contextual indicators (i.e., time, location, or characters); a score of 2 if the participant provided two of the contextual indicators; and finally, a score of 3 was assigned if the participant provided all 3 contextual indicators.

Chronological coherence captures the sequential flow and temporal organization of the events that took place. Similar to contextual coherence, narratives were scored on a scale from 0 to 3 based on the following scheme: A score of 0 was given if the narrative describes a list of events but with minimal or no information about the temporal order of the events; a score 1 indicated that a listener could only place less than 50% of the events on a timeline; a score of 2 was assigned if a listener could place 50% to 75% of the events on a timeline; and a score of 3 if a listener could place more than 75% of the events on a timeline.

Contextual and chronological coherence were highly intercorrelated, $r = .587, p = .001$. The two coherence scores were summed to create a global coherence index for each participant. Intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC) indicated that the coding reached an acceptable level of reliability for contextual coherence (ICC = .70), chronological coherence (ICC = .63), and the global coherence index (ICC = .68).

**Redemptive sequencing.** Redemption was coded using the manual called *Coding Narrative Accounts of Autobiographical Scenes for Redemption Sequences* (fourth revision) by McAdams & Reynolds (1999). Each transcript was given a score of 0 if redemption imagery was absent or a score of 1 if redemption imagery was present. In order to receive a score of 1, the participant must explicitly report a positive outcome after the hate crime. This positive outcome can be identified if the participant reports positive emotions (e.g., joy, satisfaction), positive cognitions (e.g., increased self-
understanding), and/or an outcome that would likely elicit positive emotions in most people (e.g., deepening of relationships with loved ones, reconciliation, victory, learning, healing). It is noteworthy that the redemptive outcome does not need to be of equal or greater valence to the hate crime. McAdams & Reynolds (1999) explain, “…a very dark cloud can still leave a faint silver lining” (p. 3). An example of a redemptive ending was as follows:

And the next day, I talked to some friends about [the hate crime assault] and they said you should call the police and file a report, so I did that. They came, I told them what happened, I gave them a description of the suspect. And they told me that if I ever saw the person again to call the sergeant and let them know where he was and they would come maybe and get him and pick him up. After that point, that was cool, I knew that it might not have led to anything but I guess it was maybe empowering for me to just do something instead of just sitting there and being a victim. It was kind of empowering for me to just file a report.

After describing a violent hate crime assault, the participant narrated an ending where he gained a sense of empowerment by filing a police report. This is psychologically significant given that the perpetrator was not brought to criminal justice, yet the participant described an emotional benefit to filing the report. In fact, another participant in the current study who experienced a similarly violent assault and also reported it to the police, narrated his experience in an emotionally neutral and matter-of-fact way: “The police came to see me to get the story straight and get exactly what had happened and the court dates were set.” Reliability for redemption coding was Kappa = .91.
Meaning making. Meaning making was coded using the Meaning Making Scoring System (revised version) by McLean & Pratt (2004). Each transcript was given a score of 0 to 3, with each level representing a qualitatively distinct and increasingly complex level of meaning. A score of 0 was assigned to those narratives where no meaning was made. These were purely descriptive, providing no evidence of analysis or interpretation of deeper meaning. A score of 1 was assigned to those narratives where a lesson was learned. Lessons are typically behavioural, specific, and limited to the situation in which the lesson was learned. Consider this example of a lesson, taken from the current dataset:

What I did was I avoided going along Gerrard Street when I came home on Saturday nights for a long time after [the hate crime]. I used another street over called Spruce Street and that’s like in the residential so I walked there. That’s more, that’s safer. It’s actually not a good idea to walk alone on Gerrard Street late at night, there are too many dealers and hookers and that. I do it from time to time now, but I probably shouldn’t do it. You just have the potential of meeting up with various types of people, undesirables.

The narrator has learned a specific lesson about safety, namely, that a certain area is to be avoided at night, but this lesson is purely behavioural and lacks generalizability beyond the specific situation in which it is learned.

A score of 2 represents vague meaning, in which the participant has undergone deep reflection on their experience and can sense a change has occurred in the way they view themselves, others, or the world; however, they are unable to articulate what that change is specifically (e.g., “This event had a significant impact on the person that I am...”.

...
today.”). They are on the cusp of developing an insight. A score of 3 represents an insight, where the participant realizes something new about him/herself, others, or the world. Insights are typically specific, profound, and generalizable to all situations. The following example is an insight about safety, which can be contrasted with the lesson described above:

I think it was, when I think about it, probably one of the most startling incidents for me because you live in the gay community, you expect that it’s somewhat safe, so it’s kind of a safe haven. And then you take it one step further and go beyond another threshold into safe space when you go into a women’s bar and you think, okay, this is even better, I mean it’s not just the gay community at large, I’m in a place where there’s just women. And then to have a straight man do that and actually have the nerve to grab my tits was just, it was like whoa, wake up time. Because every time something like that happens… you just sort of shake your head and it’s like you come out of your world and go, “Oh my god, there are still people out there who hate me, you know, they hate my guts.” And, or they see me as some kind of freak or whatever. And him going after a woman there was because we’re different. So he wanted to try a different approach. And it was just it was really insulting and it was just… just that feeling of security gone. It’s like, okay, there really is nowhere that’s 100% safe.”

In this example, the narrator makes a profound realization about the meaning of safety in her social world. She also gained a personal insight into how others perceive her (“There are still people out there who hate me”). In both cases, the narrator’s worldview has
evolved as a result of reflection on the event. Reliability for meaning making coding of our sample was ICC = .85.

An examination of the meaning making scores revealed that no participants reported vague meaning, only lessons and insights. Also, lessons and insights were relatively low in frequency. Thus, the meaning making variable was transformed into a dichotomous variable, representing the presence or absence of meaning (combining lessons and insights). This categorical approach is consistent with earlier work in the area of meaning making (see McLean & Thorne, 2003).

**Exploratory Thematic Analysis**

Following the quantitative analyses of redemptive sequencing and meaning making, an exploratory thematic analysis was conducted to examine the ways in which participants redeem and make meaning of hate crime events. Following the *life-narrative approach* outlined by McAdams (2012), integrative themes were inductively derived from concrete observations. Themes were extracted so as to exhaustively represent the ideas presented in the hate crime event memories (that is, themes were not extracted based on frequency of occurrence). This analytical process is similar to *grounded theory* (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), however, designed for work with autobiographical memories. The general goal was to identify, describe, and interpret the emergent themes. This study utilized a sequential mixed-methods design (Morse, 1991) since the quantitative analyses determined the subsequent qualitative analyses. That is, only those participants who were scored for redemptive sequencing and meaning making were qualitatively examined.
Chapter 3
Results and Discussion

Associations Among Coded Variables

A chi-square test of independence indicated that the meaning making and redemption variables were unrelated, $\chi^2 (1) = .106$, $p = .528$. Furthermore, there were no significant differences in global coherence across levels of meaning making $t (28) = -.831$, $p = .413$, and redemption variables, $t (28) = -.237$, $p = .815$. This suggests that narrative coherence, redemptive sequencing, and meaning making are empirically distinct constructs. Thus, separate analyses were conducted for each narrative variable.

Global Coherence and Mental Health

Global coherence had a mean score of 5.03 ($SD = 1.16$), suggesting that, on average, the hate crime event memories collected in this study were relatively coherent. As seen in Table 1 below, partial support was found for the first hypothesis. There was a significant inverse association between narrative coherence and the severity of posttraumatic symptomology, $r = -.45$, $p = .044$. Although the correlations were in the predicted direction for frequency of posttraumatic symptomology and depression, these relationships were not significant.

These results suggest that, at least within the context of the severity of posttraumatic symptoms, narrating a hate crime experience coherently is a strong indicator of positive mental health. After all, as Dimaggio (2006) succinctly pointed out:

A schizophrenic’s verbal mishmash, a dissociative abused individual’s fragmented story, the unstoppable flow of topics from an individual during a period of manic excitement, are not speech that helps the person speaking to
orient their action judiciously, and nor do they provide the listener with anything solid to build on in constructing shared meanings. Rather, they disorient, irritate, turn away, or overload a listener; they do not help in getting the latter’s cooperation. (p.105)

Therefore narratives that are coherent are more likely to facilitate adaptive functioning for victims of anti-LGBT hate crimes.
Table 1

*Correlations Among Mental Health Variables and Global Coherence Ratings of Hate

*Criminal Event Memories*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Mental Health Variable</th>
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<td>Frequency of PTSD symptoms (in the last month)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severity of PTSD symptoms (in the last month)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>-.45*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beck Depression Inventory</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* *p < .05*
Redemptive Sequencing and Mental Health

Quantitative analysis. Nine participants (30%) assigned a redemptive ending to their hate crime event memory (see Table 2 below). This proportion seems low, given the pressure to tell redemptive stories in North American culture (McAdams, 2006). It is possible that hate crime events are simply too traumatic to redeem for the average person.

Table 3 (below) presents means and standard deviations for the mental health measures, organized according to levels of the redemptive sequencing variable (i.e., redeemers and non-redeemers). While those individuals who engaged in redemptive sequencing experienced fewer and less severe posttraumatic symptoms (Figure 1) and less depression (Figure 2), independent samples t-tests revealed that these differences were not significant, failing to support the second hypothesis. Before concluding that redemption is unrelated to mental health, it is important to note the limitations associated with a small sample and lack of power to detect small effect sizes. With that said, the mean differences are suggestive, and support the general idea that positive emotional transformation facilitates well-being. Future research should explore this possibility further.
Table 2

*Frequency of Meaning Making and Redemptive Processing in Hate Crime Event*

**Memories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative Process Variable</th>
<th>Frequency ((N = 30))</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Redemptive Processing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No redemption</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redemption</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaning Making</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No meaning</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson learned</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vague meaning</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insight gained</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics for Mental Health Outcomes Across Levels of Meaning Making and Redemptive Processing*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mental Health Outcome</th>
<th>Meaning Making</th>
<th></th>
<th>Redemptive Processing</th>
<th></th>
<th>Full Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of PTSD symptoms</td>
<td>8.6 (10.42)</td>
<td>17.17 (12.67)</td>
<td>12.18 (12.54)</td>
<td>6.8 (5.54)</td>
<td>10.95 (11.44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severity of PTSD symptoms</td>
<td>15.47 (18.25)</td>
<td>24.60 (15.39)</td>
<td>19.50 (19.03)</td>
<td>10.75 (8.96)</td>
<td>17.75 (17.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beck depression inventory</td>
<td>11.88 (10.90)</td>
<td>10.63 (8.58)</td>
<td>12.80 (10.86)</td>
<td>7.29 (4.72)</td>
<td>11.37 (9.87)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Meaning includes references to both lessons and insights (i.e., all types of meaning).
Figure 1. PTSD Symptomology and Redemptive Processing

Mean Score on PTSD Scale

Frequency and Severity of PTSD Symptoms in Last Month

- Non-Redemptive
- Redemptive
Figure 2. Depression and Redemptive Processing

Mean Score on Beck Depression Inventory

- Non-Redemptive
- Redemptive
Qualitative analysis. An exploratory thematic analysis was conducted to examine the possible ways in which victims redeem hate crime events. The analysis revealed six redemptive themes, which were labelled: (1) justice, (2) generativity, (3) empowerment, (4) self-acceptance, (5) relationship gain, and (6) instrumental gain (brief definitions and narrative examples are provided in Table 4). The justice theme describes a narrative in which the victim gains a sense of satisfaction or relief through retribution from the legal system. The generativity theme describes a narrative where the victim demonstrates or develops concern for the welfare of other people and/or future generations as a result of the hate crime. The empowerment theme describes individuals who feel emboldened by exercising their personal agency and taking action in the situation. The self-acceptance theme refers to individuals who reach a deeper level of self-acceptance after the hate crime event is resolved, such as a deeper acceptance of his/her sexual orientation or gender identity. The relationship gain theme involved the participant expressing happiness and gratitude for the relationship(s) that he/she gained as a result of the hate crime. The final theme, instrumental gain, involved the participant ending his/her hate crime experience with a positive improvement in his/her living or work conditions.

These themes suggest that individuals have a diverse range of possibilities available to them in terms of how hate crime events can be redeemed. These themes are both self- and other-focused, and involve both psychological and instrumental gains. Notably, many participants included more than one theme when narrating the hate crime event. In general, these themes reflect gains in eudaimonic well-being, such as living a more meaningful or fulfilled life, rather than gains in hedonic well-being, such as
increases in pleasure or happiness (Ryan & Deci, 2001). This is consistent with the notion of the ‘hard road to the good life,’ whereby the experience of adversity leads to personal growth (e.g., King, 2001). With that said, most of the participants in this sample did not redeem their hate crime experience, suggesting that gains in eudaimonic well-being are the exception rather than the norm.
### Summary of Results from Exploratory Thematic Analysis of Redemptive Processing in Hate Crime Event Memories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Brief Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Justice</td>
<td>Individual gains a sense of satisfaction or relief through retribution, which usually involves the legal system.</td>
<td>“The police visited [the perpetrator’s] house on New Year’s Day, his mother was really upset. He was scared to death, I hear. He acknowledged that these things did happen. So I thought it was really important because if he attacks or does that to someone again, there’s already something on the record. There’s a pattern. So it also protects me.” (ID 29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Generativity</td>
<td>Individual demonstrates concern for the welfare of other people and/or future generations.</td>
<td>“I’m doing this for a good cause, if it helps to educate [the perpetrator] of homophobia, that’s why I’m sharing this with you.” (ID 22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Empowerment</td>
<td>Individual feels emboldened by</td>
<td>“After that point that was cool, I knew that it might not have led to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
exercising their personal agency and taking action in the situation. anything but I guess it was maybe empowering for me to just do something instead of just sitting there and being a victim. It was kind of empowering for me to just file a report…And so I was glad that I did that although I wasn’t expecting anything to happen about it.” (ID 09)

4. Self-acceptance
   Individual reaches a deeper level of self-acceptance after the hate crime event is resolved. “I am so comfortable with myself, [the abusive living situation] just made it so that it was so hard for me to come out and you know, come out of the closet and be who I wanted to be.” (ID 17)

5. Relationship gain
   Individual feels grateful for new relationships that developed as a result of the hate crime event. “Without her support I wouldn’t be alive today… So I’ve remained a very close friend with my tutor besides my house mother. So there are two nice women there, my house mother who is lesbian with her partner and also my tutor who is straight married living in a small community…” (ID 10)
6. Instrumental gain

Individual’s life or work conditions are improved as a result of the hate crime event.

“So from the investigation they offered me a full time job, then they had to pay me all back pays I would have lost like for full time hours because I should gotten that position, like retroactive and all that. But I didn’t want a full time job in security, and I was like absolutely not, you, you find me a different position…” (ID 14)
Meaning Making and Mental Health

**Quantitative analysis.** Twelve participants (40%) made meaning of their hate crime experience (see Table 2 above). Of these, six participants learned a lesson and six developed an insight. No participant in this sample demonstrated vague meaning making, indicating that all meanings are specific in nature. To test the third hypothesis, I combined those who made lessons and insights into one group, and compared their means with the rest of the sample (i.e., those who did not make any meaning; see Table 3 above). Independent samples t-tests revealed no significant differences between these groups for posttraumatic symptomology and depression. Again, due to the small sample size, it is possible that these analyses lacked adequate power to detect significant differences.

Examining the direction of the mean differences, it is interesting to note that those who made meaning actually reported more severe and more frequent posttraumatic symptoms than those who did not make meaning (see Figure 3). This would contradict the third hypothesis, which proposed that meaning making would be beneficial for mental health. However, as discussed above, the extant literature on meaning making and well-being is mixed, with some studies showing that meaning making is inversely related to psychological well-being (i.e., McLean et al., 2010; Sales et al., 2013). One explanation for the mixed results is the fact that the meaning making code does not assess whether the insight or lesson was positive or negative (only the depth and sophistication of self-reflection). Therefore, in addition to examining the specific types of meaning made in hate crime event memories, the qualitative analysis was conducted to also explore the valence and impact that the lesson or insight had on the participant.
Figure 3. PTSD Symptomology and Meaning Making

Mean Score on PTSD Scale

Frequency and Severity of PTSD Symptoms in Last Month
**Qualitative analysis.** An exploratory thematic analysis investigated the ways in which individuals made meaning of hate crime events. The goal of this analysis was to identify and describe the content of lessons and insights gained by the participants. This analysis revealed five themes: (1) safety, (2) positive self-understanding, (3) negative self-understanding, (4) event understanding, and (5) wisdom (brief definitions and narrative examples are provided in Table 5 below). The safety theme involved behavioural, avoidance-based strategies for staying safe, as well as more abstract realizations about the meaning of “safety” in spaces that were previously thought to be safe. The next two themes refer to a change in the way the participant sees him/herself as a result of the hate crime. The positive self-understanding theme was derived from narratives where the hate crime victim interpreted the event as leading to a positive self-development. In other words, the person grows through the adversity. In contrast, for the negative self-understanding theme, the event is interpreted as leading to a negative self-development—i.e., the person is damaged or spoiled by the event. The fourth theme, event understanding, applies to narratives where the participant gains greater understanding about the hate crime event itself, such as the motivations of the perpetrators and the circumstances that caused the hate crime to transpire. Finally, the wisdom theme describes a participant who gains new insight about how to cope with personal hardships and how to manage life.

Interestingly, all of the lessons learned and two of the insights concerned the theme of safety. Understandably, an event that involves a threat to safety is predominantly interpreted for how an individual might promote his/her safety in similar future situations. Despite having a protective function, lessons and insights about safety
were typically negative in their valence. They were often accompanied by increased feelings of paranoia, insecurity, cautiousness, and disillusionment. In some cases, participants discussed how their prior assumptions about safety were shattered.

The observation that negative meaning was more prevalent than positive meaning might explain why meaning makers exhibited higher levels of posttraumatic symptomology (see Figure 3), although this difference was non-significant. This warrants further study with a larger sample to verify if valence of meaning does indeed statistically moderate the effect of meaning making on mental health. The low prevalence of positive meaning may also suggest that it takes incredible effort to positively transform hate crime events in terms of the lessons and insights gained, and that people may require help in this endeavour. Yet, the few examples of positive meaning reveal that posttraumatic growth after an anti-LGBT hate crime event is possible. Future research should investigate those factors that scaffold such positive meaning.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Brief Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Safety</td>
<td>‘Safety lessons’ involve behavioural, typically avoidance-based, strategies for staying safe. ‘Safety insights’ are more abstract realizations about the meaning of “safety” in spaces that were previously thought to be safe.</td>
<td>“I walk, watch very carefully, and I try not to travel alone. And if I do leave a friend’s place late, I would never go down there unless it’s well lit. And I reach over my shoulder to make sure nobody is around. And if I hear of any, you know if somebody comes out of a car or whatever I will make a run for a building so you know they are not going to get out or go after me or whatever.” (ID 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Positive self-understanding</td>
<td>Individual interprets the event as leading to a positive self-development. The person grows through adversity.</td>
<td>“It really changed my life and afterwards I became so brave, I became very brave…” (ID 22)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. **Negative self-understanding**  
   Individual interprets the event is interpreted as leading to a negative self-development.  
   The person is damaged or spoiled by the event.  
   “The feeling I was left with afterwards was there was something dirty about me, something wrong about me.” (ID 02)

4. **Event understanding**  
   Reflection on the hate crime incident led to a deeper understanding of the specific situation, the people involved (e.g., motivations), or how the event that transpired.  
   “And I guess what happened with this incident after… was a moment of clarity. All of the harassment I had been going through on council wasn’t because, it was a moment of clarity in that it really illustrated or made clear to me that it wasn’t… about political differences, it was about discrimination.” (ID 29)

5. **Wisdom**  
   Individual gains insight into how to cope hardship and manage life.  
   “But I learned over the years, and I had a bad time over that experience, how to deal with life.” (ID 10)
Chapter 4

General Discussion

A large collection of research has documented the negative consequences of hate crimes on the mental health of victims. The goal of this study was to examine the relationship between narrative processing and mental health with respect to anti-LGBT hate crime events, based on the proposition that certain types of narrative processing may protect individuals against the psychologically harmful effects of hate crime victimization. Results indicated that narrative coherence is inversely related to the severity of posttraumatic symptomology. Producing a coherent narrative may facilitate positive mental health after experiencing an anti-LGBT hate crime. No significant relationships were found between redemptive sequencing, meaning making, and mental health; however, mean differences were suggestive. Those who engaged in redemptive sequencing reported more positive mental health, whereas the opposite was true for meaning making, although qualitative analyses suggest that this might be due to negatively valenced meanings.

The implications of this study concern the process of remembering and storying hate crimes, and specifically, the role that mental health professionals might play in guiding this process. As McAdams (1996) suggests, the goal of psychotherapy is to bring “the unstoried chaos of the unconscious…under conscious narrative control” (p.314). With knowledge about the most productive or adaptive ways of narrating hate crimes, psychotherapists can scaffold clients’ self-reflective processes. Specifically, it should be a goal of the therapist to help the client produce a coherent account of the hate crime event, as well as to assist the client in constructing a ‘silver lining’ to the story. If the
psychotherapist guides the client through a deeper meaning-based analysis of the hate crime episode, then they are advised to consider the valence of the meaning being made, as negative meanings may produce similar adverse effects to rumination (e.g., Trapnell & Campbell, 1999).

**Limitations**

A significant limitation of the current study concerns the small sample size. The quantitative analyses in this study lacked sufficient power. This may explain the lack of significant results associated with the redemptive sequencing and meaning making variables. As such, this study should be viewed as exploratory in nature, rather than conclusive. Inspection of the mean differences, however, justifies future research with a larger sample. It is entirely plausible that narrative processing at the level of redemptive sequencing and meaning making remains an important determinant of mental health.

The second limitation concerns the correlational design of the study. For instance, we cannot confidently determine whether it is the style of narrative processing that improves mental health or the reduction in mental health symptoms that allows one to engage in more productive forms of narrative processing (i.e., narratives that are coherent, redemptive, and contain positive meaning). This question could be resolved by conducting either longitudinal research or experimental research that involves assignment to various types of narrative therapy.

**Future Research**

The current project viewed narrative processing from an individual difference perspective. Narratives were scored for spontaneous references to redemption and meaning. One direction for future research is to specifically prompt the participant for
redemption and meaning. This would allow the researcher to examine the quality of narrative processing, such as complexity or elaboration, rather than simply presence or absence. It would be advisable to collect more than one traumatic memory from each participant in order to produce a more reliable estimate of participants’ narrative processing style. Collecting different types of traumatic memories would also allow the researcher to compare the narrative processing of anti-LGBT hate crimes to other traumatic events to see if these are unique in how they are processed.

In order to answer the question of causality, research should examine changes in narrative processing over the course of psychotherapy. It is possible that increases in redemption and meaning over time correspond with increases in positive mental health. Finally, an intervention study could assess the efficacy of narrative therapy in promoting positive mental health through therapeutic approaches that target various structural, affective, and cognitive processes.

Conclusion

The perpetration of hate against the LGBT community is a major societal concern. More research in this area is required to illuminate the adaptive ways through which victims can cope with anti-LGBT hate crimes. This study provided partial support for the importance of narrative processing in promoting positive mental health. Stories are ubiquitous in human lives. By harnessing the power of story, and the natural human tendency to story our experiences, we stand to gain significantly as individuals and as a society.
References


*An Act to amend the Criminal Code (sentencing) and other Acts in consequence thereof*, S.C. 1995, c. 22.


*Criminal Code* RSC 1995, c C-46 s 718.2


Hate Crimes Prevention Act, Public Law Number 111-84 (2009)


House, A. S., Van Horn, E., Coppeans, C., & Stepleman, L. M. (2011). Interpersonal trauma and discriminatory events as predictors of suicidal and nonsuicidal self-


