THEORIZING PATHWAYS TO RESILIENCE AMONG LGBTQ YOUTH:

A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work
University of Toronto

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Abstract

This three-paper dissertation seeks to advance the conceptual understanding of resilience among lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) youth. Interviews with service-providers (n = 16) and LGBTQ youth (n = 19) were conducted and analyzed, using Grounded Theory (GT) methodologies. The first paper conceptualizes how participants understand the construct of resilience and the associated concepts (i.e., adversity, positive adaptation). Three relevant categories are reported: (1) facing adversities across contexts, (2) growing up in the age of marriage equality, and (3) “doing well” while still in pain. Provided extensive adversities LGBTQ youth experience, participants endorsed a context-dependent understanding of “doing well” (e.g., “battling through”) rather than using normative criteria of health and wellbeing (e.g., absence of psychopathologies, presence of socially desirable outcomes). The second paper reports a substantive theory of resilience emerged in the GT study. The core category, paving pathways through the pain, suggests that youth build on their experiences of marginalization and the concomitant emotional pain to carve out personalized pathways to resilience. All youth employed the following five processes: (1) navigating safety across contexts, (2) asserting personal agency, (3) seeking and cultivating meaningful relationships, (4) un-silencing social identities, and (5) engaging in collective healing and action. While the degree of which and the
ways in which youth made use of these resilience processes varied, youth focused their attention
to the areas of their individual life circumstances that inflicted emotional pain and engaged more
deliberately in one or more of the resilience processes related to the origins of pain. In the third
paper, results of the GT study, along with other relevant literature, inform the application of a
social ecological framework of resilience in working with LGBTQ youth. This framework
conceptualizes that the role of social workers is to promote not only the internal capacity of
LGBTQ youth but also the capacity of their social ecologies to better support them. A youth case
is discussed to inform interventions across the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice.
Discussion sections for each paper and the dissertation conclusion summarize study results,
limitations, and implications for social work and further research.
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Just as my dissertation study revealed the centrality of social ecologies in one’s resilience, I can confidently say that I would not have been able to stand today with a Ph.D. without the incredible support I have received from many people.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction to the Dissertation

Social work scholars over the last several decades have made significant contributions to knowledge development on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (or trans), and queer (LGBTQ) youth. Joyce Hunter (1987) was among the first social workers in the U.S. who prioritized the studies of gay and lesbian youth and called for attention to this “invisible population” (p. 299). Hunter (1987, 1990) made vulnerabilities of gay and lesbian youth known by uncovering their everyday experiences of interpersonal violence, biases and discrimination, and emotional suffering. In the late 1990s, Caitlin Ryan (Ryan & Futterman, 1998) published Lesbian and gay youth: Care and counseling, one of the first comprehensive textbooks on social work practice with gay and lesbian youth. One of the key contributions of this textbook lies in its inclusion of content on gay and lesbian youth of color and highlights their unique identity development processes. Ryan has since continued to expose service needs of gay and lesbian youth by researching the role of parents and families on their wellbeing (Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2009; Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010). In addition, Gary Mallon (1992, 1998) uncovered the unique challenges and barriers faced by LGBTQ youth in out-of-home care. In his studies on out-of-home-care LGBTQ youth and negative psychosocial outcomes, he advocated for equitable service provisions for this population. As an author of several textbooks on social work practice with LGBTQ youth, Mallon (2008, 2009, 2010) was among the first social work scholars who highlighted adversities and lived experiences of trans youth. In Canada, early work on LGBTQ youth came out of the efforts of service providers, rather than academia-based researchers. Similar to early academically-based scholarly work in the U.S., the research team of Central Toronto Youth Services (CTYS), a children’s mental health agency, published books and
articles in the late 1980s to the mid-1990s to raise the public awareness of the needs and challenges among LGBTQ youth in Canada. These community-based practitioners at CTYS addressed LGBTQ youths’ psychosocial vulnerabilities (Schneider, 1988), challenges and needs unique to working with LGBTQ youth in counseling (Schneider, 1988), addiction (Travers & Schneider, 1996), and out-of-home service programs (O’Brien, Travers, & Bell, 1993). Along with the early work of social work scholars from the U.S., these community-based researchers in Canada contributed to social workers’ awareness of the vulnerabilities and service needs among LGBTQ youth populations.

In Canada where this dissertation study was conducted, researchers from allied disciplines (e.g., psychology, public health) have since further expanded social workers’ knowledge base on the adversities of LGBTQ youth. Several recent large-scale studies have revealed that LGBTQ youth continue to experience social marginalization and exclusion despite the great advancement of legal rights (e.g., marriage equality) and protection (e.g., inclusion of sexual orientation and transgender identity in anti-discrimination policies) for Canadian LGBTQ people. Egale Canada (Taylor & Peter, 2011) conducted a national school-based survey \( n = 3700 \) and documented a high prevalence of harassment among lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) youth, such as verbal (42-55%), physical (10-21%), and sexual (33-42%) harassment. The prevalence of harassment was exponentially higher among trans youth: verbal (74%), physical (37%), and sexual harassment (49%). Furthermore, the majority of LGBTQ youth reported feeling unsafe in their schools (64.2%), while only 15.2% of their heterosexual counterparts reported the same. In the Trans PULSE project, the largest Ontario-based study to date on trans youth and adults \( n = 538 \), researchers have detailed the adversities experienced by trans youth and adults, including family rejection of their trans identities (Travers et al., 2012), experiences
of discrimination in employment (Bauer et al., 2011) and healthcare systems (Bauer et al., 2009). Most recently, the Canadian Trans Youth Health Survey (Veale et al., 2005), the first national study on Canadian trans youth \( n = 923 \), contributed to additional knowledge with data that were not reported in previous studies, such as a high prevalence of experiencing cyberbullying (44%), feeling unsafe in school washrooms (40%) and change rooms (44%), being forced to have sexual intercourse (23%), and experiencing discrimination for being trans (60-70%).

Although studies of risk\(^1\) have elevated public awareness and concerns about LGBTQ youth as a marginalized population (Russell, 2005), research solely focused on risk might not sufficiently provide solutions to the problems faced by LGBTQ youth. More recently, several prominent scholars on LGBTQ youth (Russell, 2005; Saewyc, 2011) have proposed a paradigm shift from studying risk only to also studying resilience, “the dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity\(^1\)” (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000, p.543). Resilience research offers a promising framework alternative to the deficit-focused discourse by recognizing that LGBTQ youth can also navigate adversities when the right resources are provided to them in meaningful ways. It is also has the potential to offer empirically informed prevention and intervention plans that might help mitigate risk and promote or sustain the wellbeing of LGBTQ youth.

The overall purpose of my dissertation is to advance social workers’ knowledge on LGBTQ youth and their resilience. I conducted a qualitative study titled *Theorizing Pathways to Resilience among LGBTQ Youth* in Toronto, Ontario, from December 2013 to September 2014.

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\(^1\) Although risk and adversity are often used interchangeably, this dissertation uses these terms differentially, as defined by Masten (2014). Risk refers to the “higher probability of a negative (undesired) outcome” (p. 308), while adversity refers to circumstances or experiences that might “threaten function, development, or survival of an individual or a system” (p. 307).
This three-paper dissertation reports the results and implications of the study to advance theoretically- and empirically-based knowledge on resilience of LGBTQ youth.

**Constructionism as Research Paradigm**

A research paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) is an overarching set of theoretical framework that guides the researcher’s overall ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (the nature of knowledge), and methodology (process of research). I employed constructionism as an overall research paradigm in this dissertation study. Originally introduced in Berger and Luckmann’s seminal book, *Social Construction of Reality*, in 1996, constructionism takes on an ontological view that there is no one, objective truth shared by all members of society. There are multiple versions of truth, and no one form of truth is better than the others. Epistemologically, a constructionist paradigm posits that knowledge does not exist as an independent entity. Rather, knowledge is *constructed* within the interaction between human beings (i.e., “knowers”) and their surrounding world and is hence contingent upon a historical and social context (Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 1985). Methodologically, constructionist (also known as social constructionist or constructivist) researchers extend their inquiries from how each individual mind creates realities to how such realities are constructed by a group of people who share similar historical and social forces. Constructionist researchers seek the collective consensus of “what is real, what is useful and what has meaning” (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011, p. 116) from the perspective of people who share a certain context or experience (e.g., community, social group). While the goal of constructionist research is to examine the studied phenomenon closely from “the inside” and interpret the data situated within the contexts of the study participants (Charmaz, 2011; Lincoln et al., 2011), researchers signal special attention to circumstances or constraints that already exist in people’s lives, and to how people collectively construct their realities under such
circumstances or constraints (Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 1985; Gergen & Gergen, 2007). Within a constructionist paradigm, findings are an outcome of the researchers’ reflexive interpretation of the participants’ lived experiences and represent partial and situated knowledge.

Social work scholars, such as Dean (1993), Laird (1994), and Witkin (2012), have written about the congruence between constructionism and social work. As constructionism highlights the significance of the historical, cultural and social contexts of realities and knowledge, social workers also seek to understand the clients’ functioning within the context of their social environments. Furthermore, social workers are historically committed to working with marginalized and oppressed client populations and seeking social justice and equity (Canadian Association of Social Workers [CASW], 2005; National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2008). In the same way constructionists question taken-for-granted knowledge and honor multiple realities, social workers listen to the marginalized clients’ version of reality and voices that may not always be represented in larger society. Social workers also challenge the social systems that favor the voices and realities of the dominant group and advocate for the legitimacy of voices among the marginalized.

Despite the overarching principles discussed above, a constructionist paradigm encompasses a number of considerably varying philosophical positions held by “constructionist” scholars (Harris, 2010). Lupton (1999) and Harris (2010) suggest that constructionism sits within the spectrum of two competing versions: interpretive (also called strong or radical) constructionism and objective (also called weak or soft) constructionism. Generally, interpretive constructionists fully accept the key principles of constructionism and reject the existence of an objective reality altogether. They take on the philosophical stance that nothing is inherent; hence, everything is socially constructed. Interpretive constructionists consider human beings as
construction workers who assemble, build and manufacture meanings of everything. Interpretive
constructionists therefore inquire how human beings engage in social processes to create
meanings or assign meanings (i.e., how meanings become socially constructed). Objective
constructionists, on the other hand, take on a somewhat realist position by arguing that some
realities might exist independently from the observer. Objective constructionists study what (they
believe) already exists as real entities rather than meanings. They remain constructionist in a
sense that “something is socially constructed when a real phenomenon (as opposed to an
interpretation or meaning) derives its existence or its dimension from other social factors”
(Harris, 2010, p. 6). Objective constructionists hence study these “real” social phenomena by
examining how they are produced by the actions of human beings in the context of historical,
social and cultural forces that surround and often constrain them.

Overall, my position as a constructionist researcher is more aligned with that of objective
constructionism. In this dissertation study about resilience, I sought to study resilience as a “real”
phenomenon, rather than deconstructing resilience as a social construct or a discourse. Similarly,
in order to preserve the study focus on resilience, I did not interrogate each one of the constructs
involved in this study as socially constructed (e.g., being LGBTQ, youth, relationship, social
oppression). Provided that the ultimate goal of this dissertation about resilience was to inform
social work practice with LGBTQ youth, a more realist version of constructionism offered an
approach conducive to observing and explicating the ways in which LGBTQ youth might
navigate life challenges in an effort to achieve or sustain their wellbeing. I, however, maintained
the constructionist perspective that there is not a universal pathway to resilience that works for
all youth, and multiple pathways to resilience might exist contingent upon youths’ contexts. By
closely examining how the contexts of LGBTQ youth might be historically and socially
constructed differently from those of cisgender (i.e., non-transgender), heterosexual youth, I sought to uncover the “realities” or knowledge about resilience from the perspectives of youth and adults around them.

Researcher Reflexivity

The researcher is the main instrument in qualitative research. My own subjectivities and social locations inevitably influenced the ways in which I approached the study, and gathered and interpreted the data. To view the researcher’s role as the interpreter of the data, the researcher must develop a “reflexive stance” by interrogating his/her relationships to the topic, participants and research process (Charmaz, 2006; Mruck & Mey, 2007).

I am a clinical social worker who began working with LGBTQ youth 13 years ago in one of the only group home programs designed specifically for LGBTQ youth in New York City. My work with LGBTQ youth continued in outpatient counseling programs and a local LGBTQ youth community center in Seattle, Washington. Since I immigrated to Canada over four years ago, I have continued to engage in clinical practice with LGBTQ people in Toronto. Prior to returning to school as a Ph.D. student, I had the privilege to work with a number of LGBTQ youth who showed great capacity to not only survive but also thrive in their social environments, while experiencing a number of significant adversities. When I looked into academic literature, however, most of what was researched and written was about the risk and vulnerabilities of LGBTQ youth. The literature offered little empirical explanations for the phenomena of resilience I was seeing in my practice with LGBTQ youth. This dissertation study was born out of my desire to contribute to the literature and to the field of social work by studying how LGBTQ youth might navigate their experiences of adversity and find ways to maintain or achieve wellbeing.
I am a cisgender, self-identified gay man who spent most of my childhood and adolescence in rural Japan, left my family of origin, and moved to North America in my late teens. I experienced a sudden shift in my social locations when I crossed the physical and cultural “border,” from being a member of the dominant culture (i.e., being a Japanese male youth in Japan) to traversing both privileged (e.g., my male gender, middle-class status) and targeted positions (e.g., being racialized, living as an “out” gay man, citizenship status) in North America. As a professional social worker, I brought over a decade of clinical practice with LGBTQ youth into this research project. These personal, social, and professional positions placed me in a complex psychic “space between” (Breen, 2007) being an “insider” and an “outsider” (Kanuha, 2000; LaSala, 2003) to this study. Being reflexive is key to uncovering what my own unique locations occupying the “space between” might allow or prohibit myself to recognize during the research processes (Russell & Kelly, 2002). As suggested in the literature on reflexivity (e.g., Mruck & Mey, 2007; Tufford & Newman, 2012), I sought to take on a reflexive stance in all phases of the study (i.e., proposal, data collection, analysis, writing) by writing memos, attending peer debriefing, and consulting with my dissertation committee.

**Theorizing Pathways to Resilience among LGBTQ Youth Study**

The overall aim of this dissertation is to advance the conceptual understanding of resilience among LGBTQ youth. This three-paper dissertation used qualitative data from the *Theorizing Pathways to Resilience among LGBTQ Youth* study. This qualitative study utilized in-depth interviews with service providers ($n = 16$) and LGBTQ youth ($n = 19$). I conducted all of the interviews in Toronto from December 2013 to September 2014. The study employed Grounded Theory (GT) (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), a qualitative methodology conducive to studying a social phenomenon inductively from the
subjective perspectives of research participants (Charmaz, 2006). Given that resilience of LGBTQ youth is a relatively unexplored topic, there is a great need for producing data that are grounded in the lived experiences of this historically understudied, marginalized population.

There are several merits of employing GT in this study. First, GT offers systematic, yet flexible guidelines to qualitative data collection, analysis, and theoretical rendering. Since the 1960s, grounded theorists have rigorously developed and refined their coding and analytic devices. In fact, GT is said to be one of the most popular and rigorous qualitative research methodologies today (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Secondly, GT primarily deals with inductive approaches to text/transcript-based data (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Rather than developing a theory deductively from a priori assumptions, GT offers methodological approaches conducive to the purpose of my study, which is to theorize resilience of LGBTQ youth inductively through the participants’ lived experiences. Finally, GT is a methodology suitable for this study informed by a constructionist paradigm. This dissertation study followed Kathy Charmaz’ constructionist (or constructivist) version of GT (2006, 2008, 2011). Charmaz (2006, 2008) perceived both data and analysis as constructed within the relationship between the participants and researcher and held a constructionist standpoint that individual experiences are always situated within broader structural and social contexts. I closely followed Charmaz’s step-by-step GT guidelines for data collection and analysis to examine how LGBTQ youth navigate their everyday lives within their context, time, culture, and social locations (Charmaz, 2008, 2011).

**Aims of the Three-Paper Dissertation**

This dissertation aims to (1) explore the construct of resilience specific to LGBTQ youth, (2) theorize the pathways to resilience among LGBTQ youth, and (3) address implications for social work practice with LGBTQ youth. In the first paper (Chapter 2), *Extraordinary acts to*
‘show up’: Conceptualizing resilience of LGBTQ youth, I conceptualize the construct of resilience from the perspectives of LGBTQ youth and service providers. Specific research questions for this paper are: (1) What are the common adversities experienced by today’s LGBTQ youth?; (2) How do LGBTQ youth and adults around them define and understand positive adaptation (i.e., “doing well”) among LGBTQ youth? In the second paper (Chapter 3), Paving pathways through the pain: A grounded theory of resilience among LGBTQ youth, I report a grounded theory about resilience that offers insight into how LGBTQ youth navigate their way to wellbeing. Rather than studying discrete factors, this paper explores the resilience processes from the perspectives of LGBTQ youth and their service providers. Research questions in the second paper are: How do LGBTQ youth interact (e.g., negotiate with, resist against) with their social environments in an effort to navigate their experiences of adversities?; How do they access resources (e.g., intrapsychic, interpersonal, social/cultural, professional) in ways that promote or sustain their wellbeing? The third paper (Chapter 4), It takes a village: Applying a social ecological framework of resilience in working with LGBTQ youth, addresses social work practice informed by a resilience framework. In this paper, results of the GT study, along with other relevant literature, inform the relevance and application of a social ecological framework of resilience (Ungar, 2011, 2012) to social work practice with LGBTQ youth. Using a case study of a trans youth of color, I outline how social workers might engage the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice in an effort to mitigate risk or promote the wellbeing among LGBTQ youth.

This dissertation is grounded in the core values and principles of social work. Social workers are historically committed to working with socially and politically marginalized populations (CASW, 2005; NASW, 2008) from client/person-centered (Bogo, 2006), person-in-environment, (Germain & Gitterman, 1980), and strengths-based (Saleeby, 2006) principles.
Studying resilience inductively through the everyday, lived experience of LGBTQ youth enables me to maintain the person-centered approach of social work. By taking on the constructionist view that realities and knowledge, although partial, can only be attained within the local, historical and social contexts of LGBTQ youth, this dissertation embraces the person-in-environment principle. In light of the strengths-based principle of social work, this dissertation study seeks to promote a strength-focused discourse about LGBTQ youth alternative to the previous literature focusing primarily on risk and vulnerabilities of this population. Finally, social work is not only an academic, but also a professional discipline committed to producing “applied” knowledge. This study aims to offer theoretically and empirically informed implications for social work practice with LGBTQ youth. Specifically, I seek to build knowledge on how social workers could assist not only youth, but also their social environments in building greater capacity to promote the wellbeing of LGBTQ youth.
References


CHAPTER 2

Paper 1

Extraordinary Acts to “Show Up”:
Conceptualizing Resilience of LGBTQ Youth

Abstract

Sexual and gender diversity is an overlooked subject in resilience science. Given the empirical evidence on the hostile nature of social environments among lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) people, it is premature to assume that the findings from general youth resilience research can be uniformly transferred to LGBTQ youth. The purpose of this study is to advance the conceptualization of resilience among LGBTQ youth. Informed by social ecological theory of resilience, grounded theory analysis of interviews with service providers (n = 16) and LGBTQ youth (n = 19) yielded three categories related to the conceptualization of resilience: (1) facing adversities across contexts, (2) growing up in the age of marriage equality, and (3) “doing well” while still in pain. LGBTQ youth face both general and LGBTQ-specific adversities. LGBTQ youth, even those who live in a so-called “post-gay,” urban setting, remain challenged to navigate marginalization to maintain or achieve their wellbeing. Participants endorsed a context-dependent understanding of “doing well,” rather than using normative criteria of health and wellbeing (e.g., absence of psychopathologies, presence of socially desirable outcomes). While resilience is generally known as “ordinary magic,” this paper alternatively proposes that resilience is LGBTQ youths’ extraordinary acts to “show up” every day to battle through adversities.
Introduction and Literature Review

The examination of vulnerabilities and negative health outcomes has been the primary focus of research on lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans\(^1\), and queer (LGBTQ) youth. LGBTQ youth are more likely to report elevated rates of depressive symptoms (Clements-Nolle, Marx, & Katz, 2006), suicide risk (Haas et al., 2011; Pompili et al., 2014; Saewyc et al., 2007), and substance abuse (Goldbach, Tanner-Smith, Bagwell, & Dunlap, 2014) than youth in general. Savin-Williams (2005), a prominent developmental psychologist in the area of LGBTQ youth, was among the first to critique this deficit focus of the research and advocated for a paradigm shift to studying LGBTQ youth and their resilience, “positive adaptation in the context of risk or adversity” (Masten, 2014, p. 9). He further argued that youth today live in the “post-gay” era in which sexual diversity has gained public acceptance and reached the point where contemporary “gay adolescents have the same developmental concerns, assets, and liabilities as heterosexual adolescents” (p. 222). Similarly, Masten (2014) calls resilience an “ordinary magic” made of everyday assets and resources that are accessible to all youth. These claims raise the following important questions to advance resilience research on LGBTQ youth: Are today’s LGBTQ youth just like any other adolescents and impacted by their social environments in the same ways as their cisgender (i.e., non-transgender) heterosexual peers?; Should resilience of LGBTQ youth be conceptualized in the same way as that of cisgender heterosexual youth? This study sought to answer these questions and, in doing so, conceptualize resilience grounded in the social environments and lived experiences of LGBTQ youth.

\(^1\) Trans is an umbrella term to describe people whose gender does not correspond with the sex they were assigned at birth and/or its associated social expectations, such as transgender, transsexual, gender queer, and other gender non-conforming people.
Development of Resilience Science

Resilience science (Masten, 2014), theoretical and methodological approaches to studying resilience, has been developed and refined over the last five decades. Resilience researchers have employed diverse conceptual and methodological approaches (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009). Psychoanalytic researchers in the 1970s first examined youths’ internal quality of either being “invulnerable” or a “good coper with stress” as a form of resilience research (e.g., Anthony, 1974). Developmental psychopathologists in the 1980s and 1990s shifted the focus from solely studying one’s internal characteristics (e.g., personality) to examining contextual factors, such as the roles of family, school, and community (e.g., Garmezy, 1991). This was followed by a wave of research on positive youth development. An interdisciplinary team of researchers proposed the developmental assets model, which focuses on identifying and promoting internal and external factors that are correlated with positive psychosocial development among the general youth population (e.g., Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma 2006). Building on the previous three waves of youth resilience research, Ungar (2004, 2012) called for a social ecological and constructionist study of resilience. In his cross-cultural research (Ungar et al., 2007), Ungar suggested that trajectories to positive adaptation might not look the same for all youth across socio-cultural contexts. Instead, he proposed that researchers study resilience from the perspective of youths’ culture and social context (Ungar, 2011, 2012).

Integrating a Resilience Framework in Research on LGBTQ Youth

The research focus on risk and vulnerabilities among LGBTQ youth successfully promoted the public awareness of the needs for service and policy provision (Russell, 2005). The last decade of research on LGBTQ youth has seen a gradual expansion from its focus on the deficits to the assets and resources associated with resilience. This burgeoning area of research
has focused predominantly on lesbian, gay, and/or bisexual (LGB) youth, while only a few studies have included trans youth samples. Overall, these studies suggest that there are both similarities (i.e., common factors) and differences (i.e., unique factors) in the ways in which LGBTQ youth and their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts engage in the resilience processes. Several common protective or promotive factors (herein “resilience resources”) were identified, such as knowing a caring teacher (Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006; Konishi & Saewyc, 2014), family and school connectedness (Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006; Konishi & Saewyc, 2014; Saewyc et al., 2009), and involvement in extracurricular activities (Poon, Saewyc, & Chen, 2011) for LGB youth, as well as school connectedness (Veale et al., 2015), social (Grossman, D’Augelli, & Frank, 2011), peer (Veale et al., 2015) and parental support (Simons, Schrager, Clark, Belzer, & Olson, 2013; Veale et al., 2015) for trans youth. Furthermore, while LGB youth reported significantly lower levels of these common resilience resources than their heterosexual peers (Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006; Saewyc et al., 2009), some common resilience resources such as religion (Rew & Wong, 2006) might not work in the same way for LGB youth as they do for heterosexual youth (Gattis, Woodford, & Han, 2014; Rostosky, Danner, & Riggle, 2007). Researchers have also identified several unique resilience resources among LGBTQ youth. These resources include friendship with other LGB peers (Ueno, 2005) and peer acceptance of homosexuality (Mustanski, Newcomb, & Garofalo, 2011) for LGB youth, while family acceptance of youths’ LGBTQ identities (Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010; Travers et al., 2012) and the offering of school-based LGBTQ support groups (Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Hatzenbuehler, Birkett, Van Wagenen, & Meyer, 2014; Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012) were identified as resilience resources for both LGB and trans youth.
A critical review of resilience studies on LGBTQ youth points to a need for further conceptualization of key research constructs. Resilience science requires the presence of both (1) significant adversity and (2) positive adaptation (i.e., “doing well”) among its study samples (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). In general resilience science, significant adversity is conceptualized as a situation or condition posed on and shared by a certain group of children that can exacerbate the risk for negative psychosocial outcomes, such as living in poverty or living with parental mental illness (e.g., Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984; Werner & Smith, 1982). Most of the resilience studies on LGBTQ youth, however, did not explicate what adversities their study participants commonly experienced. Although there are some notable exceptions, such as those who defined adversity as experiences of stress (Doty, Willoughby, Lindahl, & Malik, 2012) or victimization (Konishi & Saewye, 2014; Mustanski et al., 2011; Poon et al., 2011) due to being LGB, and bias-based prejudice and stress shared by trans youth of color (Singh, 2012), this relative absence of the conceptualization of adversity in past research is noteworthy and might reflect and potentially reinforce the public assumption that being LGBTQ in itself automatically poses vulnerabilities to youth. Furthermore, although World Health Organization (2006) now defines health rather broadly and holistically as “a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease” (p. 1), there remains a limitation in how health and wellbeing of LGBTQ youth are operationalized in research. In using mostly population-based, quantitative datasets, past research has operationalized positive adaptation of LGBTQ youth as either the absence of psychopathologies (e.g., self-injury in Longo, Walls, & Wisneski, 2013) or the presence of socially desirable outcomes (e.g., academic success in Gastic & Johnon, 2009). Although these normative definitions of health and wellbeing might be just as important for LGBTQ youth as they are for cisgender heterosexual youth, these pre-determined
measures, normed ostensibly on cisgender heterosexual youth, might not sufficiently reflect how LGBTQ youth might view the notion of “doing well.” An empirically grounded, population- and context-specific understanding of adversity and positive adaptation is vital for advancing a resilience framework in the study of LGBTQ youth.

Study Purpose

Empirical evidence suggests that many youth experience bullying and violence (Taylor & Peter, 2011) as well as family rejection (Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2009) for being LGBTQ. Provided that LGBTQ youth might experience their social environments and everyday realities differently from their cisgender heterosexual peers, it might be premature to conclude that what we know about youth resilience in general can be transferred to LGBTQ youth in its entirety. In his social ecological framework of resilience, Ungar (2011, 2012) posits that resilience must be understood within a specific context, such as youths’ shared ethno-culture. What is considered as an adversity for youth in one context might not necessarily put youth in another context at risk. Similarly, what is a “healthy” or “positive” outcome in one context might not mean the same for those in another context. This theoretical framework demands that researchers closely examine the historical, social, cultural and political contexts of youth in conceptualizing the nature of adversity and how such an adversity threatens youths’ wellbeing. This social ecological framework (Ungar, 2011, 2012) theoretically informed this study to advance the conceptualization of resilience and its associated constructs (i.e., adversity and positive adaptation). Research questions for this study were: (1) What are the common adversities experienced by today’s LGBTQ youth?; and (2) How do LGBTQ youth and adults around them define and understand positive adaptation (i.e., “doing well”) among LGBTQ youth?
Method

This article draws from a larger grounded theory study of resilience processes among LGBTQ youth. More detailed descriptions of the larger study, including methodology and samples, can be found elsewhere (Chapter 3). The data related to the participants’ understanding of resilience and its related constructs (i.e., adversity, positive adaptation) were analyzed for this article. The University of Toronto Research Ethics Board approved all research materials.

Recruitment and Participants

First, service providers (SP) \( n = 16 \) were recruited for in-depth interviews through social and health service organizations serving LGBTQ youth. The inclusion criteria for SP were to (1) be older than the maximum age limit of youth served in their respective organizations, and (2) have worked with LGBTQ youth for at least three years (3) as either a paid professional (e.g., social worker, healthcare provider) or a community volunteer. Most SP were white \( n = 12 \), with the mean age of 44.5 (ranged from 25 to 69). All self-identified as LGBTQ (e.g., lesbians, gay men, trans men). Most were cisgender females \( n = 11 \), while 2 cisgender males, 2 trans males, and one gender queer (i.e., does not strictly identify as male or female) also participated.

This study employed a person-focused analysis (Masten, 2014), an in-depth examination of resilient youth and their social environments, and recruited youth who are considered as “resilient” from the standpoint of the local LGBTQ communities. Using the “nomination” strategy recommended by Ungar (Theron et al., 2011; Ungar et al., 2007), SP were asked to nominate youth who (1) self-identified as LGBTQ, (2) were ages 16 to 24, and (3) have experienced significant adversities and have managed to achieve or maintain wellbeing. Youth were also asked to nominate other “resilient” peers for the study. This resulted in 19 youth participants, with the mean age of 20.5 (ranged from 16 to 24). Youth used diverse LGBTQ
identities, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, queer, gender queer, two-spirited, and trans. Their gender identities were also diverse, including cisgender female \((n = 4)\), cisgender male \((n = 3)\), trans-female \((n = 1)\), trans-male \((n = 5)\), and gender queer \((n = 6)\). Their racial identities included: White \((n = 8)\), Asian \((n = 3)\), Black \((n = 2)\), and mixed-race, including of Aboriginal heritage \((n = 6)\). Although only 3 youth were born outside Canada, almost half of the youths \((n = 9)\) identified as children of immigrants.

Data Collection and Analysis

This author conducted all of the interviews with SP including three volunteers \((n = 16)\) and youth \((n = 19)\). Participants were asked to review the study information sheet (see Appendix A for SP, Appendix B for younger youth, and Appendix C for older youth) before they agreed to participate in the study by signing the consent form (see Appendix D for SP, Appendix E for younger youth, and Appendix F for older youth). Each participant also filled out a demographic information sheet (see Appendix G for SP and Appendix H for youth). Each interview lasted from 45 minutes to 2 hours, 2 minutes. No honoraria were offered to paid SP, while honoraria of a $20 gift card were offered to volunteer SP and youth. The interview questions that generated the data used for this article are summarized in Table 1.

Coding methods from grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) were employed for this analysis. After the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, transcribed data were imported to Dedoose, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software, for coding. During initial, line-by-line coding (Charmaz, 2006), the interview data were labeled with discrete codes for inductive analysis. In focused coding (Charmaz, 2006), which is the next, more conceptual level of coding, the data were organized based on which and how the initial codes would be grouped together to explain the larger data. While this process
resulted in eight categories, this article focuses on three of these categories and the associated sub-categories, which are directly related to the purpose of this article (i.e., conceptualization of resilience and its related constructs). Axial coding (Charmaz, 2006) was conducted to identify the relationships between the categories and sub-categories. Constant comparative methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) were used to highlight both similarities and differences within and across cases, while memo writing (Charmaz, 2006) allowed this author to conceptualize the data. Data source triangulation of comparing SP and youth data, audit trail of the data analysis processes, thick description of participants’ experiences and social environments, and consultation with the dissertation committee were used to enhance trustworthiness (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) of the study and its results.

Results

The following three categories emerged: (1) facing adversities across contexts, (2) growing up in the age of marriage equality, and (3) “doing well” while still in pain. These results offer insight into a myriad of adversities, the social, cultural, and political landscapes, and the criterion of positive adaptation to develop a conceptualization of resilience that accounts for the lived experiences and social environments of LGBTQ youth. SP excerpts will be identified by the letters “SP” followed by a number assigned to each participant (e.g., SP07), while the letter “Y” and a number will be used to identify youth excerpts (e.g., Y11). To protect the privacy of participants recruited from a small, marginalized subset of the general population, no specific demographic information about each participant is provided in this article. Contextual information is provided only when it is relevant and necessary for the explanations of the data.

Category 1: Facing Adversities across Contexts
Lived experiences of LGBTQ youth are in some ways very much like any other youth and in other ways are very much unique to being LGBTQ. The first category, facing adversities across contexts, signifies that LGBTQ youth experience both general and LGBTQ-specific adversities across time (current and earlier childhood) and physical contexts (homes, schools, communities). The following three emergent sub-categories will be reported in this section: (1) childhood experience, (2) family acceptance-rejection, and (3) social marginalization in schools and communities.

Sub-Category 1-1: Childhood Experience

Just like any other youth, LGBTQ youth in this study reported a range of early childhood experiences. Some had relatively easier upbringings and family relationships, while for others childhood consisted of poverty, abuse, family violence, and out-of-home care. For most youths, however, childhood was neither all positive nor all negative, and their life circumstances changed over time. While one youth recalled a “a really happy childhood” and “didn’t have…any abuse or hardship” as a young child, he then saw significant changes as a result of family immigration to Canada: “Suddenly when we came to Canada…[saw] our family struggling with money…our parents fighting” (Y09). Another youth lived under extreme poverty as a child: “My father worked at $14 an hour. We were broke and go on for months at a time not eating a lot besides rice. We moved around a lot as a child because we weren’t able to hold onto any of our homes” (Y14). The same youth, however, also fondly remembered his childhood because of the close family relationship, and his family connectedness remained critical for his continued positive outlook on life: “A lot of bad things happened to my family, but my family has always been a strong undercurrent.”

Sub-Category 1-2: Family Acceptance-Rejection
Youth participants suggested that their social environments and everyday realities diverge from youth in general when others perceived them as LGBTQ or youth acknowledged their own emerging LGBTQ identities. Youth reported varied family reactions to their LGBTQ identities, ranging from complete rejection to full acceptance. For some youth, families played a positive role in supporting their LGBTQ identities: “My sexuality…wasn’t really an issue. I was lucky” (Y15); “My parents were extremely progressive and they never genderized my toys and let me do, wear, or be whatever I wanted” (Y14). On the other end of the spectrum, one gay male youth reported a difficult family relationship since his “coming out”:

My dad’s first response was, ‘we should have never come to Canada’…[As] the oldest son, [my parents have] lots of high hopes. ‘We sacrificed our resources…so you can have a good future.’ [My parents] have the right to feel that I need to pay them back by a good job, family, kids and fulfilling social responsibilities. (Y02)

Family rejection of youths’ LGBTQ identities often occurs in the family through physical and/or emotional means, as the following SP shared: “Often youth either run away or are kicked out. Or ‘frozen out,’ where… youth felt like they had no choice but to leave because they couldn’t stay under the rules that the parents had set” (SP06). In fact, youth interviews revealed a range of ways family rejection of youths’ LGBTQ identities took place, from the silencing of the topic to verbal, physical and even sexual assault. While most youth experienced family rejection, some nonetheless chose to stay and face the difficulties with their families and others ended up leaving home. A close look at the youth data, however, did not reveal a clear-cut relationship between the type of family rejection outcomes (e.g., leaving home, staying connected) and youths’ self-reported current wellbeing. Further, family attitudes towards youths’ LGBTQ identities might
not remain constant. One 22-year-old youth who felt that there was no choice but to move out of home at age 17 when he came out as trans observed the changes in his family attitudes over time:

My father and I did not speak for about 4 years after I left. There were a couple of times when we tried to reconcile. But when he learned that I was planning on medically transitioning and…starting testosterone and a top surgery, we stopped talking again. But over the last year, he has apologized and wants to work things out. (Y10)

Sub-Category 1-3: Social Marginalization in Schools and Communities

Family acceptance-rejection does not occur in a vacuum; it resides within larger social contexts. Participants highlighted how pervasive anti-LGBTQ attitudes remain in schools and communities. Homophobia and transphobia were reported to take place in many forms (e.g., verbal, physical, sexual, cyber) and threaten youths’ safety in schools and communities: “In my grade 10 civics class, one kid [said], ‘if my brother was gay, I’d beat him up.’ But the teachers didn’t do anything about it” (Y01); “(I was) experiencing such hate from people online and I didn’t even feel safe going to school…I did not know who was saying this stuff” (Y03). Positive changes in the school climates were also reported. Most youth reported the presence of Gay-Straight Alliances in their high schools, which is known to be one of well-known resilience resources for LGBTQ youth (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2014). Some had teachers who interrupted anti-LGBTQ comments and behaviors in schools. Some who had difficulties in regular classrooms had successful experiences attending a classroom designed for LGBTQ students.

While homophobia remains pervasive and impacts many youth, the data revealed extensive prejudice, discrimination, and violence trans youth experienced on a daily basis. In fact, the initial code of “transphobia” appeared most frequently in the data. One SP who has worked extensively with trans youth used public bathrooms, which are generally divided into
two genders (male and female), as an example of how transphobia plays out and negatively impacts youth:

Public bathrooms are a source of fear… Not just for trans but for anyone (that) doesn’t fit the [binary gender] norms… If they’re seen as not fitting the [binary gender] norms, those bathrooms are a location of abuse, harassment and tremendous fear… Every time you need to take care of physical need, you have to risk facing danger. (SP12)

In fact, each of the 12 youth who did not identify as cisgender (e.g., trans, gender queer) emphasized safety concerns associated with the public bathroom use. Transphobia takes place across social institutions, including healthcare, housing, and employment sectors. One trans male who sought medical transitions recalled traumatizing experiences with a medical provider:

(I was) scrutinized… I was constantly fighting… just to prove that I identified as male though I had previously identified that way for years… I learned… that the medical system was not safe… it was help being disguised as help but it wasn’t actually helping me at all. It was actually making me feel worse about myself. (Y03)

Another trans youth with a university degree experienced employment-related discrimination: “My biggest barrier (is) finding a job… because this is where I experience the most discrimination… I don’t even get a job interview… unless it’s at a queer organization” (Y8).

In addition to experiencing LGBTQ-specific marginalization, youths’ other marginal social locations (e.g., being a person of color, being a newcomer) might impact their lives. Like the general youth population in Toronto (City of Toronto, 2013), LGBTQ youth come from diverse backgrounds of race/ethnicity, class, gender and other social locations. Canada is a new home for many LGBTQ youth who sought political asylum from their home countries that criminalize LGBTQ citizens (Lee & Brotman, 2011). A SP who works extensively with LGBTQ
youth who migrated to Canada on their own to seek physical and/or psychological safety offered insight into these youths’ complex experience of marginalization:

[For LGBTQ refugee youth] the immigration officer is probably the first person they come out to… And having to go through the process of proving that you’re queer or trans [to have their refugee claim approved] is quite stressful and difficult. And you come [to Canada] with a hope…that you can actually be yourself. You’re free now. But when you walk down the street and someone says something racist. And that’s really heartbreaking. (SP16)

Category 2: Growing Up in the Age of Marriage Equality

The second category, growing up in the age of marriage equality, reflects the social, cultural, and political landscapes of contemporary LGBTQ youth. SP participants, who have witnessed changes in such landscapes relevant to the lives of LGBTQ people over time, suggested that we have come a long way. LGBTQ youth today grew up and currently live in the age of marriage equality (also known as gay marriage), in which LGBTQ Canadians are now afforded full legal rights and protection on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identities. As Ontario legalized same-sex marriage over ten years ago (Woodford, Newman, Brotman, & Ryan, 2010) and included transgender identity in its human rights legislation in 2012 (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2014), there has been a marked shift in the social, cultural and political landscapes: “There (are) more available public images to look to… There is an openly lesbian Premier of the province… That’s huge…There are [LGBTQ] public figures. There are popular TV shows [about LGBTQ people]. The list gets longer each year” (SP01). SP also noted the ways in which such a landscape shift has influenced the LGBTQ youth service
provision: “The internet has given people more access [to resources]…There are more Gay-Straight Alliances…more awareness” (SP05);

Gay and lesbian kids struggling with coming out issues…We really don’t see that anymore…because in the community, society and culture at large, things have shifted in a much more positive and supportive way… [Youth] are better supported (in) schools, communities, families, (and) spiritual organizations…so they’re no longer needing [services for a coming out purpose]. (SP09)

These articulated cultural shifts, however, should be treated with caution. Both youth and SP nonetheless stressed the need for further social change. The absence of meaningful and relevant representations of LGBTQ people, for instance, reflects the continued marginalization of LGBTQ people, as articulated by the following SP:

There’s not so much imagery for LGBTQ youth to see themselves [reflected]. That really impacts their sense of identity and a core sense of self… Important developmental piece for youth…about looking to outside…peers, support systems, mentors, and social media…celebrities… Whatever it is they may look at and they don’t see themselves reflected in that…it is really challenging. (SP10)

Despite the increasing number of LGBTQ representations, what is available today continues to privilege certain demographics and fails to reflect the everyday realities of many LGBTQ youth. The same SP who emphasized the increase in the volume of LGBTQ representation also problematizes the available LGBTQ representations:

But then…look at that list…[We are seeing] predominantly white folks because (of) the role whiteness plays in being able to be ‘out.’ The [name of the school district] is 70% youth of color, representation (is) not sufficient to be of value to youth.” (SP01)
Finally, the absence of meaningful representations of trans people and its significance on their psychosocial wellbeing was especially stressed by many participants. As exemplified by the following youth, this is a serious adversity that directly impacts the wellbeing of trans youth:

The lead singer of one of my favorite punk bands came out as a trans woman and made an album about being trans. It was like ‘if I heard this as a child...how amazing would that have been?’... A year ago I saw a photo of an elderly trans guy...until then I (had) never seen an elderly trans person. The lack of images of people in their later ages... means you don’t have a future... We still have trans people being killed...but there’s no other image to challenge that... All I learned growing up was, ‘don’t be trans because you’ll die. (Y03)

Category 3: “Doing Well” While Still in Pain

The third category, “doing well” while still in pain, highlights the emotional pain deeply felt in the stories of youth participants. Even though these youth were nominated for their resilience and saw themselves to be relatively doing well, they emphasized their continued struggles with various psychosocial vulnerabilities, such as school absence, relationship difficulties, struggles with depression and anxiety, past suicide attempts, poverty and lack of stable housing. Although some youth named a “turning point” (e.g., leaving home, attending college) and its positive influence for their wellbeing as often reported in general youth resilience literature (e.g., Werner & Smith, 1982), a close data analysis confirmed that these turning points alone did not dramatically enhance youths’ wellbeing. While a turning point might have opened up more opportunities and contributed to positive changes among these resilient youth, youth nonetheless continued to experience adversities and battle through every day.
SP and youth both articulated the association between youths’ psychosocial vulnerabilities and their experiences of marginalization across families, schools, and/or communities that are “not going away tomorrow” (SP09). One lesbian youth, for instance, explained her mental health within the context of her experiences of marginalization: “My social anxiety is really affected by social norms (of) gender and sexuality and how I really felt like a misfit based on that…that ‘oh, I’m different than these people…I’m different and perceived as wrong and not as good” (Y01). This sentiment was corroborated by a queer woman of color: “It was the queer thing. It was the Muslim thing. It was the ‘not fitting in’… coming out and losing faith… It was so much going on that it just caused me to be really depressed” (Y6). While lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer youth are greatly impacted by homophobia, transphobia threatens the wellbeing of trans and gender non-conforming youth. The youth who experienced prejudice and discrimination within the healthcare system stressed how impactful transphobia can be on one’s sense of self: “[I learned that] trans is… bad… Any time someone thought I was trans, I said no…because being cis(gender) is safe and being trans is dangerous. I’m still unlearning that” (Y03). Other trans and gender non-conforming youth shed light on the accumulated impact on their wellbeing when one’s gender is not respected by others (i.e., “misgendering”): “[Being misgendered] is like a bee buzzing around your head. I had an entire day where someone kept referring to me as a girl… It got to the point… there were way too many bees around me and I broke down” (Y12); “Every time [teachers misgender me] I have to walk out of the classroom because I get really upset. I missed almost half my semester because I couldn't bring myself to go to class because I’m being consistently [misgendered]” (Y7).

SP and youth both endorsed a rather social constructionist understanding of “doing well.” Being resilient and LGBTQ means that youth continue to “show up every day” (SP01), “(being)
able to get out of bed” (SP10), and “having hope for the future” (SP05), knowing that they must continue to struggle to exist within their marginalized lived realities. One SP who works with trans youth further elaborated on this sentiment: “For [trans] youth I work with, just being able to get out there every day is ‘doing well.’ Just being able to navigate the world every day is doing well. And when I see them coming to the groups, that’s doing well because they are getting themselves out there” (SP16). Youth also rejected the normative definitions of positive adaptation such as the absence of psychopathologies and school success. As evidenced by the choice of phrases such as “still struggling” (Y08), “battling through” (Y12), “still fighting” (Y09), and “[having] your head above water” (Y15), youth underlined their experience of pain associated with courageously working through adversity. For one youth (Y07) who had used “cutting” as the primary coping skills for a long time, for instance, cutting sometimes comes back unexpectedly when anti-LGBTQ discriminations occur on a seemingly normal day. Another youth (Y05) stressed that “doing well” is not about eliminating stress, depression or anxiety but about knowing when support is needed and taking active steps to take care of the self. Similarly, while one youth prefaced that “it’s hard to see myself as resilient when you’re constantly fighting and constantly having to survive,” the importance of celebrating the act of “showing up” as extraordinary was emphasized: “I congratulate myself for going to school…and work(ing). When I look at others doing that, I would be like, ‘that’s awesome, that’s amazing! … But most of the time I still feel the weight of trauma” (Y03).

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The study findings suggest that LGBTQ youth might be impacted by their social environments both similarly to and differently from their cisgender heterosexual counterparts. The results corroborate the minority stress model (Meyer, 2003), which suggests that the stress
of living as a sexual and/or gender “minority” sets apart the everyday realities of LGBTQ youth from those of youth in general. Youth participants’ articulation of the plausible association between their individual-level vulnerabilities (e.g., mental health) and the stress associated with their marginal social locations suggests the need to conceptualize LGBTQ youths’ vulnerabilities as a structural issue rather than as an individual or identity problem. While the unit of analysis of homophobia/transphobia is the individual who discriminates against LGBTQ people, these terms do not fully account for the social structures that produce such individual- and interpersonal-level attitudes and behaviors. The concept of hetero- and cis-normativity (Bauer et al., 2009; Warner, 1993) might offer an alternative language to homophobia/transphobia and better account for the structural barriers to the wellbeing of LGBTQ youth. Hetero-cis-normativity signifies a social ideology that privileges and sustains heterosexuality, binary gender (i.e., only male or female), and its alignment with one’s biological sex as the norms (Bauer et al., 2009; Warner, 1993; Weiss, 2001). Because it is embedded in our everyday language and practices, hetero-cis-normativity can operate across many social institutions (e.g., schools, medicine) and perpetuate homophobic and transphobic bullying, violence, and discrimination (Bauer et al., 2009; Ward & Schneider, 2009). While basic legal rights and protection are now afforded and positive changes are observed in the contemporary landscapes of LGBTQ Canadians, the ongoing psychosocial struggles stressed by the youth participants also raise the question of to what extent we have actually reached the “post-gay” era (Savin-Williams, 2005). While legal rights and protection can certainly contribute to undoing the norms of hetero-cis-normativity, problematizing and challenging everyday language and practices that perpetuate such norms is warranted as we seek to envision and actualize an alternative discourse that truly embraces and celebrates sexual and gender diversity. The adoption of gender-neutral bathrooms is one very concrete example that
challenges our everyday hetero-cis-normativity and affords greater safety among those who do not fit in the gender binaries (Seelman, 2014).

The study findings also suggest a need for youths’ experiences of hetero-cis-normativity to be better integrated in the conceptualization of resilience among LGBTQ youth. Calling it “ordinary magic,” Masten (2014) suggested that resilience is made of assets and resources that are ordinarily available to youth, such as family, peers, and caring adults. As shown in previous resilience studies on LGBTQ youth (e.g., Saewyc et al., 2009), many of the ordinary resources are certainly essential in protecting youth from risk or promoting their wellbeing. This study additionally offers empirical evidence that these ordinary resources might not be readily available for many LGBTQ youth within hetero-cis-normative discourses, which restrict the ways in which families, schools, and communities can fully support LGBTQ youth. Until we can actualize the kind of society in which all families can accept sexual and gender diversity and teach their LGBTQ children how to keep themselves physically and psychologically safe, a contextual understanding of positive adaptation (i.e., doing well while “still struggling” and “battling through”) might be more favorable than using a normative definition of health and wellbeing in conceptualizing resilience of LGBTQ youth. Given that it is often the ordinary resources that are the very sources of pain, the current study shows how extraordinary it is that many LGBTQ youth choose to “show up” for life and battle through the myriad of adversities.

Using a qualitative, person-focused analysis (Masten, 2014) of resilient LGBTQ youth, this study suggests a greater need for incorporating LGBTQ youth and SP as important knowledge holders to further advance a resilience framework in LGBTQ youth research. Overall, participants of this study problematized the normative definitions of health and wellbeing (e.g., absence of psychopathologies, presence of socially desirable outcomes) as a primary way to
measure LGBTQ youths’ resilience, while these normative measures of health have been predominantly used in youth resilience research (Ungar, 2011; Masten, 2014). More qualitative studies, especially of longitudinal design and person-focused analysis (Masten, 2014), have the potential to add more nuances and complexities to the important body of knowledge on this population developed mostly through quantitative research.

The following story about a youth who experienced daily harassment and bullying uncovers the complexities involved in recognizing resilience in this population “[The youth] would often threat suicide, [so that she can] go into the youth jail for a night or two (because) it was safer there” (SP06). This youth story fits well with the social ecological framework of resilience (Ungar, 2011, 2012), which calls for a dynamic, context-dependent understanding between adversity and positive adaptation. On the other hand, this framework was originally designed to study risk and resilience within a particular ethno-cultural context. It is hard to argue that being LGBTQ is a “culture” per se, and it is important to acknowledge that the LGBTQ youth population is incredibly diverse. This study suggests that other contextual factors, such as being a person of color, being an immigrant/refugee, and growing up poor, contribute to the ways in which LGBTQ youth differentially experience adversities and everyday realities. This corroborates past research that reported the correlations between LGBTQ youths’ experience of family acceptance-rejection and the demographic characteristics of both youth (Ryan et al., 2009) and families (Ryan et al., 2010), such as youths’ gender, family immigration status and religion. While the social ecological theory of resilience informed this author to primarily attend to LGBTQ youths’ shared experiences, the findings of this study suggest a greater need to account for these contextual influences in studying LGBTQ youth and their resilience. Combining the social ecological theory of resilience with other frameworks, such as feminist
intersectionality (Mehrotra, 2010; Warner, 2008), might offer researchers an additional analytic lens to examine how hetero-cis-normative language and practices might differentially impact diverse LGBTQ youth (e.g., sub-groups, contexts).

The study has several limitations. Although youths’ involvement with SP often extended beyond being service users (e.g., youth advisor, trainer), those who do not engage these agencies were nonetheless excluded from the study. Youth who choose not to engage or do not have readily access to services might have different relationships with adversities and perspectives about “doing well” from the participants of the study. Furthermore, the nomination method might have limited the diversity of perspectives among participants, as it is plausible that the nominators chose youth who shared similar perspectives to theirs. Transferring the findings of the current study based on a small urban sample to other social, cultural and political contexts should be done cautiously.

Overall, this qualitative study supported previous research on risk and resilience by illuminating youths’ experiences of marginalization for being LGBTQ and the relative scarce of “ordinary” resources available to support the wellbeing of LGBTQ youth (Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006; Saewyc et al., 2009). The study highlighted a greater need for research and practice that address hetero-cis-normative ideology. Attending to how such social institutions and practices structurally impact the lives of LGBTQ youth across the family, school, and community levels allows us to better support LGBTQ youths’ extraordinary acts to show up every day and battle through adversities.
### Table 1

**Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

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<th>Interview Questions (SP)</th>
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<td>“What do you think are adversities commonly experienced by today’s LGBTQ youth? How do you think that they are experiencing such adversities?”</td>
<td>“You have been invited to participate in this study because someone else thought that you were a ‘resilient’ youth. What is your understanding of how someone thought that you were a ‘resilient’ LGBTQ youth?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“What does ‘doing well’ look like for LGBTQ youth? How do you know that LGBTQ youth are ‘doing well’ despite their experience of significant adversity? What kind of indicators do you have to know that LGBTQ youth are ‘doing well’?”</td>
<td>“Thinking about yourself and your LGBTQ peers, what do you think are challenges or difficulties LGBTQ youth are experiencing? Can you tell me how you and/or your peers have experienced these challenges?”</td>
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<td>“What does ‘doing well’ mean to you and other LGBTQ youth? How can others in your life (e.g., adults, friends) be assured that you are ‘doing well’ despite challenges?”</td>
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References


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CHAPTER 3

Paper 2

Paving Pathways through the Pain:

A Grounded Theory of Resilience among LGBTQ Youth

Abstract

Researchers in the last decade have identified discrete protective or promotive factors among lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ) youth. There remains, however, a dearth of research on resilience processes among LGBTQ youth. This grounded theory study utilized interviews with service providers ($n = 16$) and resilient LGBTQ youth ($n = 19$) to develop a substantive theory that offers insight into how LGBTQ youth navigate their way to wellbeing. The core category, _paving pathways through the pain_, suggests that resilient LGBTQ youth build on their experiences of emotional pain to carve out personalized pathways to resilience. Constant comparisons of youth cases showed that youth employed all of the following five resilience processes: (1) navigating safety across contexts, (2) asserting personal agency, (3) seeking and cultivating meaningful relationships, (4) un-silencing LGBTQ and other social identities, and (5) engaging in collective healing and action. Youth, however, focused on particular areas of their life circumstances that inflicted emotional pain and engaged more intentionally in one or more of the resilience processes related to the origins of their emotional pain.
Introduction and Literature Review

Researchers have rigorously documented the hostile environments and negative psychosocial outcomes among lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans1, and queer (LGBTQ) youth. Previous studies in Canada and the U.S. (D’Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002; Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012; Taylor & Peter, 2011) revealed hostile social environments of LGBTQ youth, including verbal abuse (range: 59%-81%) and physical abuse (range: 24%-38%) related to their gender expression or sexual orientation. Past research, using mostly gay, lesbian, and bisexual (LGB) youth samples, highlighted elevated rates of psychosocial outcomes than their heterosexual peers, such as depression (Marshal et al., 2011; Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, & Azrael, 2009), substance abuse (Goldbach, Tanner-Smith, Bagwell, & Dunlap, 2014), and suicide risk (Almeida et al., 2009; Haas et al., 2011; Pompili et al., 2014). Significantly less information is available about the experiences of trans youth. Limited research, using relatively small convenience U.S. samples (Clements-Nolle, Marx, & Katz, 2006; Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006; 2007), has pointed to frequent experiences of verbal and physical abuse and striking rates of depression and suicide risk (as high as 47% reported attempts) among trans youth. A study of adults and youth in Canada (n = 538) revealed burdens carried by trans people, such as family rejection (Travers et al., 2012), discrimination in employment (Bauer et al., 2011) and healthcare (Bauer et al., 2009), and strikingly high suicide risk (36% reported ideation in the past year) (Bauer, Pyne, Francino, & Hammond, 2013).

Documented vulnerabilities and negative psychosocial outcomes have raised public

1 In this article, the term trans is used to encompass “people whose gender identity and/or expression do not conform to the societal expectations for the sex they were assigned at birth (Singh, Richmond, & Burns, 2013, p. 95)” including transgender, transsexual, gender queer, and other gender nonconforming people.
awareness of the needs and challenges of LGBTQ youth (Russell, 2005). Studying vulnerabilities alone, however, does not directly address how to mitigate risk and help promote or sustain the wellbeing of this marginalized population. To address the health disparities among LGBTQ youth, there is a vital need for a research paradigm shift to studying resilience (Mayer, Garofalo, & Makadon, 2014; Russell, 2005; Saewyc, 2011), “the dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity” (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000, p. 543). Resilience research offers an alternative framework to the deficit-focused discourse by suggesting how LGBTQ youth can navigate adversities when the right resources are provided to them in meaningful ways.

The last decade has seen considerable progress in the study of resilience among LGBTQ youth. Variable-focused analysis (Masten, 2014) of quantitative datasets has resulted in identifying discrete protective or promotive factors (i.e., resilience resources) in the social environments of LGBTQ youth. Most of the studies have focused on lesbian, gay, and/or bisexual (LGB) youth, while some studies included both LGB and trans youth. Few studies have focused specifically on trans youth. Previous research detailed that resilience resources which are commonly known to work well for adolescents in general might be just as important for LGBTQ youth. These factors included school connectedness (Saewyc et al., 2009; Poon, Saewyc, & Chen, 2011), family support (Craig & Smith, 2014; Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006; Konishi & Saewyc, 2014), and knowing caring adults (Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006; Gastic & Johnson, 2009) for LGB youth, as well as school connectedness (Veale et al., 2015), perceived parental (Simons, Schrager, Clark, Belzer, & Olson, 2013; Veale et al., 2015) and social support (Grossman, D’Augelli, & Frank, 2011; Veale et al., 2015) for trans youth. Researchers also identified resilience resources that are unique to LGBTQ youth across family, peer, school, and
community contexts. In the family domain, family acceptance of youths’ LGBTQ identities was protective against suicidal behaviors among both LGB and trans youth (Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010) and promotive of positive mental health among trans youth (Travers et al., 2012). Within the peer domain, social involvement with other LGB peers (Ueno, 2005), perceived peer support, including peer acceptance of homosexuality (Mustanski, Newcomb, & Garofalo, 2011), as well as romantic involvement with same-sex partners (Bauermeister et al., 2010) played positive roles on the psychosocial wellbeing of LGB youth. On a school level, having inclusive anti-bullying policies was associated with reduced risk for suicide among LGB youth (Hatzenbuehler & Keyes, 2013; Saewyc, Konishi, Rose, & Homma, 2014). Similarly, the offering of a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), a school-based program for LGBTQ students and their allies, was associated with lower rates of suicide attempts among LGB youth (Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Hatzenbuehler, Birkett, Van Wagenen, & Meyer, 2014; Saewyc et al., 2014) and bullying victimization among both LGB (Goodenow et al., 2006; Kosciw et al., 2012) and trans youth (Kosciw et al., 2012). In a larger community context, recent studies have found that LGB youth who resided in neighborhoods with high rates of hate crimes against LGBTQ people were significantly more likely to report suicide risks (Duncan & Hatzenbuehler, 2014) and illicit drug use (Duncan, Hatzenbuehler, & Johnson, 2014). Given that these results were not observed among heterosexual youth and there were no associations between living in neighborhoods with high crime rates in general and LGB youths’ psychosocial outcomes, social climates specific to LGBTQ people might play an especially important role for the wellbeing of LGBTQ youth. Finally, small qualitative studies identified access to supportive schools and engagement with social media and activism for identity affirmation as unique resilience resources for trans youth (Singh, 2012; Singh, Meng, & Hansen, 2014).
Purpose of the Current Study

The purpose of this study was to develop a substantive theory of resilience processes among LGBTQ youth. Although in the 1980s Rutter (1987), a prominent resilience researcher, called for a shift in research focus from identifying factors to also examining resilience processes or mechanisms, researchers have thus far focused primarily on identifying discrete factors that can contribute to the wellbeing of LGBTQ youth. The person-focused analysis, a close examination of the lives of “resilient” individuals, is better designed than variable-focus analysis to examine resilience processes (Masten, 2014). In the few qualitative studies that investigated resilience among LGBTQ youth (Fenaughty & Harre, 2003; Singh, 2012; Singh, Meng, & Hansen, 2014), however, researchers used open recruitment for participants and did not intentionally sample “resilient” youth. By answering the following research questions, the current study sought to expand beyond identifying discrete factors to examining the processes of resilience among LGBTQ youth: How do LGBTQ youth interact (e.g., negotiate with, resist against) with their social environments in an effort to navigate their experiences of adversities?; How do they access resources (e.g., intrapsychic, interpersonal, social/cultural, professional) in ways that enhance or sustain their wellbeing?

Sensitizing Theoretical Framework

Proposed by Ungar (2011, 2012) who has studied youth resilience in a cross-cultural context, a social ecological theory of resilience suggests that researchers study resilience by accounting for both the person and the environment as well as the interaction between them. Ungar (2004) emphasized that such an interactional process is culture- or context-specific and needs to be studied from the perspective of youths’ local contexts. To this end, he proposed a contextual definition of resilience as follows:
… both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well being, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided and experienced in culturally meaningful ways. (Ungar, 2008, p. 225)

Provided that this study sought to develop an understanding of resilience grounded in the data, Ungar’s theory was used as a sensitizing concept (Bowen, 2006; Charmaz, 2006). Rather than as an explicit analytic lens (i.e., definitive concept), the social ecological theory of resilience was used as a heuristic, starting point to guide inductive analysis. This theory specifically allowed this author to (1) explicate the role of social ecologies in resilience and (2) subscribe to the view that multiple pathways to resilience can exist and might be contingent upon youths’ contexts. This study explored LGBTQ youths’ pathways to resilience by examining LGBTQ youths’ lived experiences and how their contexts might be historically and structurally constructed differently from youth in general.

**Method**

This study employed grounded theory (GT) (e.g., Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), a qualitative methodology conducive to studying a social phenomenon directly through participants’ subjective experiences and meaning making (Charmaz, 2006). This GT study was designed to shed light on the participants’ voices and ecological contexts of resilience processes among LGBTQ youth. Research processes of the study are summarized in Table 1.

*Grounded Theory Methodology*

GT was originally developed in the 1960s by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) and later refined by Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1990, 1998). These original grounded theorists detailed research procedures to collect and analyze qualitative data to
“discover” theory emerging within data. This study largely attended to the newer, constructivist version of GT methodology proposed by Kathy Charmaz (2006, 2008, 2011). Similar to the aforementioned original, positivist grounded theorists, Charmaz, too, remains realist in that she seeks to develop a theory that represents the subjective ‘realities’ of research participants (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Her approach is also interpretive in a sense that she disagrees that theories are “discovered” solely from the data and instead views theorizing as a product of the researcher’s interpretation of the data. Contrary to the original GT approaches, Charmaz (2008, 2011) views theoretical rendering as representing situated knowledge and truths that are multiple, partial, and contingent upon time and context.

Procedure

The data collection of this GT study consisted of the following two concurrent phases: Interviews with (1) service providers (SP) and (2) LGBTQ youth. Both study phases began with initial sampling (Charmaz, 2006), a starting point in GT to enter the field, through specific inclusion criteria for sampling, which are detailed in the subsequent pages. This was followed by theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Morse, 2007), a GT sampling strategy whose purpose is not to seek random or representative samples, but rather to purposefully seek participants to expand and/or refine the theoretical categories. Based on the properties that emerged from initial data analysis (i.e., the first few interviews), sampling and interview strategies were re-visited and modified to intentionally seek more specific data that would help explicate the emergent theoretical categories. For instance, when early data signified unique adversities and resilience processes among trans youth, recruitment of trans youth was actively undertaken. Similarly, when social media emerged as a key concept in the data, participants were asked more direct questions to discuss the role of social media in youth
resilience during interviews. Data collection based on theoretical sampling was continued until no new data properties emerged from the data (i.e., theoretical saturation). Data collection took place from December 2013 to September 2014. This researcher conducted all interviews at one of the following sites: this researcher’s office, SP offices or their homes. The interview questions that generated the data used for this article are summarized in Table 2. All research materials were approved by the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board.

SP were recruited for the study to share their understanding of common adversities faced by today’s LGBTQ youth as well as their understanding of “resilient LGBTQ youth” by providing specific examples. The inclusion criteria for SP were those who (1) are older than the maximum age limit of youth served in their respective organizations, and (2) have worked with LGBTQ youth for at least three years (3) as either a professional (e.g., social worker, child and youth worker, frontline worker, healthcare provider) or a volunteer. These sampling criteria were designed to recruit adults who do not qualify to receive services as youth clients, yet have substantial knowledge about the needs and assets of LGBTQ youth. Participants were recruited through a wide range of organizations serving LGBTQ youth (e.g., social services, healthcare, education). Organizations that required parental consent (e.g., schools) for research participation were excluded, as this could jeopardize the safety of youth who are not “out” at home. Each interview lasted from 55 minutes to 2 hours, 2 minutes. At the end of the interview, the service providers were asked to nominate LGBTQ youth who have (1) experienced significant adversities, but who are (2) relatively “doing well” to participate in the second phase of the study. Ungar and his colleagues (Theron et al., 2011; Ungar et al., 2007; Ungar, Brown, Liebenberg, Cheung, & Levine, 2008) employed this nomination strategy to identify “resilient” youth based on the local community standards when they conducted a person-focused analysis of
socio-culturally diverse youth. No honorariums were offered to paid SP, while unpaid volunteers received $20.

Consistent with the definition of adolescence, a life cycle stage that precedes adulthood which generally begins in the early 20s (Institute of Medicine, 2011), and the age range of LGBTQ youth being served in the local organizations, self-identified LGBTQ youth, ages 16 to 24, were recruited. Each interview lasted from 45 minutes to 1 hour, 46 minutes. In addition to those nominated by SP (n = 15), youth also nominated a small number of peers (n = 4) as it was plausible that youth might have a different understanding of “resilience” from that of adults. Youth received $20 as an honorarium.

Participants

The ages among SP (n = 16) ranged from 25 to 69 (mean = 44.5). They worked with LGBTQ youth in a variety of positions (e.g., social worker, program manager, healthcare provider) for a minimum of 3 years to a maximum of 33 years (mean = 12.5). The majority of participants held at least Bachelor’s degrees (n = 13), while seven held Master’s or higher degrees (Ph.D., M.D.). The majority identified as White (n = 12), while four were people of color (2 Asian, one South Asian, and one Middle Eastern). Their gender identities included cisgender female (n = 11), cisgender male (n = 2), trans male (n = 2), and gender queer (n = 1). All SP were self-identified members of LGBTQ communities.

The ages of youth (n = 19) ranged from 16 to 24, with a mean age of 20.5. Their gender identities were cisgender female (n = 4), cisgender male (n = 3), gender queer or those who rejected the male-female gender binary (n = 6), trans-female (n = 1), and trans-male (n = 5). These youth also used a variety of preferred gender pronouns, including he, she, they, ze, and ae. Their LGBTQ identities included lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, queer, gender queer, two-
spirited and trans. Youth in this study reflected the racial diversity of Toronto, including White 
\( (n=8) \), Asian \( (n=3) \), Black \( (n=2) \), and mixed-race \( (n=6) \) including three of Aboriginal 
heritage. Although the majority of youth, except for two, were born in Canada, almost half \( (n = 
9) \) spoke of their experience of having grown up in an immigrant family. Some \( (n = 9) \) were 
currently in post-secondary education (colleges and universities), while five were currently 
attending high school. Other youth were either working (part- or full-time) or attending career 
development programs. About half lived alone or with roommates \( (n = 9) \), while others lived 
with parent(s) \( (n = 6) \) or in a shelter or transitional housing program \( (n = 4) \).

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and imported to Dedoose, a computer assisted 
qualitative and mixed-methods data analysis software, for data management and coding. 
Adhering to GT methodology, data collection and analysis took place simultaneously. Initial 
coding, (Charmaz, 2006), which involved labeling each line of the interview data by asking what 
the data suggest and exemplify, began as soon as the first few interviews were conducted 
(Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2006; 
Dey, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), a hallmark of GT coding, was used 
to compare data within each interview and across interviews and to identify commonalities and 
differences. This process resulted in 70 initial codes. Focused coding (Charmaz, 2006), a more 
abstract, conceptual level of coding, was used to synthesize a large number of initial codes into 
more conceptual categories based on the degree of saliency and frequency. This process 
ultimately yielded eight categories. In conducting axial coding (Charmaz, 2006; Kelle, 2007), 
this author did not use the coding paradigm, a more positivist, formalized approach to axial 
coding proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). In this constructivist GT study, however, axial
coding was flexibly used to bring depth to the data by exploring the relationship between categories and sub-categories. Consistent with initial coding, the constant comparative method was employed throughout the focused and axial coding processes. Of the eight categories, this article focuses on reporting the five categories that signified resilience processes among LGBTQ youth. The theoretical coding process (Charmaz, 2006; Holton, 2007), the final, most abstract, conceptual level of coding, involved constant comparison to inspect the relationship between the categories and resulted in the core category, *paving pathways through the pain*.

Throughout these multi-level coding processes, memo writing (Charmaz, 2006; Lempert, 2007) was used as an additional analytic device. The earlier memos comprised of comparing data within data, data with category, and category with category to develop theoretical sensitivity, “the ability to see relevant data and to reflect upon empirical data material with the help of theoretical terms” (Kelle, 2007, p. 193). The more advanced memos were used to compare categories and examine the fit between the emergent theory and the observed data. This resulted in an enhanced degree of abstraction and completeness of the data interpretation. Although GT is primarily inductive in nature, more deductive reasoning was employed later to determine whether the observed data confirmed the emergent theory. This *abductive* method (Charmaz, 2008; Reichertz, 2007), the analytic logic that begins with induction and ends with deduction, was used in a later part of data collection, in which participants were asked to comment and further elaborate on the preliminary results (e.g., emergent categories and theory).

**Trustworthiness of the Study**

Four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were employed to ensure the rigor in this qualitative research: (1) credibility, (2) transferability, (3) dependability, and (4) confirmability. Credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) refers to the degree of which the emergent
theory is trustworthy and grounded in the data. Study credibility was enhanced through triangulation (Denzin, 1978; Marshall & Rossman, 2011) of the data from both phases of the study to ensure the level of robustness and comprehensiveness in the results. Member checking (Charmaz, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 2011) was not conducted in a traditional sense. The process of asking those who participated during the middle to late stages of data collection for their feedback on preliminary results, however, served a similar purpose to member checking and strengthened the trustworthiness of the results. Transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in this study means the degree to which the results can be applied to understand LGBTQ youth in other geographic and socio-cultural contexts. Thick descriptions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) of the study, including the descriptions of the participants’ experiences and their social contexts, aimed to allow readers to decide how and whether the findings might transfer to understanding LGBTQ youth in other contexts. Dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) means the extent of which the research steps and decisions are clearly documented and can be traced later on. A detailed audit trail (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) of research activities was maintained, such as field notes, memos on constant comparisons, and the process of decision-making regarding theoretical sampling and coding. The fourth and final criterion is confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), a concept that was traditionally understood in a positivist lens as the process of ensuring that the researcher remains objective and unbiased. In keeping the tenets of constructivist GT, this author maintained the position that the researcher’s objectivity might be a naïve, false misconception. Rather, confirmability in this study should be recognized as the degree of which this author engaged in reflexivity (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011), the process in which the researcher critically examined the personal and professional selves in relation to the study, to ensure that the results are trustworthy. To this end, memo writing (Charmaz, 2006;
Lempert, 2007), debriefing and consultation allowed this author, who is an immigrant gay man of color with many years of experience working with LGBTQ youth, to productively make use of the self as a researcher.

**Results**

_Core Category: Paving Pathways through the Pain_

The following five categories emerged in the SP and youth data as resilience processes among LGBTQ youth: (1) navigating safety across contexts, (2) asserting personal agency, (3) seeking and cultivating meaningful relationships, (4) un-silencing LGBTQ and other social identities, and (5) engaging in collective action and healing. Although these categories were developed through the analysis of both the SP and youth data, youth data were primarily used to explicate how youth made use of these resilience processes. On the other hand, SPs’ professional insight into the experiences of local LGBTQ youth helped contextualize the categories. Constant comparisons of youth cases revealed that youth employed all five processes although the degree to which they adhered to each process varied across cases. While no one process appeared to be superior to another when the comparisons were made across cases, some processes carried more significance than others within each case. Furthermore, even when two participants adhered to the same process, the ways in which they employed such a process were unique to each youth.

The core category, _paving pathways through the pain_, suggests that resilient LGBTQ youth build on their experiences of emotional pain to carve out personalized pathways to resilience. While all five processes were employed by youth, each youth focused on particular experiences that inflicted emotional pain and engaged more intentionally in one or more of the resilience processes related to the origins of their emotional pain. For instance, for one youth whose life narratives centered on the emotional pain caused by transphobia in accessing
healthcare, *engaging in collective healing and action* to fight against systemic transphobia was a particularly meaningful resilience process. While another youth might engage in the same process/category in a different way (e.g., volunteering with a LGBTQ sport league), the emphasis placed in social action by this youth might not be as pronounced as the aforementioned youth. For the youth whose life story was centered on her emotional pain inflicted by social isolation from peers and family rejection of her queer identity, *navigating safety across contexts* and *seeking and cultivating meaningful relationships* might carry greater weight than the other processes. In the following sections, the five resilience processes will be detailed through the interview excerpts. SP excerpts are identified by “SP” and a number assigned to each participant (e.g., SP15). Similarly, “Y” and a number signify youth excerpts (e.g., Y06). Provided that detailing the demographic information (e.g., “41-year-old trans male service provider of Mexican descent,” “17-year-old trans female refugee from Jamaica currently living in a downtown shelter”) can lead to the potential identification of some participants, only minimal demographic information and relevant contextual explanations are provided in this article.

*Code-switch: Navigating safety across contexts*

In the face of experiencing marginalization in their families, schools and communities, resilient LGBTQ youth examined these social contexts to assess their own safety in each context. *Code-switching* is a linguistic construct that explains the phenomenon that multilingual people learn to switch back and forth between languages depending on their surrounding (Gardner-Chloros, 2009). As previous research documented negative consequences involved in one’s coming out (Heatherington & Lavner, 2008; Saltzburg, 2009), resilient LGBTQ youth also experientially learned to know “when, where and (with) who(m) to share [their LGBTQ identities] safely” (SP15). Youth carefully examined and assessed their own physical, social,
psychological, and/or financial safety in each context and made intentional decisions about coming out as LGBTQ. This process is illustrated in the following youth story and the youth’s decision to come out in a family context:

I thought about coming out to [my parents] two years ago. But it wasn’t a possibility because they (would) disown me… I would [have to] be able to sustain myself financially before telling them. I talked to a financial officer. I chose to [come out] at my neighbor’s house…because I was afraid that my dad was going to get violent. (Y02)

When a full disclosure might jeopardize their safety, some youth chose to partially come out (e.g., being out as bisexual but not as trans) in one context, while fully disclosing their LGBTQ identities in another (e.g., with close friends).

Access to a “safer space,” even temporarily, played an essential role in youths’ ability to navigate other, more hostile social contexts. Safer space is a concept adopted by school-based (e.g., GSAs) and social service programs (e.g., LGBTQ groups) to create an inclusive environment that welcomes gender and sexual diversity among youth and does not tolerate anti-LGBTQ prejudice (Asakura, 2010; Fetner, Elafros, Bortolin, & Drechsler, 2012). The term “safer” was preferred over “safe” among participants given such a space “cannot be 100% safe for everyone all the time” (SP03), especially for those who carry other marginal identities (e.g., people of color). Safer space, as explained by the following youth, might function as a recharging station for youth to go and return to whenever needed for emotional fuel, so that they can go out and navigate other, more hostile social contexts: “I could talk about girls and not have to worry about being judged” (Y07); “I’m confident that staff and youth will back me up (about being gender queer)…I’m not as assertive in settings like out in public or at school because I’m not sure if people…would have my back…And I don’t have energy to get into an argument”
“(Youth) don’t have to worry about the way they present to others… even for three hour(s) a week, they don’t have to be on the defense against everyone” (SP11).

Although this resilience process was endorsed by all youth to a degree, the utility of safer space was particularly important for those who experienced significant pain related to the absence of felt safety. For these youth, temporarily afforded safety furthered their capacity to navigate other, more hostile contexts. In addition to accessing safer space, some youth made use of their skills developed as children to navigate hostile social contexts. While the healthcare system is known to scrutinize trans people’s gender identity and expression and often threatens their emotional safety (Bauer et al., 2009), the following trans youth credited his experience as a child of an immigrant family for his successful navigation of the healthcare system: “The fact I was the first-born [child] helped because my immigrant parents asked me to do a lot of [work on behalf of them because of their] language barrier. So I was trained from early age” (Y09).

Commitment to continued skill building in navigating unsafe social contexts was also evident among these resilient youth. The following 22-year-old trans youth, who left home at age 17 due to his family’s rejection, shows that navigating safety across contexts is an ongoing process: “I’ve gotten better at being able to articulate my boundaries and tell [my family] when I feel like something isn’t ok. It feels like extra emotional work, but I don’t want my father to [spend] the rest of his life without me” (Y10). Making use of external (e.g., safer space) and internal resources (e.g., coping and adaptive skills), youth in this study sought to cultivate the capacity to “code-switch” by navigating and maintaining their safety across different social contexts.

**Honoring me, myself, and I: Asserting personal agency**

Experiencing control and abuse from others for being LGBTQ, resilient LGBTQ youth have learned to capitalize on their personal agency, through which youth (1) put a spotlight on
their own needs, limitations, and future visions and (2) take ownership for their own decision making. Constant comparison of youth cases revealed that it was not the decisions per se (e.g., leaving or staying at home when faced with family rejection, leaving church, going through gender transition), but rather the felt degree of ownership over such decisions, that played a resilience-promoting role. One youth, who grew up in a small town and experienced extensive bullying for being gay and Black, learned at a young age to purposely under-achieve in school as a way to avoid being targeted by bullies. Putting a spotlight on his own future visions and making behavioral changes accordingly, however, allowed him to become the first in his family to leave his hometown to attend university: “I started fighting for what I wanted… So my main motivation was I have to get out and make sure I’ll never have to come back [by earning a university education]” (Y17). Another youth, who chose to have no contact with her abusive family and consequently faced living in poverty, stressed the importance of her own personal agency in decision making: “That’s the beautiful thing about independence. Even though it’s difficult…you get to that point…you truly trust yourself and you know you can do it. I don’t regret my decision at all” (Y06). For another youth, whose mother was abusive about the youth’s non-conforming gender, creative ways to assert personal agency became a necessity:

Over the years, I refused to…tell her [that I go to LGBTQ programs]; I told her I was out volunteering or was out in choir practice. And that was power I was taking back. I was taking back agency. I started learning how to explore haircuts, shopping for my own clothes, becoming independent of her. (Y08)

Although asserting personal agency was reflected in the stories of all youth, this process was more evident among older youth. It is likely that younger youth, most of who lived at home, do not have as much physical and financial autonomy to make decisions independently and have
less room to exercise competence as an independent being. Finally, this process was particularly meaningful for those youth who experienced immense pain as a result of their lives being controlled and constrained by their social environments (e.g., parents). Finding ways to honor their own needs and take steps to take greater control of their own lives facilitated these youths’ efforts to navigate their way to wellbeing.

*Do you see me?: Seeking and cultivating meaningful relationships*

Resilient LGBTQ youth sought and cultivated relationships with (1) LGBTQ adults and peers who reflected their LGBTQ-specific experiences and (2) others, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, who provided youth with physical and/or emotional resources. “I see you” is a phrase commonly used among those with marginal identities (e.g., people of color) when one acknowledges another person’s existence or experience that is otherwise unnoticed. This category emerged in the SP data more than the youth data. It is plausible to hypothesize that youth focused their narratives primarily on their own action, while SP had a more ecological insight into youths’ lives and their support system. When youth cases were closely analyzed, however, youth certainly had and benefited greatly from relationships in which others would “see” them as valuable. While all youth recognized the power of meaningful relationships, this resilience process was especially important for those who experienced emotional pain within a relational context and provided them with reparative relational experiences.

Other LGBTQ peers and adults can serve as reflections of one’s experience of living as a LGBTQ youth. Relationships with other LGBTQ people can allow youth to share the burden of marginalization and consequently feel less alone in navigating the world. The following youth experiences show how having a relationship with other LGBTQ youth can enhance the felt experiences of being “seen”: “[With my LGBTQ friends, I am like] ‘Yes! I agree with that. Yes!"
I feel that every day.’ It’s relieving that someone ‘gets’ it. It’s a lot easier when people… understand your struggles and what you’re going through” (Y05); “It was nice to be around people who were both people of color and queer… I’m usually half and half… The intersections of both of my identities are not understood” (Y11). LGBTQ adults (e.g., mentors, SP, neighbors) can have a similarly powerful role by modeling for youth that it is possible to have healthy adulthood as LGBTQ: “We had a school assembly, where one of my favorite teachers came out. That impacted me because I had never really spoken to or known someone that was actually ‘out.’ Anything like that shows comfort to queer kids” (Y12). This sentiment was further evidenced by SP who showed remarkable commitment to the use of self as LGBTQ in their work with youth: “I was not going to be closeted [at school]. I was going to be out… there were kids there who… needed to see me“ (SP07); “This young person said ‘we lived in the same neighborhood and since I was a kid, I have seen you.. saw you going through changes [with gender transition]…I looked at you and thought to myself, ‘that’s ok then. I can be me’” (SP12).

Furthermore, resilient LGBTQ youth benefited from relationships with others who actively supported youth by providing physical and/or emotional resources. It was found that anyone across demographics (e.g., LGBTQ, non-LGBTQ, adults, peers, professionals) has the potential to actively support LGBTQ youth. Although some youth knew exactly what they needed and actively sought specific support from others, in most cases, it was someone else (e.g., adults, peers) who recognized youths’ suffering, identified their needs, and offered resources accordingly. Examples of these physical and emotional resources included money, food, places to stay, and listening to youth and their needs. One youth whose wellbeing was severely compromised due to extensive bullying in middle school attributed his later success to having met a teacher who actively supported him: “[That same teacher] followed me into high school...
just to make sure that I would be ok” (Y18). Another youth who left his family of origin found his friendships that provided support as imperative in navigating his wellbeing:

I was broke…on welfare... I don’t think I could have made it without my friends who took care of me by…showing up with food. I went over to my friends’ parents’ place to eat dinner… I started being able to trust people with details of my life… Being able to voice was really helpful. (Y10)

In addition to offering support for specific needs, those who are committed to “seeing” LGBTQ youth recognized youths’ both strengths and vulnerabilities. For the following participant, who now actively works within LGBTQ communities as a youth leader, being appreciated and recognized by others was essential: “These social workers and community activists… saw me as the way I wanted to be seen. They…actually appreciated, recognized my abilities, strengths, and all these things” (Y08). Another youth’s relationship with an adult mentor has become an integral part of her support system. She attributed this meaningful three-year relationship to her mentor’s patience with and full acceptance of the emotional pain she experienced from family rejection and the relational difficulties she consequently displayed:

[Mentor] and I joke that in the first year of our relationship I was constantly waiting for the other shoe to drop. I was like, ‘she’s a really cool person. But when is she going to hurt me?’ It took about a year for me to be like, ‘ok, this person’s cool. This person isn’t going to let me down… I think she was always there… I realized that this person is…going to be there for me. (Y6)

Coming into one’s own: Un-silencing LGBTQ and other social identities

Resilient LGBTQ youth turned their previous experiences of having their LGBTQ and other social identities (e.g., race, newcomer) silenced into actively seeking out resources to un-
silence and embrace “who they are.” Youth in the study were quite at ease with and assertive about their diverse sexualities and gender identities. As suggested by the following youth, knowing and owning one’s LGBTQ identities might facilitate youths’ efforts in navigating the world: “I’m like, ‘I’m sorry you can’t accept that [I like girls]. But I’m not going to change who I am because of that” (Y07); “I am like, ‘you can’t change me into something I never was. If I was never that then how can you change me to it? You can’t change me because I’m who I am and I’m not going to change” (Y18). Some SP warned, however, that successfully asserting their own identities requires youths’ skills to know when and how to do so: “I don’t think it’s necessarily always resilient for youths to demand to [have their identities respected] if the response they’re going to get is not helpful to them” (SP09). Nonetheless, as highlighted by the following participants, one’s identity construction process appears to promote self-confidence and stronger sense of being among youth: “Changing [gender] in the (legal) document helped me to feel less insecure [about myself]…I don’t have to…be really alert like, ‘would people notice’… It’s a big load off” (Y09).

[Youth] come to a process of accepting their sexuality or gender and get to a place where they’re comfortable with it. I’ve seen that happen for a number of youth who…suddenly seem to be doing better…Their reaction to people is different because they’re referred to in a way that makes sense for them. (SP03)

In an effort to navigate their own identity development, youth accessed relevant language and knowledge through a variety of means. Some examples included youths’ engagement with LGBTQ history and literature, involvement with counterculture communities (e.g., Cosplay²),

² Cosplay is a form of performance art, in which people wear costumes and act out characters.
and use of social media (e.g., Tumblr). One youth explained the significance of LGBTQ-specific media on one’s identity development: “I devoured all the queer media I could get my hands on. I read all the books in the library…I was trying to surround myself in queerness…where it wasn’t wrong to be queer” (Y08); “[Reading LGBTQ non-fiction] is like building a fort. Every single book is a brick and then you build up this fort that can support you” (Y02). While images and knowledge about lesbians and gay men might be more readily available in the mainstream media, alternative means to knowledge building were necessary for trans and other gender non-conforming youth: “I came across this Japanese comic …about a girl who wants to be a boy and a boy who wants to be a girl. When I read that I really identified with the girl… She wore whatever she wanted to wear…and cut her hair really short” (Y09); “I got into Cosplay community and met someone ‘gender fluid’…I realized that this word describes who I’ve been my entire life” (Y12). Finally, social media plays a critical role in promoting youths’ LGBTQ identity development. Most, if not all, of the youth participants found that social media allowed them to learn the ways in which other LGBTQ peers engage in their identity development: “I read the stories and all that of other LGBT people and trans people especially…their stories…resonated with how I was feeling” (Y16); “I really wanted to…educate myself. On Tumblr, people [share] personal experiences. I feel that’s more helpful” (Y11).

Emotional pain was often inflicted when youths’ important social identities were silenced or denied. “Coming into one’s own” served as a particularly important process for these youth to invert their experiences of pain and seek resources and opportunities to embrace and celebrate these identities of theirs. Despite its evident utility to youths’ resilience, however, the process of “coming into one’s own” is not uniform for all youth. This study revealed that one’s identity development as LGBTQ might be more complex for those with other intersecting marginalized
identities, such as being racialized, being a newcomer, and/or not falling within the gender binary (i.e., male or female). As one youth called it “second betrayal” (Y19), tensions arise when one’s engagement with LGBTQ communities resembled and reminded youth of other forms of marginalization and discrimination they have experienced in larger society. The following youth who carry multiple intersecting marginalized identities in such areas as race, gender, ability, and citizenship suggested that their relationships with LGBTQ communities are qualitatively different from those of their Canadian-born, white, cisgender LGB peers: “The gay boys around me were on dates. I did not have (the same) access. I went to all the queer events. I was ignored the same way I was elsewhere” (Y08); “I have yet to find a place where I fit in the gay community. It is difficult [given] this promise of ‘come find your people’ (Y14); “This was almost more difficult in a way because it felt like I had found a community and now I was sort of rejected again” (Y19). What these youth suggest here is that LGBTQ communities too are vulnerable to reproducing power relations and social hierarchy inherent in the larger Canadian society. These youth stressed a greater need for LGBTQ youth services that account for diversity within LGBTQ populations. As exemplified by the following youth, participation in such a program can facilitate the identity construction among marginalized LGBTQ youth:

I couldn’t really find myself in… [LGBTQ] groups…because there were no Asian people. Whenever…I’m struggling with my parents, they would give me a totally different response…like “then just get out of the house.” I’m like “That’s not the problem here.” But if I talked to people in [the group specifically designed for LGBTQ Asian youth] they would understand more. I think that’s what got me out. (Y09)
Becoming me, us, and we: Engaging in collective healing and action

Resilient LGBTQ youth (1) accessed and applied relevant knowledge to conceptualize their individual struggles as a result of a structural problem and (2) engaged in a range of activities to seek positive changes for themselves and others alike. Engagement in this resilience process was especially important for youth who experienced painful, and in some cases traumatizing, experiences of marginalization and discrimination. These youth found it helpful to develop a knowledge base about the mechanisms of societal oppression against LGBTQ people. As illustrated by the following participants, raising consciousness about how different forms of oppression, such as homophobia, transphobia, racism and classism, might operate and impact LGBTQ people allowed youth to conceptualize these societal problems as a primary cause of their individual pain: “[Resilient] youth are able to identify systems as putting them at risk, not their own failures” (SP03);

I didn’t have…language…to think more critically about what was going on. [Learning about oppression] was really helpful… I was able to stop blaming myself for everything that happened with my family… I could start recognizing it as part of a systemic oppression towards trans and queer folks. (Y10)

Although healing is usually considered an internal, individual-level process, a more collectivist and action-oriented understanding of healing was embraced by the participants. As the following SP suggests, resilient LGBTQ youth might engage in a range of activities to seek action and changes needed not only for themselves but also for their peers: “Understanding that their experiences are not ok and…wanting to look for a solution…by doing so the next person won’t experience the same thing” (SP04). The degree of youths’ involvement in collective healing and action had a wide range, from supporting peers to engagement in social activism.
Some of the examples of peer support included organizing a fundraising event for a friend’s sex re-assignment surgery, speaking up when a peer is targeted, and learning about other forms of oppression even when they themselves are not directly targeted (e.g., a white queer youth studying about racism). The following youth, for instance, showed commitment to speaking up and supporting peers while recognizing difficulties associated with such a commitment:

“Whenever [my mother] says something problematic… I try to correct her because I want to make a safe environment for not only me but for my friends. I don’t want [my family] to be an unsafe space for them” (Y11).

Resilient youth in this study also emphasized the importance of engaging in community activism, as illustrated by the following youth participants who showed commitment to critically examining the systems of oppression within the local gay male community against people of color, newcomers, and trans people: “A part of moving us forward is (to) realize where our pitfalls are. If we forget where our pitfalls are, we’re never going to fix anything” (Y14). Youth in this study engaged in a wide range of activism. Some used social media and built on their own experiences as a platform to educate the public about anti-LGBTQ marginalization: “There are plenty in this world who can’t speak up because of fear (for) their lives… Right now in the safety of my bedroom sending a Tweet, I can do that” (Y3). Some youth also used art (e.g., illustration, photography, film) as a platform for community activism, as exemplified by the following youth who was making a film about trans people: “The whole film is [created] by and for trans folk… The goal is to have community dialogue… so that people watch this film and then think to themselves like ‘how does this speak to me?’” (Y10). Finally, others engaged in activism by getting involved in more formal social service and educational organizations. From starting a GSA in school, serving as an advisor for local youth-serving agencies, and working as trainers of
anti-oppression workshops designed for peers, teachers, or healthcare professionals, the
engagement with activism offered these youth meaningful opportunities to make sense of their
own pain and seek justice not only for themselves but also for others with a shared experience.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This article reported five resilience processes identified in the SP and youth data. Overall, remarkably similar results were found across interviews (SP and youth) and in the
stories of youth across diverse social identities. Notable differences in the results were as
follows: (1) SP offered more detailed insight than youth into youths’ social support, (2) older
youth made use of their personal agency more than younger youth, (3) the process of un-
silencing LGBTQ identities was more complex for those with other intersecting marginalized
identities, such as youth of color, newcomer and trans youth, than white gay and lesbian youth.
Ultimately, it was not one type of adversity (e.g., bullying) or demographic category (e.g.,
gender, race) that specified why and how youth employed each of the five resilience processes.
Rather, the core category (paving pathways through the pain) suggests that youth focused their
attention on their emotional pain and engaged more intentionally in one or more of the resilience
processes related to the origin(s) of their emotional pain.

Results of the current study corroborate that LGBTQ youth pave similar pathways to
resilience to those of youth in general. Similar to resilience research on youth in general, many of
the emergent resilience processes in this study also consisted of youths’ internal assets, such as
personal agency (Hauser, Allen, & Golden, 2006), and external resources, such as caring adults
(Theron & Englebrecht, 2012) and positive school environments (Glassi & Akos, 2007). In
addition to these common resilience resources, the study results corroborate previous research
that identified unique resilience resources for LGBTQ youth. These unique resources include the
availability of safer spaces (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2014; Saewyc et al., 2014), friendship with LGBTQ peers (Ueno, 2005), social media and activism (Singh, 2012; Singh et al., 2014).

While previous researchers used variable-focused analyses (Masten, 2014) to point to the importance of the availability of these resilience resources, this qualitative study underscored that it is both the availability of these resources and the capacity of youth to effectively make use of them that allow LGBTQ youth to carve out pathways to resilience. Using a person-focused analysis (Masten, 2014) of resilient LGBTQ youth, the current study suggested the ways in which LGBTQ youth might benefit from a variety of resources that can help them sustain or enhance their wellbeing. The study supports the importance of the availability of safer space for LGBTQ youth (e.g., Hatzenbuehler et al., 2014) by detailing how youth might mindfully use safer space as a re-charging station to navigate more hostile social contexts. While social support is a well-known resilience resource (e.g., Mustanski et al., 2011), this study specified the ways in which youth sought and cultivated non-LGBTQ and LGBTQ-specific relationships. Identity formation has been long known as a critical developmental milestone for adolescents in general (Erickson, 1963, 1968). This study detailed the ways in which LGBTQ youth might work on identity construction, including such unique and unconventional means as one’s engagement with counterculture communities. Considering that LGBTQ youth are just as socio-culturally diverse as the general youth population (e.g., race/ethnicity, newcomer status), the study supports other researchers’ argument that an intersectional framework is needed for practice and research on contemporary LGBTQ youth (Daley, Solomon, Newman, & Mishna, 2007; Wagaman, 2014). Specifically, the study adds that an intersectional lens can be used to uncover the power hierarchy within LGBTQ communities that might negatively impact youth with multiple marginalized identities. Finally, while past research suggested the availability of an activist
community for the purpose of identity construction among trans youth (Singh, 2012; Singh et al., 2014), this study further suggests how LGBTQ youth might engage in a similar process to Freire’s theory of conscientization (Freire, 1970), in which the development of critical consciousness allows those in the oppressed groups to seek liberation by exposing the systems of oppression and breaking the culture of silence.

Results of this study support the social ecological theory of resilience (Ungar, 2012), which views one’s resilience process as a culture- or context-specific one. Youth in the study employed the emergent resilience processes for the purpose of navigating social environments that are often hostile for LGBTQ people. Further supported by previous research on the negative impacts of anti-LGBTQ social climates on the wellbeing of LGBTQ youth, but not on their heterosexual counterparts (Duncan & Hatzenbuehler, 2014), anti-LGBTQ social climates might influence the quality and availability of common resilience resources (e.g., support from family and school). The stories of resilient LGBTQ youth suggest that when these common resources are unable to support them, youth have to seek alternative, sometimes unconventional resources to achieve or sustain their wellbeing. When his family (i.e., an ordinary resource) was unable to continue to support him upon his coming out, one youth ultimately made the decision to leave home and engage in sex work for financial survival, while accessing safer spaces and using social media to start building a new support network of peers and adults that can fully accept him. Life stories such as this youth’s support the need for a more context-dependent understanding of youth resilience by studying both general and LGBTQ-specific elements of resilience as suggested by previous researchers (Russell, 2005; Saewyc, 2011).

Future research on resilience of LGBTQ youth can be built on the limitations of the current study. First, keeping in mind that generalizability (to LGBTQ youth as a population at
large) is not the primary goal of qualitative research, transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the findings is certainly possible and was the intentional aim of this study. While participants of this study recruited in an urban Canadian setting were afforded legal rights and protection and appeared to have relatively easy access to relevant services and vibrant local LGBTQ communities, these are often not the case for most LGBTQ youth in other North American contexts. Readers are therefore encouraged to cautiously decide how and to what extent the study results can be transferred to other LGBTQ youth, especially those situated within a social, cultural, and political climate that is different from that of the current study. Furthermore, using constructivist GT methodologies, the study was not designed to capture objective reality; rather the results reflect the interpretive outcome of how the researcher and the participants together constructed the stories. Future hypothesis-testing research, such as survey or intervention studies with a larger youth sample, will further detail the results and examine the utility of the emergent resilience processes for LGBTQ youth in similar and dissimilar contexts.

Sampling biases involved in this study need to be recognized. The nomination method used for participant recruitment provided access to “resilient” LGBTQ youth. While participants were recruited from agencies offering a wide range of services (e.g., recreation, counseling, youth leadership, mentorship) and youth had a varying degree of involvement with these agencies (e.g., service user, youth leader), this recruitment strategy nonetheless excluded the participation of youth who did not engage with these agencies. It is likely that there are other LGBTQ youth who are “doing well” without being connected to these agencies because they have access to other resources (e.g., GSA, university-based LGBTQ programs) or do not require any LGBTQ-related resources at all. Furthermore, rather open-ended nomination criteria of “resilient” LGBTQ youth likely resulted in the sample variance in terms of youths’ access to
resources. Using more explicit criteria for youth nomination (e.g., type or degree of significant adversity and positive adaptation) will provide more rigor and specificities to researching the resilience processes.

It should be noted that results of the current study only reflect the experiences of the small number of participants. While one of the strengths of the study is the inclusion of previously neglected sub-groups in LGBTQ research, namely racialized youth \((n = 11)\) and youth who do not identify as cisgender \((n = 12)\), this diverse, yet small, sample made it difficult for this author to theorize differential resilience processes based on youths’ diverse social identities and experiences (e.g., being bisexual, being trans, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status). Considering that the study did not include youth from all LGBTQ spectrums (e.g., this study included only three gay males and one trans female), the emergent results, grounded in the experiences of youth who are majority racialized and/or non-cisgender, should be cautiously interpreted. Finally, it should be noted that despite this author’s concerted recruitment effort, only one trans female youth was nominated for this study. This might reflect the observation of both SP and youth that the lives of trans female youth are qualitatively more difficult than other LGBTQ peers for reasons that are beyond their control, such as exponentially high rates of harassment and violence against trans women (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006; Marcellin, Scheim, Bauer, & Redman, 2013). Future research is needed to explore adversities and resilience processes specific to the lived experiences of trans female youth.

Taken together, this study adds to a growing body of literature that highlights the importance of advancing resilience research on LGBTQ youth (Russell, 2005; Saewyc, 2011). This study stressed that resilience does not occur naturally within a “resilient person”; it occurs within the interaction between youths’ intentional efforts and the resources that support them. On
one hand, it is courageous that LGBTQ youth in this study actively paved their own pathways to resilience. On the other hand, the concomitant emotional pain shared by these youth sheds light on the burden of marginalization and oppression carried by these youth. Researchers, practitioners, parents, and other stakeholders all have the responsibility to envision and actualize the kind of social climates that pave smoother pathways on which LGBTQ youth can march on with less pain and more joy.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Research Phase</th>
<th>Research Task</th>
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| (1) Community engagement | • A series of meetings with various local community agencies serving LGBTQ youth to partner with for the study.  
• Discussed and consulted on the proposed study and its methodology |
| (2) Initial recruitment of and interviews with service providers (SP) | • Recruited SP participants through the partner agencies  
• Conducted interviews with a few SP  
• Youth participants who were ‘nominated’ by the above SP contacted for study participation |
| (3) Initial recruitment of and interviews with youth | • Conducted interviews with a few youth  
• Conducted initial, line-by-line coding of initial interview data  
• Emergent codes (n=104) |
| (4) Data analysis: Stage 1 | • Sought and interviewed SP who work with trans youth, LGBTQ youth of color, and LGBTQ newcomer youth  
• Sought SP nomination of “resilient” trans youth, LGBTQ youth of color, and LGBTQ newcomer youth |
| (5) Theoretical sampling of and interviews with SP and youth | • Conducted more interviews with youth  
• Continued with initial coding of interview data through constant comparison methods  
• Refined and collapsed codes (n = 70)  
• Conducted focused coding and axial coding  
• Emergent categories (n = 8) |
| (6) Data analysis: Stage 2 | • Continued with youth interviews to seek data to help refine the emergent categories  
• Conducted interviews deductively to refine the categories |
| (7) Data analysis: Stage 3 | • Conducted theoretical coding to develop the core category using constant comparison methods |
| (8) Continued theoretical sampling of and interviews with youth | |
| (9) Data analysis: Stage 4 | |
Table 2

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Questions (SP)</th>
<th>Interviews (Youth)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Can you share stories about one or two LGBTQ who you consider to be ‘resilient’ and their past and current circumstances? Please make sure not to share any identifiable information about these youth to ensure their privacy.”</td>
<td>“You have been invited to participate in this study because someone else thought that you were a ‘resilient’ youth. What is your understanding of how someone thought that you were a ‘resilient’ LGBTQ youth?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“How do you think that these youths have managed/strived to overcome challenges and maintain their wellbeing?”</td>
<td>“Can you share a story about how you have managed to overcome challenges?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>[Alternative question] “Can you share a story about another LGBTQ youth you know who has been able to overcome similar challenges as you have faced?”</td>
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CHAPTER 4

Paper 3

It Takes a Village:

Applying a Social Ecological Framework of Resilience in Working with LGBTQ Youth

Abstract

It is well-documented that hostile social environments can have detrimental impacts on the health and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) youth. Provided the profession’s historical commitment to working with marginalized populations from person-in-environment and social justice perspectives, social workers are well-positioned to promote not only the internal capacity of LGBTQ youth but also the capacity of their social ecologies to better support them. This article suggests the relevance and application of a social ecological framework of resilience to social work practice with LGBTQ youth. Findings of this author’s grounded theory study, along with other relevant literature, are used to specify elements in applying the social ecological framework of resilience to working with LGBTQ youth. The case study of a resilient trans youth will be discussed to inform interventions that can be employed across the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of social work practice.
Introduction

Due to family rejection (Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2009), bullying, harassment, and violence (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006; Taylor & Peter, 2011), lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (or trans), and queer (LGBTQ) youth experience greater risk for depression (Marshal et al., 2011; Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, & Azrael, 2009), substance abuse (Goldbach, Tanner-Smith, Bagwell, & Dunlap, 2014), and suicidal ideation (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2007; Pompili et al., 2014) than the general youth population. Past research that documented risk and vulnerabilities has significantly raised public awareness of the extensive service needs among LGBTQ youth (Russell, 2005; Wells et al., 2013). Research focused solely on risk and vulnerabilities, however, might not sufficiently provide solutions to the adversities LGBTQ youth face. Resilience, defined as “dynamic processes encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity” (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000, p. 543), offers a promising, alternative framework to risk-focused research. Resilience research is designed to identify factors and processes that can alleviate risk and/or promote the wellbeing among youth (Masten, 2014) and has the promise to provide social workers and other service providers with research-informed knowledge on effective prevention and intervention.

While resilience was historically defined as an individual’s capacity and skills, the advancement of resilience research in the last few decades has contributed to the current understanding of resilience as a social ecological process (Luthar et al., 2000; Ungar, 2011). This article employs the social ecological framework of resilience, a theory about general youth resilience proposed by Ungar (2011, 2012). This theoretical framework posits the following two major principles: (1) resilience depends not only on individuals’ capacity to navigate themselves to wellbeing but also on the capacity of their social ecologies to provide them with resilience-
promoting resources; and (2) these resilience-promoting resources are often population-specific and context-dependent and there might be resilience processes unique to each socio-cultural community. The social ecological framework of resilience is particularly relevant for social workers, who are trained to work with clients within the context of their social environments, including families, communities, and larger social structures. To address the paucity of practice frameworks that focus on resilience development among LGBTQ youth, this article suggests the relevance and application of the social ecological framework of resilience (Ungar, 2011, 2012) to social work practice with LGBTQ youth. Results of the *Theorizing Pathways to Resilience among LGBTQ Youth* study, along with other literature on LGBTQ youth (e.g., Craig, 2012; Crisp & McCave, 2007; Ryan, 2010), are used to specify elements in applying the social ecological framework of resilience to working with LGBTQ youth. The case of Alex, a 20-year-old trans youth, will be discussed to inform interventions that can be employed across the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of social work practice.

**Literature Review**

In the past decade, scholars have proposed important conceptual frameworks for social work practice with LGBTQ youth (e.g., Crisp & McCave, 2007; Craig, 2012; Ryan, 2010). Although some did not explicate the theoretical underpinnings for their frameworks, literature on social work practice with LGBTQ youth can be broadly categorized under the following three theoretical principles: (1) cultural competency, (2) strengths perspective, and (3) person-in-environment (PIE). It should be noted that some authors employed more than one of these three theories. For instance, some of the PIE principles were often implicated in how some authors discussed their practice frameworks theoretically grounded in cultural competency or the strengths perspective. In order to explicate the contributions of each theory to social work
practice with LGBTQ youth, however, I will highlight one predominant theoretical underpinning in each framework discussed in this literature review.

**Working with LGBTQ Youth from a Cultural Competency Framework**

In response to the rapid changes in client demographics, social work practice and education communities in the 1990s recognized the importance of cultural competency (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2008; National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2007), “the process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures… and other diversity factors in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities” (NASW, 2007, pp. 12-13). Crisp and colleagues (e.g., Crisp & McCave, 2007; Van Den Bergh & Crisp, 2004) proposed principles for working with lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) youth from a cultural competency framework. Their “gay affirmative model” consists of knowledge, attitudes, and skills (Crisp & McCave, 2007). It suggests that social workers develop population-specific knowledge (e.g., terminologies, community history), theories, and resources pertinent to LGB populations. This model also encourages social workers to critically reflect on their own attitudes, biases, and prejudice about non-heterosexuality. This model stresses workers’ development and utility of specialized practice skills, such as assessing youths’ sexual orientation and degree of being “out,” assisting youths’ coming out, and using LGB-specific resources. Collazo, Austin, and Craig (2013) proposed a similar framework for working with trans people. Although not strictly focused on youth, these authors’ contribution lies in their explicit focus on trans people, an often-neglected sub-population in LGBTQ research and practice. These authors offered population-specific knowledge about trans people on unique stressors (e.g., prevalence of violence) and specific treatment needs (e.g., gender transition). Furthermore, the authors detailed practice
recommendations for assisting trans clients in navigating medical, legal, and social systems, such as affirming the client’s gender and advocating for the rights of the client.

*Working with LGBTQ Youth from a Strengths Perspective*

The strengths perspective (Saleebey, 1996), a core principle of social work practice, encourages social workers to recognize what is beyond the clients’ problems, namely their strengths. Saleebey (1992) published the first edition of *the Strengths Perspective in Social Work Practice* in the early 1990s to propose a framework alternative to the previous practice models focused primarily on individual pathologies (e.g., psychoanalytic, diagnostic schools). The strengths perspective is grounded in the assumption that all people have “capacities, talents, competencies, possibilities, visions, values, and hopes” (Saleebey, 1996, p. 297). According to this perspective, social workers leverage the clients’ strengths, which consist of traits, talents, and resources, to cope effectively with their experiences of trauma and/or oppression (Saleebey, 1996). Although resilience is often used interchangeably with the strengths perspective, there are some nuanced differences. The social ecological framework of resilience (Ungar, 2011, 2012) places simultaneous foci on both youths’ capacity and skills, and their external resources in facilitating positive youth development. The strengths perspective, on the other hand, focuses primarily on the client’s coping capacity and adaptive skills and does not always point to how certain external resources can be used in assisting clients. Furthermore, the strength perspective was originally designed for the micro- and mezzo-level interventions, and its implications for macro practice remain unknown.

Craig and colleagues applied the strengths perspective to case management (Craig, 2012; Craig, McInroy, Austin, Smith, & Engle, 2012) and group work (Craig, 2013) with LGBTQ youth. Consistent with the strengths perspective (Saleebey, 1996), workers in these models
stressed the centrality of youths’ right to self-determination and viewed youth as the experts of their own lives. In so doing, they encouraged youth to reflect on and identify their strengths, such as communication skills, artistic talent, and having supportive peers and adults. In case management (Craig, 2012), workers engaged youth to leverage their existing strengths to develop care plans (e.g., linking youth to specific services) and help achieve goals. Group work was similarly designed to help youth to recognize their existing strengths and further develop coping skills to navigate challenges (Craig, 2013). While cultural competency emphasizes knowledge, attitudes, and skills relevant to LGBTQ youth as an aggregate social group, the strengths perspective additionally brings social workers’ attention to youths’ unique individual voices, experiences, and existing assets and resources.

*Working with LGBTQ Youth from a Person-in-Environment Perspective*

As exemplified in the aforementioned practice frameworks theoretically grounded in cultural competency and the strengths perspective, historically social workers had primarily engaged LGBTQ youth as individual clients and sought to enhance their individual capacities to cope with difficulties. More recently, social workers have begun to fully embrace the person-in-environment (PIE) perspective, one of the most significant practice principles in the history of social work (Germain & Gitterman, 1980), by placing a greater emphasis on intervening with youths’ social environments. PIE posits that people can only be understood within the contexts of their social environments, such as families, schools, and communities. The PIE has long guided social workers to maximize the fit between the clients and the environment by not only helping them to cope effectively within the current conditions of the environment but also enhancing the quality of their social environments (Germain & Gitterman, 1980).

In the *Family Acceptance Project*, Ryan and her team (Ryan, 2010; Ryan, Russell,
Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010) researched the important role that families can play in mitigating risk and enhancing the wellbeing of LGBTQ youth. This community-based action research project engaged and assisted families in accepting their children’s LGBTQ identities. This research team also developed empirically grounded resources (e.g., information sheet about the importance of family acceptance in multiple languages) for families and service providers to assist culturally diverse families of LGBTQ children. In his qualitative study with families of lesbian and gay (LG) children, LaSala (2010) developed practice guidelines for engaging families who were adjusting to their LG children’s coming out. He identified stages of family adjustment or acceptance of LG children and suggested key issues that might arise in working with LGBTQ youth as well as their families. Lev (2004) proposed similar practice guidelines for working with families of trans youth. These practice frameworks informed by the PIE perspective have contributed to shifting the practice paradigm from engaging individual LGBTQ youth as the primary focus of intervention to also engaging their families as an important resource for youth.

The practice guidelines outlined by Morrow (2004) were among the first frameworks that attended to the ecological systems beyond families in working with LGBTQ youth. Although her work was grounded in the rather limited, mostly conceptual, literature available at that time, the suggested interventions included engaging both youth as individuals clients (assess LGBTQ identity development, assess the degree of being “out,” assess for safety, provide LGBTQ-specific psychoeducation, offer LGBTQ affirmative working relationships) and their surrounding ecological systems (advocate for LGBTQ-specific services, safer schools, and legal protection).
Theorizing Pathways to Resilience among LGBTQ Youth Project

Using grounded theory (GT) methodologies (Charmaz, 2006), I conducted a study in Toronto, Canada to advance a conceptual understanding of resilience among LGBTQ youth. This study (herein “the GT study”) used in-depth interviews with service providers (n = 16) and racially diverse “resilient” LGBTQ youth ages 16 to 24 (n = 19). Youth who were “doing well in the face of significant adversity” were nominated by service providers and/or youth for study participation. Details of methodology, sample and results can be found elsewhere (Chapters 2 and 3). The study findings suggested that LGBTQ youth faced adversities that were both general to all adolescents (e.g., child abuse, poverty) and unique to being LGBTQ (e.g., LGBTQ-specific oppression, family rejection for being LGBTQ). Despite the legal rights and protection provided to LGBTQ Canadians, LGBTQ youth remained vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion (e.g., harassment, discrimination, violence, silencing of LGBTQ topics) across home, school, and community settings. Resilient LGBTQ youth, however, navigated their way to wellbeing by employing the following five resilience processes:

- **Navigating safety across contexts**— Facing anti-LGBTQ marginalization and exclusion, resilient LGBTQ youth examined their social contexts and assessed their own physical and emotional safety level in each context. Youth often accessed services designed for LGBTQ youth as a re-charging station to navigate other hostile social contexts.

- **Asserting personal agency**— In the face of control and abuse from others about their LGBTQ identities, resilient LGBTQ youth capitalized on their personal agency by focusing on their own needs, limitations, and future visions and took ownership in making their own life decisions.
Seeking and cultivating meaningful relationships—Experiencing rejection of their LGBTQ identities from others (e.g., peers, families) and concomitant pain, resilient LGBTQ youth sought and cultivated relationships (1) with adults and/or peers who have a shared experience of being and living as LGBTQ and (2) with others, LGBTQ or not, who actively supported them through physical and/or emotional resources.

Un-silencing social identities—Resilient LGBTQ youth turned their previous experience of having their social identities silenced into actively seeking out resources (e.g., social media) to un-silence and embrace these marginal social identities (e.g., LGBTQ, race).

Engaging in collective healing and action—Upon experiencing anti-LGBTQ discrimination in social institutions, resilient LGBTQ youth accessed relevant knowledge to conceptualize their individual challenges as a result of a larger social oppression against LGBTQ people. Some engaged in supporting LGBTQ peers as a healing process (e.g., volunteerism), while others engaged in larger social action (e.g., activism).

Although all five processes played roles in facilitating LGBTQ youths’ wellbeing, the degree to which and the ways in which youth made use of each process varied. These five processes therefore should be flexibly understood as general guidelines, rather than a fixed model, stressing that LGBTQ youth account for their individual circumstances and social contexts to personalize their own pathways to resilience.

Case of Alex: Conceptualizing Resilience as a Social Ecological Process

Results of the GT study signified that LGBTQ youths’ resilience comprised of more than individual-level assets and skills. To show a concrete example of resilience as a social ecological process and the application of the social ecological framework of resilience (Ungar, 2011, 2012) for working with LGBTQ youth, I will discuss the case of Alex (a pseudonym), a resilient trans
youth who was nominated for the GT study. Details in this case study have been altered to address ethical concerns around confidentiality in that trans youth participants may be easily identified and this could pose serious risk to them. Modified details in this case study were drawn from several other youth cases and interview data from the GT study to ensure that the case study represents social contexts, lived experiences, and resilience processes among trans and/or racialized youth.

Alex is a 20-year-old trans male (i.e., assigned female gender at birth) of Chinese descent currently living with a roommate. When Alex first came out as lesbian at age 15, his Chinese immigrant parents showed moderate acceptance for their only child. While his parents did not want Alex to come out to other relatives who live in Hong Kong, they reluctantly agreed to meet his girlfriend. When one of his childhood friends revealed Alex’s trans identity on a social media site without his consent, however, Alex became the target of cyber and relational bullying in school. His parents soon found out about his trans identity and quickly became controlling of his gender expression. Alex was not allowed to cut his hair short or wear masculine clothes, and his parents restricted his internet use, which he used primarily to connect with other LGBTQ peers. He felt as though he had no choice but to leave home at age 17. He also did not feel safe enough to continue attending school despite his excellent grades. Devastated by the rejection from his family with whom he was very close as a child, Alex “couch surfed” at friends’, occasionally accessed shelters, and was on public assistance for a year. In shelters, where Alex was placed in the female unit because of frequent physical and sexual violence in the male unit, staff and residents showed discomfort and occasional hostility to Alex, especially when he accessed bathrooms and the shower. Alex experienced similarly difficult experiences within the healthcare system, whereby his doctors repeatedly scrutinized his gender. Alex had to prove his male
gender identification and need for medical (e.g., hormone treatment) and legal (e.g., changes with name and gender) transitions over and over. For instance, although the issue pertained to gender, his doctors persistently asked Alex questions about his sexual attraction and experiences. Alex reported that the doctors thought that Alex could not be a female-to-male transgender especially because he was not exclusively attracted to females. Alex also had to repeatedly assert himself to convince the doctors that his depression was situational and closely related to his experiences of family and peer rejection and not being able to live as a male.

Prior to family rejection and school bullying, Alex had met local LGBTQ peers through social media sites, with whom he had begun to spend time in an LGBTQ youth drop-in program. Upon leaving his family and school, Alex continued to experience harassment and discrimination in the shelter, employment, and healthcare systems. When he lived in a shelter, Alex would attend the LGBTQ drop-in space almost every day, which allowed him to feel more relaxed and safer in general. Alex noted that he could count on drop-in staff for intervening when peers did not respect his male pronoun or made transphobic or racist comments. Alex also connected with other resources available in the community through drop-in staff. With a therapist, who has worked many years within LGBTQ communities, Alex processed the emotional pain associated with his experiences with his family and bullying and more recently his experiences with shelter, employment and healthcare systems. Alex appreciated his therapist’s respect for his initial hesitancy to open up especially after rejection by those with whom he had close relationship. Six months ago, Alex’s mother called and expressed an interest in re-connecting with him. Therapy provided Alex with a space in which he could identify and articulate his own needs and visions about his family relationships. Alex ultimately decided to re-connect with his family within the boundaries he established for future contacts. Alex has recently returned to school after his
therapist recommended an alternative school, which strives for an inclusive learning environment. The LGBTQ mentorship program allowed Alex to connect for the first time with an adult trans man. Alex received guidance from his mentor through their weekly coffee meetings about navigating healthcare and other systems and negotiating for his own safety in communities. Having a mentor who has firsthand experienced similar challenges and has been able to live a relatively healthy life as an adult trans man allowed Alex to envision a positive future for himself. More recently, the LGBTQ community of color has become important for Alex. While his therapist and mentor, who are both white, remained vital in his life, Alex recognized their limitations in fully understanding his experiences with racism especially within the LGBTQ communities. His friendship with other LGBTQ youth of color has served an important strategy in coping with racism. Alex currently broadcasts his life story through a social media site in an effort to offer support for other LGBTQ youth of color.

**Working with LGBTQ Youth from the Social Ecological Framework of Resilience**

Contrary to the early conceptualization of resilience as one’s individual assets and skills (Anthony, 1974), the story of Alex exemplifies that it likely takes “a village” of multi-level support and resources to build resilience among LGBTQ youth. Ungar’s social ecological framework of resilience (2011, 2012) signals social workers’ dual foci on both engaging youth and mobilizing their social environments as key vehicles to improving the odds for positive youth development. In this section, results of the GT study, along with other literature, will be used to specify elements of the social ecological framework of resilience in working with LGBTQ youth. These practice implications also build on the important contributions of the theoretical principles that have guided social work practice with LGBTQ youth, namely cultural competence (knowledge, values, and skills relevant to youths’ socio-cultural contexts as
LGBTQ), the strengths perspective (making use of LGBTQ youths’ personal agency, assets and resources), and the PIE (dual foci on LGBTQ youth and their surrounding systems). The social ecological framework of resilience, however, is designed to more clearly point to purposes and goals for social workers, which are to build greater capacity among youth and their social ecologies in mitigating risk and promoting the wellbeing of LGBTQ youth. It offers social workers a conceptual framework that focuses on promoting resilience among LGBTQ youth across the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice. Specifically, this framework guides social workers to (1) enhance LGBTQ youths’ capacity to navigate challenges through micro practice, (2) promote the capacity of key resources to better support LGBTQ youth through mezzo practice, and (3) prevent system-level oppression that poses risks to LGBTQ youth through macro practice (see Table 1 for summaries of the framework).

Promoting Social Ecological Resilience of LGBTQ Youth in Micro Practice

The purpose of micro practice (i.e., working with individuals) informed by the social ecological framework of resilience (Ungar, 2011, 2012) is to help strengthen the capacity of youth to navigate their way to wellbeing in the face of adversity. Results of the GT study, along with other literature (e.g., Crisp & McCave, 2007; Saleebey, 1996), point to the following areas in engaging LGBTQ youth at the micro level: (1) assist youth in cultivating skills to assess and navigate safety across contexts, (2) capitalize on youths’ personal agency in identifying needs and accessing helpful resources, and (3) support youths’ efforts in navigating experiences of oppression related to their LGBTQ and other intersecting social identities.

Hostile social environments might threaten the physical and emotional safety of many LGBTQ youth (e.g., Ryan et al., 2009), as exemplified in the case study of Alex. While youth who experience harassment and violence in schools are more likely to report risk outcomes such
as suicide (Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2011), one of the helpful resources for Alex’s wellbeing was his access to safer spaces, namely individuals and physical environments that recognize the unique challenges facing LGBTQ youth and affirm their gender and sexual diversity (Fetner, Elafros, Bortolin, & Drechsler, 2012). Alex had access to several safer spaces, including the LGBTQ drop-in, friendship with LGBTQ peers, and counseling and mentorship relationships. The physical and psychological safety afforded, even temporarily, through these safer spaces provided Alex with emotional fuel to navigate his other, more hostile social environments. Alex’s therapist demonstrated elements of cultural competence (Crisp & McCave, 2007) through her knowledge of the LGBTQ population, affirming attitudes towards Alex’s trans identity, and skills to assist Alex in navigating safety and other challenges unique to trans youth. Furthermore, Alex’s mentor built on his own lived experience as a trans man and provided guidance for how Alex might navigate safety-related concerns. Most youth outside urban contexts, however, do not have easy access to safer spaces like Alex did. When such resources are unavailable, social workers can focus instead on developing a LGBTQ affirmative therapeutic relationship that can function as one safer space, even for one hour a week, for youth. In so doing, social workers can assist LGBTQ youth in developing skills to assess and navigate differential levels of safety across contexts.

Consistent with the strengths perspective (Saleebey, 1996), the story of Alex stresses the importance of youths’ personal agency in identifying needs and goals and in making life decisions. Alex’s therapist supported his personal agency in deciding whether to re-connect with his family and assisted him in exploring and deciding to what extent he would re-connect with them. While offering resources for youth is an essential element of micro practice, the story of Alex suggests that social workers offer resources based on youths’ individual needs and assist
youth in accessing these resources of their own accord. Alex located and accessed several resources to meet his needs and further his goals within his relationships with drop-in staff, his therapist, and his mentor. While accessing an alternative school, for instance, offered Alex a positive educational experience, what was equally meaningful was that he identified his own needs and goals (i.e., attend university) and made the decision to access this particular resource.

In addition, it is essential for social workers to support youth in developing positive LGBTQ and other social identities and navigating experiences of oppression. For Alex, his relationships with his mentor and LGBTQ peers of color offered immense opportunities to have his multiple identities reflected and validated. These relationships also allowed Alex to build skills in navigating his experiences of oppression (e.g., transphobia, racism). Recognizing that many LGBTQ youth in other geographic areas likely do not readily have access to relevant resources, social workers might carry greater responsibilities to support youth. Workers can build upon the cultural competency framework (e.g., Crisp & McCave, 2007) and offer a therapeutic space in which youths’ marginalized social identities—not just their LGBTQ identities but also other relevant social identities (e.g., gender, race, class) that impact their everyday lives—are accepted and embraced, while youths’ experiences of oppression are fully acknowledged and attended to. Workers are especially encouraged to use their reflective capacity to examine their own social locations (e.g., gender, sexuality, race) to attend to the “cross-cultural” dynamics and power differentials inherent in any professional relationship (Bogo, Tsang, & Lee, 2011; Mandell, 2007). Finally, workers, especially in the geographic contexts that offer few LGBTQ-specific resources, might consider engaging youth in using social media (Craig & McInroy, 2014) to explore their LGBTQ identities, access relevant knowledge, and develop appropriate parameters for safely developing a support system with other LGBTQ youth and adults online.
Promoting Social Ecological Resilience of LGBTQ Youth in Mezzo Practice

The purpose of mezzo practice informed by the social ecological framework of resilience (Ungar, 2011, 2012) is to build capacity of the family, school, and community-level resources, as well as social services to better support youth. In applying this framework to working with LGBTQ youth, results of the GT study and other relevant literature (e.g., LaSala, 2010; Wagaman, 2014) call on social workers to engage (1) families of LGBTQ youth and (2) teachers, peers, and other community-level resources in building or restoring their capacities to support youth, and (3) build greater capacity among social service agencies to offer LGBTQ affirmative services.

The story of Alex offers insight into key resilience-promoting mezzo systems for LGBTQ youth. Despite his relatively positive early childhood, Alex’s mezzo systems became sources of stress upon his coming-out. LaSala’s work (2010) shows that, despite their initial rejection, families of LGBTQ youth have the potential to restore their capacity to function as a powerful support system for youth. As exemplified in his therapist’s engagement with Alex regarding his recent family reunification, social workers should assess how and to what extent family work can be incorporated to benefit the youth. Similarly, workers, especially in schools, can engage teachers and peer groups as potentially resilience-promoting resources. Alex experienced comfort in knowing that staff would interrupt anti-LGBTQ comments in the drop-in program. Workers can play a key role in facilitating a positive school climate by regularly offering training for teachers and students on detecting and interrupting bullying, harassment and violence against LGBTQ students (Kosciw, Bartkiewicz, & Greytak, 2012). Along with the offering of a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), which is known to contribute to reduced suicide risk (Saewyc, Konishi, Rose, & Homma, 2014) and enhancement of social and emotional wellbeing (Hatzenbuehler,
Birkett, Van Wagenen, & Meyer, 2014) and connection (St. John et al., 2014) among LGBTQ youth, advocating for school policies that explicitly prohibit anti-LGBTQ harassment and discrimination (Russell, Kosciw, Horn, & Saewyc, 2010; Saewyc et al., 2014) is a vital task for social workers in mezzo practice.

In addition to family- and school-level support, the wellbeing of LGBTQ youth can also be promoted or restored through community-level resources. Consistent with empirical evidence of mentorship programs, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, on general youth development (e.g., Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1995; De Wit et al., 2007), Alex’s story shows that LGBTQ mentors, who reflect youths’ social identities and have had similar life experiences, have the potential to offer youth relevant and meaningful guidance and resources, as documented by other researchers (Davis, Saltzburg, & Locke, 2009; Wagaman, 2014). Furthermore, consistent with previous research on youth of color (Chan, Ou, & Reynolds, 2014) and LGBTQ youth (Singh, 2012; Wagaman, 2014), the story of Alex shows that involvement in activism, leadership and other types of civic engagement can play a role in positive youth development. Social workers can play a role not only in offering support within these community-level resources but also engaging youth in shaping service provision of such resources (Wagaman, 2014).

Finally, it is important to note that most youth in North America do not live in a LGBTQ resource-affluent region, and general social services are not typically well-equipped to serve LGBTQ youth (Davis, Saltzburg, & Locke, 2010). Service provider participants of the GT study indicated that in the areas with few to no LGBTQ resources available, responsibilities were often laid on a few committed workers to go out of their way to start services for LGBTQ youth. Collaborating with LGBTQ-specific agencies, offering relevant training (e.g., safe space training) for staff, and forming an equity committee exemplify ways in which workers can seek
to build greater capacity within these agencies to serve LGBTQ youth more competently. Social work managers and administrators can further facilitate these efforts by adopting an institutional-level commitment to providing equitable services for LGBTQ and other marginalized youth.

*Promoting Social Ecological Resilience of LGBTQ Youth in Macro Practice*

The social ecological framework of resilience (Ungar, 2011, 2012) posits that social environments play an essential role in facilitating or hindering positive youth development. Social policies that marginalize LGBTQ people can have detrimental impacts on the general social and cultural climates of LGBTQ youth. Past U.S.-based research (Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008), for instance, showed that LGBTQ youth living in the states that legally prohibit school staff from positively portraying LGBTQ people (e.g., “no promo homo” laws in Arizona) were less likely to report having access to LGBTQ-specific resources discussed earlier in this paper (e.g., GSA, anti-bullying policy) or effective support and interventions from school staff when harassment or assault occurred. Macro-level social work practice informed by the social ecological framework of resilience may therefore involve advocating for necessary policy and structural changes to prevent or minimize system-level oppression that poses risks to LGBTQ youth. In applying this framework that conceptualizes resilience as context-specific (Ungar, 2011, 2012), it should be stressed that the resilience of Alex be understood within his local social and political climates relevant to LGBTQ people. Alex lives in Ontario, Canada, where legal rights are in place to protect trans people from discrimination (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2014). Alex’s ultimate access to a safer school was likely facilitated by the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009), which mandates all schools to strive to promote a safer school climate for all students. Furthermore, Toronto supports the offering of one of the only LGBTQ mentorship programs in North America, through
which Alex was matched with a trans male mentor. It is important to note, however, that these macro-level resources are often not available for LGBTQ youth living in other geographic areas in North America or elsewhere.

Despite general political advancements for the rights of LGBTQ people in the past decade (i.e., marriage equality), harassment and violence remain prevalent in the lives of many LGBTQ youth across North America (Saewyc, Konishi, Poon, & Smith, 2011; Taylor & Peter, 2011). This points to a great need for social services that can meet the unique needs among LGBTQ youth (Wells et al., 2013). Alex’s experience, for instance, supports the findings of previous research (Seelman, 2014) on an urgent need for safer, all gender shelters and bathrooms for trans youth. Furthermore, even in LGBTQ resource affluent geographic areas, such as Toronto, social, economic, and political climates are often fragile and can impact the availability of LGBTQ-specific services and youths’ access to them. It is therefore important for social workers to become involved in professional organizations (e.g., Canadian Association of Social Workers [CASW], NASW) and engage in advocacy to ensure that policymakers and other stakeholders are educated about the unique and eminent needs of LGBTQ youth, and that the funding for LGBTQ services remains a priority. Finally, what is unique about social work is our historical commitment to social justice (CASW, 2005; NASW, 2008). Growing up as LGBTQ will remain challenging for many youth until we live in an inclusive and equitable society. Social workers’ continued commitment to eradicating homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of oppression remains critical.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

In this article, I have proposed social work practice with LGBTQ youth informed by the social ecological framework of resilience (Ungar, 2011, 2012). Using the case study of Alex as
an example, the application of this framework suggests that resilience requires more than one’s individual-level assets and skills; it likely takes a village of people, resources, and LGBTQ affirmative climates to facilitate resilience among LGBTQ youth. Results of the GT study, along with other relevant literature on LGBTQ youth (e.g., cultural competency, PIE, other empirical studies), were used to specify elements of this framework conducive to social work practice with LGBTQ youth across the micro, mezzo, and macro domains (summarized in Table 1). These multi-level social work interventions include (1) enhancing LGBTQ youths’ capacity to navigate challenges through micro practice, (2) promoting the capacity of key resources to better support LGBTQ youth through mezzo practice, and (3) preventing system-level oppression that poses risks to LGBTQ youth through macro practice.

Given the centrality of PIE and social justice in our profession (NASW, 2008), social workers are well positioned to adopt this practice framework. This framework suggests that, contrary to social work’s historical tension between direct and indirect practice (Austin, Coombs, & Barr, 2005), practices at micro, mezzo, and macro levels all play essential roles in promoting resilience among LGBTQ youth. Recognizing a need for specialized knowledge and skills in each of the practice domains (e.g., clinical practice), I do not argue that each worker must engage in all practice domains (micro, mezzo, macro) simultaneously when adopting this practice framework. Rather, in this framework, social workers across different practice domains might be more effective in collaborating with each other and other allied professionals to offer more comprehensive, multi-level interventions for these marginalized youth. Furthermore, the suggested framework does not signify fixed guidelines for working with all LGBTQ youth. Rather, it should be viewed as a heuristic framework that stresses workers’ role in understanding youths’ individual circumstances and social contexts and assisting youth in carving out their own
personalized pathways to resilience. Workers therefore must also use general social work competencies (e.g., interviewing skills, advanced clinical knowledge and skills, reflective practice, policy knowledge) in assisting youth. Suggested micro-level interventions in this framework, for instance, can be effectively implemented only when the social worker accounts for his/her unique therapeutic, relational dynamics with each client.

Furthermore, the framework provided supports social workers’ continued commitment to building knowledge relevant to LGBTQ youth. A survey study in the U.S. and Canada (Fredriksen-Goldsen, Woodford, Luke, & Gutierrez, 2011) found that while overall faculty were supportive of integrating LGBTQ content in social work education, significant gaps remained in the areas of institutional oppressions faced by LGBTQ people (e.g., heterosexism, transphobia) and trans identities. Another recent Canadian study (McInroy, Craig, & Austin, 2014) specified social work students’ perceived scarcity of readings and case studies on trans people. These studies highlight the greater responsibilities of schools of social work in offering relevant education to better prepare graduates for ethical and competent practice with LGBTQ youth.

Finally, resilience of LGBTQ youth remains a burgeoning area of research. Suggested interventions are grounded in rather limited existing knowledge on resilience factors and processes among LGBTQ youth. There is little to no empirical knowledge available that signifies effective timing for such interventions (e.g., when to offer family intervention). Further research on resilience and LGBTQ youth remains essential and can only strengthen the suggested framework. Despite these limitations, this article offers a conceptual framework for multi-level social work practice that focuses on mitigating risk and promoting the wellbeing among LGBTQ youth.
### Table 1

Social Ecological Framework of Resilience in Working with LGBTQ Youth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scope of Practice</th>
<th>Purpose of Social Workers</th>
<th>Tasks of Social Workers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Micro Practice:</strong> Working with individuals</td>
<td>To promote the capacity of LGBTQ youth to navigate their ways to wellbeing in the face of adversity</td>
<td>○ Assist youth in cultivating skills to assess and navigate safety across contexts ○ Empower youth to make use of their personal agency in identifying needs and goals and making life decisions ○ Support youth in navigating oppression related to their LGBTQ and other marginal social identities</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mezzo Practice:</strong> Working with families, schools, and other relevant systems</td>
<td>To build or restore capacity among families, schools, and other relevant resources to better support LGBTQ youth</td>
<td>○ Engage families of LGBTQ youth, teachers, peer, and other community groups in building or restoring their capacity to support youth ○ Engage social service agencies to build greater capacity to offer affirmative services to LGBTQ youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Macro Practice:</strong> Working with social institutions and systems</td>
<td>To advocate for relevant social and policy-level changes to prevent system-level oppression that poses risks to LGBTQ youth</td>
<td>○ Advocate for funding for relevant resources for LGBTQ youth ○ Advocate for legal rights and protection for LGBTQ people ○ Engage in social action to eradicate oppression against LGBTQ people</td>
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CHAPTER 5

Dissertation Conclusion

In a series of three papers, this dissertation aimed to advance the conceptual understanding of resilience among LGBTQ youth. This dissertation reported the results and implications of the grounded theory (GT) study titled *Theorizing Pathways to Resilience among LGBTQ Youth*. Using rigorous GT coding methods (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and the social ecological theory of resilience (Ungar, 2011, 2012) as a sensitizing concept (Bowen, 2006), I conducted and analyzed a total of 35 in-depth interviews with service providers (SP) \((n = 16)\) and resilient LGBTQ youth \((n = 19)\). In the first paper (Chapter 2: *Extraordinary acts to “show up”: Conceptualizing resilience of LGBTQ youth*), I reported how LGBTQ youth and SP participants understood the construct of resilience and the associated concepts (i.e., adversity, positive adaptation). The second paper (Chapter 3: *Paving pathways through the pain: A grounded theory of resilience among LGBTQ youth*) reported five resilience processes that emerged in both SP and youth data, which signified how LGBTQ youth might make use of a variety of intrapsychic, interpersonal, and physical resources to navigate their way to wellbeing. In the third paper (Chapter 4: *It takes a village: Applying a social ecological framework of resilience in working with LGBTQ youth*), I presented practice implications from the GT study and other relevant literature to illustrate the application of the social ecological theory of resilience (Ungar, 2011) as a promising framework for working with LGBTQ youth.

Chapters 2 and 3, which reported the main findings of the GT study, were designed to fill some of the gaps identified in the current literature on LGBTQ youth and their resilience. Chapter 2 addressed the paucity of robust conceptualization of resilience and its related constructs in the existing literature on LGBTQ youth. A study of resilience requires the presence of both adversity and positive adaptation (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005), and seminal researchers
on youth resilience generally defined and explained a common adversity shared by the study samples, such as living in poverty or with parental mental illness (e.g., Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984; Werner & Smith, 1982). A conceptualization of adversity, however, was often missing in resilience studies on LGBTQ youth. Chapter 2 sought to address this gap by exploring how and why being LGBTQ might place youth at a greater risk for negative psychosocial outcomes. This paper illuminated how LGBTQ youth are subject to both general (to all youth) and unique (to LGBTQ youth) adversities. In spite of much advancement in the social, cultural, and political landscapes of LGBTQ people in Canada, such as legislations on marriage equality (Woodford, Newman, Brotman, & Ryan, 2010) and human rights and protection (e.g., Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2014), we appear to continue to live in hetero-cis-normative social structures, language, and everyday practices that marginalize and exclude those who do not fit within the cisgender and heterosexual norms. The paper suggested that we have yet to fully achieve the kind of society that fully accepts and embraces sexual and gender diversity, and being LGBTQ continues to place youth on the margins. While normative definitions of health and wellbeing (e.g., academic success) are often used to measure positive adaptation (i.e., “doing well”) in studying youth resilience in general (Masten, 2014), participants in this study endorsed a context-dependent understanding of positive adaptation. It was suggested that positive adaptation among LGBTQ youth be recognized within the context of their everyday experiences of marginalization (i.e., “doing well” while “still struggling” and “battling through every day”).

Chapter 3 addressed the dearth of literature on resilience processes among LGBTQ youth. Using secondary data analysis of population-based datasets (e.g., Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006; Saewyc et al., 2009), previous researchers have significantly advanced our understanding of resilience resources in the lives of LGBTQ youth. Most of such quantitative studies, however,
did not account for the capacity (e.g., personal agency, internal asset and skills) of youth as a contributing element to their resilience development. When researchers included the capacity of youth in their studies, they used it only as a measure of youths’ positive health outcomes (e.g., Anderson, 1998; Bauermeister et al. 2010). Chapter 3 addressed these research gaps by reporting five resilience processes of how LGBTQ youth might actively engage a variety of resources to navigate their way to wellbeing. The core category of *paving pathways through the pain* showed how resilient LGBTQ youth turned their experiences of emotional pain into an opportunity for survival and growth. While previous resilience research on LGBTQ youth focused largely on identifying resources external to youth, such as social support (e.g., Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006), Chapter 3 showed that resilience extends beyond a cluster of factors; it is a process that occurs when youth intentionally make use of their internal capacity and resources (e.g., personal agency) as well as a variety of external resources made available to them (e.g., relationships with others, social services).

Each of these unique contributions of the first two papers builds on and informs one another. First, these two papers together underscore the connection between personal experience and larger social structures. While Chapter 2 conceptualized structural bases of adversities (i.e., hetero-cis-normativity), Chapter 3 suggested how such structurally-based adversities can have impacts on the everyday, personal lives of LGBTQ youth. Emotional pain emerged as the common thread (i.e., core category) across the five resilience processes in Chapter 3. Considering that hetero-cis-normativity (Bauer et al., 2009; Warner, 1993; Weiss, 2001) is embedded in our everyday language and practice, a certain level of emotional pain can be an expected part of the lives of LGBTQ youth. The results detailed in Chapter 3, however, show that resilient LGBTQ youth actively made use of various resources (i.e., both internal and
external) to navigate such structurally-based adversities. What the GT data used in these two papers do not directly address but imply is the importance of structural changes within our hetero-cis-normative practices for the wellbeing of LGBTQ youth. As suggested in Chapter 2, the adoption of gender neutral bathrooms is one concrete way to actualize such changes in hetero-cis-normative practices. Such structural changes in our everyday language and practices of hetero-cis-normativity can further assist LGBTQ youth in navigating adversities.

Furthermore, the results of Chapter 2 might explain how and why the results of Chapter 3 signified some resilience resources that are unique to LGBTQ youth. In Chapter 3, I reported that LGBTQ youth engaged both general (to all youth) and unique (to LGBTQ youth) resources to navigate their way to wellbeing. Unique resources articulated by the study participants included the access to safer spaces, relationships with LGBTQ adults and peers, the use of LGBTQ-specific social media sites, involvement with counterculture communities, and engagement in activism related to LGBTQ rights. It is plausible to hypothesize that LGBTQ youth historically and currently have had to find creative ways to resist against the structurally-based adversities articulated in Chapter 2. The results of these two papers indicate that until “ordinary” resources, such as families of origin and schools, are able to offer acceptance and affirmation of youths’ LGBTQ identities and can support their wellbeing, LGBTQ youth might likely continue to create and/or engage unique or rather unconventional resources as a part of their resilience processes. This signifies a great need for changes within the families, schools, communities, and social structures that comprise the social ecologies of LGBTQ youth (e.g., Goldstein, Collins, & Halder, 2007; Newman & Fantus, 2015; Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010).

Chapters 2 and 3 informed the implications for social work practice reported in Chapter 4. Chapter 2 conceptualized hetero-cis-normative social practices and structures (Bauer et al.,
as a shared adversity that might threaten the wellbeing of LGBTQ youth. Chapter 3, on the other hand, highlighted LGBTQ youths’ active negotiation with and resistance against these structurally-based adversities to carve out their pathways to resilience. Together, these papers informed Chapter 4, in which I suggested that the roles and tasks of social workers in facilitating the pathways to resilience among LGBTQ youth are to engage not only youth but also their social ecologies (e.g., family, school, community, policy). Along with other practice frameworks (i.e., cultural competency, strengths perspective, and the person-in-environment) and empirical studies, the results from Chapters 2 and 3 informed the relevance and application of the social ecological framework of resilience (Ungar, 2011, 2012) to social work practice with LGBTQ youth. In this paper, I stressed the need for social work interventions across the micro, mezzo, and macro domains.

Across all three papers, I demonstrated the applicability of the social ecological framework of resilience (Ungar, 2011, 2012) to further our understanding of LGBTQ youth. I used the social ecological framework of resilience (Ungar, 2011, 2012) as a sensitizing concept (Bowen, 2006; Charmaz, 2006) in analyzing the GT study data for Chapters 2 and 3. Specifically, this theory sensitized me to notice and explore the following two areas in the data: (1) the role of both youth and their social ecologies in resilience development, and (2) resilience-promoting resources and processes unique to LGBTQ youth. The hallmark of GT is the inductive analysis of the data grounded in the voices of study participants (Charmaz, 2006). While staying close to the data in my data analysis, the social ecological framework of resilience (Ungar, 2011, 2012) additionally signaled my attention to the social, cultural, and political contexts (i.e., social ecologies) of today’s LGBTQ youth in explicating the constructs of adversity and positive adaptation in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, the social ecological framework of resilience (Ungar,
2011, 2012) constantly reminded me of recognizing in the data the role of both youth and their surrounding social ecologies in the resilience processes of LGBTQ youth. The theory sensitized me to theorize the ways in which LGBTQ youth actively engaged in making use of various resources available and/or offered in their social ecologies. Additionally, the theory sensitized me to recognize the presence and functions of resources or processes that otherwise might not be considered as resilience-promoting (e.g., the role of Cosplay community in youths’ gender identity development). While the social ecological theory of resilience was used to explore the roles of youth, youths’ social ecologies, and unique resilience processes in analyzing the data inductively, findings from Chapters 2 and 3 subsequently provided empirical evidence to show resilience as a social ecological process. The social ecological framework of resilience was then used as a definitive concept (as opposed to a sensitizing concept) deductively to illuminate practice implications in Chapter 4.

In sum, the findings from this dissertation suggested the importance of conceptualizing resilience of LGBTQ youth as a context-dependent process contingent upon the social ecologies relevant to LGBTQ people. Chapters 2 and 3 provided empirical evidence that furthered the conceptual understanding of resilience among LGBTQ youth, while informing the relevance and application of the social ecological framework of resilience to social work practice with LGBTQ youth in Chapter 4. All three papers demonstrated that resilience of LGBTQ youth is a social ecological process that takes place within the interaction of the capacity of youth and the capacity of youths’ social ecologies to better support them.

**Study Limitations**

There are several limitations in this dissertation study. First, provided the sampling method employed in this study, it is important to note that the results of this study represent only
a small subset of the LGBTQ youth population at large. The results of this small-scale qualitative study are grounded in the experiences and social ecologies of LGBTQ youth in Toronto, the largest city in Canada. Although I intentionally conducted this study in one of the most LGBTQ resource affluent cities in Canada to study how youth access a wide range of resources to navigate their way to wellbeing, readers should note that participants in this study likely had access to resources, especially LGBTQ-specific services (e.g., safer space), which might not be readily available to youth in other Canadian cities or more rural areas. It is therefore plausible that the emergent resilience processes might not apply directly to LGBTQ youth who do not have easy access to LGBTQ-specific resources and might have to rely on other types of resources that were not emphasized by the youth participants in this study. Furthermore, this study used the “nomination” sampling method to identify LGBTQ youth who are “relatively doing well in the face of significant adversity.” While this sampling method was essential for the person-focused analysis (Masten, 2014) of youth resilience, the lack of explicit criteria for youth nomination might have resulted in a wide range of adversities and access to resilience resources among youth participants. This nomination strategy also precluded the study participation of LGBTQ youth who did not or chose not to engage local LGBTQ services. Furthermore, the sample did not include youth from certain sub-groups (e.g., only one trans female of any race and no white gay male participated). It is plausible that the definition of resilience, which emphasizes youths’ experiences of significant adversity, might have led to more youth nominations from historically marginalized sub-groups (e.g., racialized and/or trans youth) than others. On the other hand, the challenges associated with the recruitment of “resilient” trans female youth might be a reflection of immense transphobia (Marcellin, Scheim, Bauer, & Redman, 2013) and the barriers to service access reported by trans women (Bauer et al., 2009).
Accounting for these limitations associated with the study sample and sampling method, readers are encouraged to cautiously consider the transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the study results when researching or working with LGBTQ youth situated in social, cultural, and political contexts that are different from those of Toronto. Nonetheless, the inclusion of a number of participants from previously understudied sub-groups of LGBTQ youth, such as racialized LGBTQ youth and those who do not identify as cisgender (e.g., trans, gender queer), was a notable strength of this study.

Furthermore, this dissertation about the pathways to resilience focused mostly on LGBTQ youths’ individual- and community-level resources and had a less explicit focus on the influences of macro- or structural-level resources, such as social policies and climates relevant to LGBTQ people, on youth resilience. This is likely a reflection of how the study was designed. In this person-focused analysis (Masten, 2014) of resilient LGBTQ youth, I purposely constructed the research and interview questions to focus my attention on how youth actively made use of internal (e.g., personal agency) and external resources (e.g., relationships, social services). Although Paper 1 suggested how structurally-rooted oppression might pose threats to the wellbeing of LGBTQ youth (Chapter 2), the data collected from the interviews with direct service providers and youth did not allow me to account more explicitly for how macro- or structural-level resources, such as the inclusion of transgender identity in Ontario’s human rights code (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2014) or increased media representations of LGBTQ people, might facilitate the resilience development of LGBTQ youth. An additional sampling method, such as interviews with policymakers and youth advocates, might mitigate this limitation in future research.
In addition to the study design, this lack of explicit focus on the role of macro- and structural-level resources on youth resilience might reflect the theoretical framework used in this study. Emerged out of Ungar’s research on youth resilience across ethno-cultures in Canada (Ungar, Brown, Liebenberg, Cheung, & Levine, 2008) and elsewhere (Ungar et al., 2007), the social ecological framework of resilience (Ungar, 2011, 2012) was originally intended for the study of a specific “cultural group.” This theoretical framework sensitized me to view and study resilience of LGBTQ youth as a “shared” experience of this population. Although this framework allowed me to pay closer attention to the social, cultural, and political contexts of LGBTQ youth, the unit of analysis, however, remained on the individual-, interpersonal, and community-levels. The use of another theory from a critical paradigm, such as queer theory (Warner, 1993), might lead to a different study design conducive to examining the role of the macro- and structural-level resources on youth resilience.

Furthermore, while this dissertation suggests the overall applicability of the social ecological framework of resilience in studying LGBTQ youth as one collective group, LGBTQ youth are a diverse group in terms of sexuality, gender, race, and other intersecting social identities and locations. This theoretical framework, along with the nature of youth sample, limited my capacity to account for how adversities might impact diverse LGBTQ youth differently based on their social identities and locations and hence the ways in which they navigate their ways to wellbeing. The use of another theoretical framework, such as feminist intersectionality theory (Warner, 2008), might mitigate this limitation in the future and allow more room to account for the potential differences in the resilience processes among diverse LGBTQ youth.
Dissertation Implications for Social Work Practice and Education

Recognizing the limitations of the GT study, this three-paper dissertation offers several implications for social work practice and education. Overall, results of the GT study suggested the need for social workers’ simultaneous foci on the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice. Chapter 3, which detailed the ways in which resilient LGBTQ youth actively engaged various external resources, provided empirical support for how social workers in micro practice can assist LGBTQ youth in building greater capacity to navigate life challenges. Furthermore, Chapter 2, which illuminated the adversities that are often embedded in hetero-cis-normative social practices and structures, pointed to the importance of mezzo- and macro-level practices. In mezzo and macro practice, the role of social workers is to restore or build greater capacity of youths’ social ecologies to support the wellbeing of LGBTQ youth. As illustrated through the youth case study, Chapter 4 emphasized the importance of all three levels of social work practice (i.e., micro, mezzo, and macro) in promoting resilience among LGBTQ youth. In so doing, I suggested that LGBTQ youths’ pathways to resilience requires not only the capacity building of youth themselves, their families, schools, and communities but also the advancement of social policies that can promote the discourse and social climates of social justice and equity. Recently, the Trans PULSE project (e.g., Bauer et al., 2009), an Ontario-based study on trans people and their experiences in healthcare, provided an empirical basis for the successful inclusion of transgender identity in the Ontario Human Rights Code (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2014). Under this legislation, discrimination against trans people on the basis of their gender identities or expressions is considered a human rights violation in Ontario. This type of social policy relevant to the wellbeing of LGBTQ people, unfortunately, remains a rarity across North America. More research that can support social workers’ advocacy efforts is needed to seek
changes in our hetero-cis-normative discourse and practices and to ultimately advance the social climates relevant to LGBTQ youth.

Findings of this dissertation call on social workers to reclaim our original commitment to the ecological thinking in our practice and education. What makes social work practice theoretically distinct from other allied disciplines (e.g., medicine, psychology) is our historical focus on both the person and the environment in working with marginalized populations (Germain & Gitterman, 1980). Given the ecological perspectives historically emphasized in our profession, social workers are particularly well positioned to employ the multi-level practice implications suggested in Chapter 4. Social work, however, has long suffered from the tensions between the micro and the macro scopes of practice. Despite our historical emphasis on the ecological perspective in social work practice (Germain & Gitterman, 1980), social workers often feel the need to choose either the person (i.e., direct practice) or the environment (i.e., macro practice) as the point of intervention (Austin, Coombs, & Barr, 2005). In his historical analysis of the social work profession, Gitterman (2014) suggested that social work was once called a “semi profession” (p. 600) in a wider society. He detailed how social work turned to other disciplines, notably medicine/psychiatry, to follow in their footsteps (e.g., medical model, evidence-based practice) to seek legitimacy as a profession. Gitterman argued that this history of our profession likely resulted in the “crisis” of our distinct function and identity as “the only profession to identify that both people and environments require equal attention” (p. 601). This dissertation encourages social workers to reclaim our distinct identity and contribution, which is our simultaneous foci on the person and the environment. I agree with Gitterman (2014) that social work educators have the responsibility to teach students that the integration of the person and the environment is what makes social work a distinct profession. I have emphasized
throughout this dissertation that the internal resources of youth and the capacity of youths’ social ecologies are both essential in promoting the wellbeing among LGBTQ youth. Social work educators can play a greater role in re-affirming our tradition that views human development as an ecological process in our classroom and field teaching. In so doing, we can reclaim our unique role and identity as an ecological expert within practice and research communities.

**Dissertation Implications for Future Research**

This three-paper dissertation reported the results and practice implications of the GT study. This GT study was designed to address the paucity of qualitative research on LGBTQ youth and their resilience, especially the studies that examine both the capacity of youth and the roles of youths’ social ecologies in the development of resilience processes. While Chapter 3 confirmed the importance of several resources known from previous studies (e.g., the use of safer space, friendship with other LGBTQ youth), additional resilience resources and processes were identified, such as knowing other LGBTQ adults, involvement with counterculture communities, intentional use of social media, and critical consciousness building. Furthermore, there might be other important resilience resources for LGBTQ youth that were not adequately investigated in the current study, such as the role of LGBTQ affirming legislations on the wellbeing of LGBTQ youth. Further research is needed to explore the specific mechanisms and utility of these resources in promoting the wellbeing of LGBTQ youth. For instance, several trans youth participants reported the problematics associated with how the mainstream media portray trans people. These youth have also actively engaged social media sites and a variety of artistic avenues to produce representations of trans people (i.e., images, stories) that are relevant and meaningful to trans youth today. A research study that (1) interrogates currently available media representations of trans people and their impacts on the wellbeing of trans youth, and (2)
explores the utility of youths’ engagement in the production of relevant and meaningful trans representations can further our understanding of adversities and resilience processes that are unique to this marginalized youth population.

This dissertation grounded in the lived experiences of a highly diverse youth sample is an important addition to the literature on LGBTQ youth and their resilience. Unlike most of the previous resilience studies on LGBTQ youth, the majority of the youth participants in this GT study were non-white (i.e., youth of color, Aboriginal youth) and/or either immigrants themselves or children of immigrants, while more than half of youth identified as non-cisgender (e.g., transgender, gender queer). These diversities in this small-sample study, however, made it impossible for me to fully examine nuanced differences in how diverse social identities and locations might impact the ways in which LGBTQ youth differentially experience adversities and resilience processes. Furthermore, there is some evidence that suggests urban-rural differences in the psychosocial outcomes among LGBTQ youth (Poon & Saewyc, 2009; Galliher, Rostosky, & Hughes, 2004). Additional qualitative studies are needed to place a greater focus on youths’ demographic differences, and in doing so, specify the similarities and differences in the resilience processes among diverse LGBTQ youth across contexts. Moreover, the findings of this dissertation can be used as hypotheses to design quantitative research studies to survey larger samples of diverse LGBTQ youth across multiple geographic areas. Such studies should include the development of more explicit, quantified criteria to identify resilient LGBTQ youth (i.e., those who are “doing well” in the face of significant adversity) and explicate the similarities and differences in how youth across diverse social identities/locations and geographic areas might make use of resilience resources identified in this and other studies.
This dissertation was born out of my desire to answer the questions that I have developed over a decade of clinical practice with LGBTQ youth about resilience. I imagined that the answer to these questions would offer a knowledge base to social workers, who like myself seek to find solutions to the extensive struggles that our LGBTQ youth clients bring into our therapeutic relationships. What surprisingly stood out across all 35 interviews was the evidence of risk and adversity faced by LGBTQ youth. Even when asked directly about resilience and resilience-promoting resources, both youth and service providers continued to speak about the everyday experiences of marginalization and exclusion as well as the concomitant emotional pain among LGBTQ youth. I have no doubt that, like these study participants, many LGBTQ youth in Canada continue to experience a myriad of adversities from childhood through young adulthood. What this study of a small, convenience sample of LGBTQ youth was unable to empirically address, however, was the question of whether all LGBTQ youth remain marginalized and hence should be uniformly considered an “at risk” population. In this GT study, for instance, not one service provider chose to speak about a white gay male youth when asked to discuss a resilient youth who has gone through significant adversities during interviews; in fact not one white gay male was nominated for and participated in the study. On the other hand, participants had a very hard time discussing trans female youth who are “doing well,” while emphasizing a myriad of adversities faced by many trans female youth they knew. Even after extensive recruitment efforts, only one trans female youth was nominated for and participated in the study. Does this suggest that white gay male youth might not face the same level of risk as racialized LGB and/or trans youth in the current social climates? Does this mean that it is a lot more difficult for trans female youth to “do well” because they experience significantly more challenges in life? While this study was unable to answer these questions, there remains an immense need for continued
research on risk and adversities in the lives of diverse LGBTQ youth, as suggested by other researchers (e.g., Saewyc, 2011). Further research is needed to continue to examine (1) which LGBTQ youth are especially at risk and require greater attention from social workers (e.g., being a gay male, lesbian, bisexual, queer, or trans, being racialized, growing up poor, living in a rural area) and (2) what type(s) of adversities (e.g., childhood abuse, homophobia or transphobia-based bullying, violence, oppression based on multiple social locations) might put these LGBTQ youth at a greater risk for negative psychosocial outcomes. Building greater knowledge on these research areas on risk and adversity can lead to more targeted research questions and methodologies to uncover or examine resilience mechanisms among LGBTQ youth. Studying both risk and resilience remains integral to advancing future research on LGBTQ youth (Russell, 2005) and can only strengthen ethical and competent social work practice with this population.
References


Appendix A

Study Information Letter for Research Participants (Service Providers)

Research Project Title: Theorizing Pathways to Resilience among Queer Youth: A Grounded Theory Study

Affiliation: Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto

Researcher: Kenta Asakura, MSW, RSW, Doctoral Candidate
(416) 951-1787
kenta.asakura@mail.utoronto.ca

My name is Kenta Asakura, and I am the Principal Investigator (PI) of this study. In this project, I seek to develop a theory of resilience specific to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirited, and queer (the term ‘queer’ will be used throughout this project) youth, ages 16 to 24. Resilience is generally defined as one’s process of maintaining or achieving positive adaptation in the face of adversity.

You have been contacted because you are either a paid or a volunteer service provider who speaks English proficiently, are older than the maximum age limit of youth clients being served in your organization, and have worked with queer youth for over 3 years in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Face-to-Face Interview

If you agree, you will be invited to a face-to-face interview, which will last approximately one to one and a half hours. During the interview, you will be asked to share your understanding of (1) common adversities facing today’s queer youth, (2) what resilience looks like for queer youth, and (3) how “resilient queer youth” have managed/strived to overcome challenges. Please note that I will stop recruiting participants as soon as the maximum number of study participants (15) is reached.

Study Benefits & Risks

Your participation in this study will contribute to the development of knowledge about resilience of queer youth. There are minimal risks (physical or emotional) involved in your participation in this study. Given the relatively small size of the GTA service provider community for queer youth populations, I will ensure to de-identify the interview data to protect your privacy or status/reputation within the community.

Study Compensation

If you are a volunteer (i.e., unpaid) service provider, I will offer a $20 President’s Choice gift certificate per meeting for your time. There will be no monetary benefits for those who are paid service providers.
Privacy & Confidentiality

Face-to-face interviews will be recorded. Privacy and confidentiality will be assured by ensuring that:

1. Participants can ask that the recording device be turned off at any point in the interview.
2. Interview recordings, transcripts, and all other electronic data will be kept in secure servers protected by a personal password. Interview recordings will be deleted as soon as the interviews are transcribed.
3. The master-list of participants (e.g., contact information), consent forms, and demographic forms will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s office.
4. The only individuals who might hear the recordings include PI and anyone he may hire to assist with transcription. If used, transcribers will sign a confidentiality agreement.
5. The researcher’s supervisor, Dr. Peter A Newman, may have access to the interviews transcripts. No one beyond the researcher and his supervisor will have access to the research data.
6. While transcripts will be prepared from interviews, no identifying information (e.g., names of individuals or agency) will be included in the final transcripts. All participants will be given a code name that will be used in reference to their interviews.
7. All data will be destroyed seven years after the study is finished (June 2022).
8. Publications or written materials associated with this study will not include any research participant-identifying information.

While I, as a PI, will take the steps outlined above to protect your privacy, please know that I am also duty-bound to report any concerns regarding a child (age 15 and under) in need of protection as well as interviewee self-harm or harm to others. In addition, any research records may be later subject to subpoena or court order.

Other Important Information

At the end of the interview, you will be asked to nominate queer youths whom you have worked with who (1) have faced significant adversities in their lives, and (2) have managed to maintain or achieve well-being. Then you will be asked to provide these youths with the information about this study, so that they can voluntarily contact me regarding study participation. The study information sheet provided to potential youth participants will emphasize that (1) the study is not being conducted by your agency, and (2) youth’s relationship with you will not be in any way impacted even if they choose not to participate. This is optional, however, and you may decline to nominate any youth.

I may also contact you over the course of the study period to nominate more queer youths for study participation. Furthermore, you may be contacted and asked to participate in a second interview in order to further clarify the issues raised. You may also be later contacted to meet with me to review and provide feedback about initial findings. Please know that your participation in any of these requests is completely optional. If you are a volunteer service provider, I will offer a $20 gift certificate for each meeting you choose to attend with me.
Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. There are no consequences related to choosing not to be involved in this project. Participants can also choose not to continue their project involvement at any time before, during, and after the interview, up to the point when I begin data analysis. Data analysis begins approximately one month after the interview. There are no consequences for withdrawing from the study.

This project was reviewed by the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board, which provided clearance to carry out the research. For any questions or concerns related to research ethics of this research, please contact:

Daniel Gyewu  
University of Toronto Research Ethics Manager  
(416) 946-5606

If you have any question or are interested in participating in this study, please contact me.

Sincerely,

**Researcher contact information:**  
Kenta Asakura, MSW, RSW  
Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work  
University of Toronto  
Tel: 416-951-1787  
Email: kenta.asakura@mail.utoronto.ca

**Supervisor contact information:**  
Peter A. Newman, Ph.D.  
Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work  
University of Toronto  
Tel: 416-946-8611  
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Appendix B

Study Information Letter for Research Participants (Youth Version 1)

Title of Research: Developing a Theory about Resilience of Queer Youth

Affiliation: Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto

Researcher: Kenta Asakura, MSW, RSW, Doctoral Candidate
(416) 951-1787
kenta.asakura@mail.utoronto.ca

My name is Kenta Asakura, and I am the researcher of this study about resilience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirited, and queer (the term ‘queer’ will be used throughout this project) youth (ages 16-24) in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Resilience means someone has been able to ‘do well’ even though they have faced big challenges in their lives.

You have been contacted because an adult (e.g., your service provider, adult mentor) thought that you have met the criteria to participate in this study, which are: (1) You self-identify as queer; (2) You are between the ages of 16 and 24; (3) You live or work in the GTA; (4) You speak English; and (5) An adult thought that you are “resilient.”

What will I do?

If you agree, you will be asked to meet with me for a face-to-face interview, which will last about one to one and a half hours. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your everyday experience (e.g., challenges, family life, school life, social life) as a queer youth and how you have managed to do well. Please note that I will stop recruiting youths for interviews as soon as the maximum number of participants (25) is reached.

Are there benefits to participate?

Your participation will help us understand the needs, strengths, and resources of queer youth and develop services for queer youth in the GTA.

Are there risks?

There are no physical risks in this study. Because you will be asked to talk about yourself and challenges you have faced, taking part in the interview might upset you. If you wish I will help you figure out how to get help and connect with someone that can help you. I am aware that you might not be “out” to everyone in your life. To protect your privacy, you can choose and tell me how I can contact you (e.g., cell phone, email), so that no one else will know that you are participating in this study. You can also choose where we will meet for an interview, such as your agency, my office at the University of
Toronto, or any other quiet place that you would feel comfortable meeting with me but others will not listen to the interview (e.g., library study room).

**Will I get paid for my time?**

I will offer a $20 President’s Choice gift certificate per meeting for your time.

**Who will know about what I said during the interview?**

Face-to-face interviews will be recorded. I will make sure to keep the interview private and confidential by taking these steps:

1. When you contact me to participate in the interview, you do not have to use your real name. All I need is any first name and how I can get in touch with you (e.g., phone # or email address).
2. You can ask that the recording device be turned off at any point in the interview.
3. Interview recordings, transcripts (i.e., interviews dictated), and all other computer-based data will be kept in secure servers protected by a personal password. Interview recordings will be deleted once the interviews are transcribed.
4. The master-list of participants (e.g., contact information), consent forms, and demographic forms will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my office.
5. The only people who might hear the recordings are me and the people I might hire for transcription services. If used, transcribers will sign an agreement to keep all information private.
6. My supervisor, Dr. Peter A Newman, may have access to the field notes. No one else besides my supervisor and myself will have access to the interview data.
7. While transcripts will be prepared from interviews, identifying information (e.g., names of people and places) will be deleted from the transcripts. Instead of the name you provide, you will be given a code name in reference to the interview.
8. I will destroy all research data seven years after the study is finished in June 2022.
9. Reports I will prepare to publish from this study will not include any of your identifying information.

However, there are limits to my ability to keep information shared during the interview private between us. If you share with me that children under the age of 15 are physically, emotionally, or sexually abused or neglected by an adult, I will have to call Children’s Aid Society. If you share with me that you are thinking about hurting yourself or others, I will also have to speak to an appropriate authority to ensure everyone’s safety. In addition, please know that there might be times when the judge orders research materials (this is called subpoena) if you or someone in your life later become involved in the court system. This may include any illegal activities you might discuss during the interview.

**What else should I know?**
At the end of the interview, you might be asked to talk about the study to some of your queer friends who like yourself have (1) experienced big challenges in their lives and (2) have managed to “do well.” Then you will be asked to provide these peers with the information about this study (e.g., share this form), so that they can voluntarily contact me if they are interested in participating in the study. I may also contact you over the course of the study to talk to other friends about this study. This request is completely optional; you don’t have to talk to anyone if you do not want to. Also, I might contact and ask you to participate in a second interview to get more clarification. I might also ask you to meet with me later to review and give feedback about the study results. Please know that any of these requests are optional; you can just say no to any or all of these requests. I will offer a $20 gift certificate for each meeting you choose to attend with me.

How can I decide if I want to participate?

Your participation is completely voluntary; it is up to you to decide if you want to be interviewed by me. There are no consequences for choosing not to participate. Even though an adult (e.g., staff, mentor) talked to you about this study, this study is not conducted by their agency. So, your relationship with them or the services you receive from them will not change at all even if you choose not to participate.

You can also choose not to participate even during or after the interview. You can choose not to be a part of this study at any time up to when I begin analyzing the interview data. I will destroy your information and the interview data. Please know that I start analyzing the data about one month after our interview. There are no consequences if you choose not to continue.

This project was reviewed by the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board, which gave me permission to do this research study. For any questions or concerns related to research ethics of this study, please contact:

Daniel Gyewu
University of Toronto Research Ethics Manager
(416) 946-5606

If you have any question or are interested in participating in this study, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Researcher contact information:  Supervisor contact information:
Kenta Asakura, MSW, RSW  Peter A. Newman, Ph.D.
Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work  Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work
University of Toronto  University of Toronto
Tel: 416-951-1787  Tel: 416-946-8611
Email: kenta.asakura@mail.utoronto.ca  Email: p.newman@utoronto.ca
Appendix C

Study Information Letter for Research Participants (Youth Version 2)

Research Project Title: Theorizing Pathways to Resilience among Queer Youth: A Grounded Theory Study

Affiliation: Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto

Researcher: Kenta Asakura, MSW, RSW, Doctoral Candidate
(416) 951-1787
kenta.asakura@mail.utoronto.ca

My name is Kenta Asakura, and I am the Principal Investigator of this study. I am conducting a study about resilience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirited, and queer (the term ‘queer’ will be used throughout this project) youth (ages 16-24) in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Resilience means someone has been able to maintain well-being even though they have faced significant adversities or challenges in their lives.

You have been contacted because your service provider (e.g., counselor, mentor) thought that you have met the criteria to participate in this study, which are: (1) You self-identify as queer; (2) You are between the ages of 16 and 24; (3) You live or work in the GTA; (4) You speak English; and (5) An adult thought that you are “resilient.”

What will I do?

If you agree, you will be asked to meet with me for a face-to-face interview, which will last approximately one to one and a half hours. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your everyday experience (e.g., challenges, family life, school life, social life) as a queer youth and how you have managed to maintain or achieve your well-being. Please note that I will stop recruiting youths for interviews as soon as the maximum number of participants (25) is reached.

Are there benefits to participate?

Your participation will help us understand the needs and assets of queer youth and develop services for queer youth in the GTA.

Are there risks?

There are no physical risks in this study. Because you will be asked to talk about yourself and challenges you have faced, taking part in the interview might cause upset or uncomfortable feelings. If you wish I will help connect you with a counselor. I am aware that you might not be “out” to everyone in your life. To protect your privacy, you can decide how I can contact you (e.g., cell phone, email) in such a way that no one else will know your association with me or this study. You can also choose where the interview will take place, such as your agency, my
office at the University of Toronto, or any other quiet that you would feel comfortable meeting
with me, but your privacy is ensured (e.g., library study room).

**Is there compensation?**

I will offer a $20 President’s Choice gift certificate (for each interview) for your time.

**Who will know about what I said during the interview?**

Face-to-face interviews will be recorded. I will make sure to keep the interview private and
confidential by taking these steps:

1. When you contact me to participate in the study, you may use either your name or a
   pseudonym. All I need is any first name and how I can get in touch with you (phone # or
   email address).
2. You can ask that the recording device be turned off at any point in the interview.
3. Interview recordings, transcripts (i.e., interviews dictated), and all other electronic data
   will be kept in secure servers protected by a personal password. Interview recordings will
   be deleted as soon as interviews are transcribed.
4. The master-list of participants (e.g., contact information), consent forms, and
demographic forms will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my office.
5. The only people who might hear the recordings are me and anyone I might hire to assist
   with transcription. If used, transcribers will sign an agreement to keep all information
   private.
6. My supervisor, Dr. Peter A Newman, may have access to the field notes. No one else
   besides my supervisor and myself will have access to the interview data.
7. While transcripts will be prepared from interviews, identifying information (e.g., names
   of people and places) will be deleted from the transcripts. Instead of the name you
   provide, you will be given a code name in reference to the interview.
8. I will destroy all research data seven years after the study is finished in June 2022.
9. Publications from this study will not include any of your identifying information.

However, there are limits to my ability to ensure the confidentiality of your interview. First, I am
professionally obligated to reporting any suspected child abuse (children who are currently under
the age of 16) as well as your intent to harm yourself or others. In addition, any research
materials are subject to subpoena or court order if you or someone else you know become
involved in the court system. This may include any illegal activities you might discuss during the
interview.

**What else should I know?**

At the end of the interview, you might be asked to nominate other queer youths who have (1)
faced significant challenges in their lives and (2) have managed to maintain or achieve well-
being. Then you will be asked to provide these peers with the information about this study, so
that they can voluntarily contact me regarding study participation. I may also contact you over
the course of the study period to nominate more peers for study participation. This request,
however, is completely optional. Furthermore, if you consent, you may be contacted and asked to
participate in a second interview in order to further clarify the issues raised. I might also ask you to later meet with me to review and provide feedback about initial findings. Any of these additional requests is also optional; you may decline any or all of these requests without penalty. You will be offered a $20 gift certificate for each meeting you choose to attend with me.

How can I decide if I want to participate?

Your participation is completely voluntary. There are no consequences for choosing not to participate. Even though someone (e.g., agency staff, mentor) informed you of this study, this study is not conducted by them. So, your relationship with them or the services you receive from them will not be impacted even if you choose not to participate. You can choose not to be a part of this study at any time up to when I begin analyzing the interview data. I will destroy your information and the interview data. Please note that I start analyzing the data approximately one month after our interview. There are no consequences if you choose not to continue.

This project was reviewed by the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board, which provided clearance to carry out the research. For any questions or concerns related to research ethics of this research, please contact:

Daniel Gyewu
University of Toronto Research Ethics Manager
(416) 946-5606

If you have any question or are interested in participating in this study, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Researcher contact information:
Kenta Asakura, MSW, RSW
Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work
University of Toronto
Tel: 416-951-1787
Email: kenta.asakura@mail.utoronto.ca

Supervisor contact information:
Peter A. Newman, Ph.D.
Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work
University of Toronto
Tel: 416-946-8611
Email: p.newman@utoronto.ca
Appendix D

Study Consent Form (Service Providers)

**Research Project Title:** Theorizing Pathways to Resilience among Queer Youth: A Grounded Theory Study

**Affiliation:** Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto

**Researcher:** Kenta Asakura, MSW, RSW, Doctoral Candidate  
(416) 951-1787  
kenta.asakura@mail.utoronto.ca

I have reviewed the information sheet about this study and understand that Kenta Asakura, doctoral candidate at University of Toronto, is conducting an interview about resilience of queer youth, ages 16-24, in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). I understand that I will participate in an interview that will last approximately one to one and a half hours. I understand that with my permission the interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed. Pseudonyms will be used in individual interview transcripts. I am aware that the audio-tapes and transcripts will only be used by Kenta Asakura and his supervisor, Peter A. Newman, Ph.D.

I understand that anonymous aggregate results may be published in scholarly journals or disseminated at peer-reviewed conferences. The results might also be shared with social service agencies serving queer youth. The research findings can be sent to the participant via email upon the completion of the project and its acceptance by the University.

By reviewing the study information sheet, I have been made aware of the potential risks and benefits associated with my participation in this study. I understand that my participation is completely voluntary and that my decision either to participate or not will be kept completely confidential. Furthermore, any questions I have asked about the study have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that as a voluntary participant I may choose not to answer any questions that may make me feel uncomfortable. I further understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without explanation or consequences until data analysis begins approximately one month after the interview. I understand that data analysis begins approximately one month following the interview and I will not be able to withdraw from the study at that point and on.

All research documents (e.g., consent form, demographic form) will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s office. All electronic research data (e.g., audiotaped interview) will be stored in secure servers protected by a personal password. All data will be destroyed seven years after the study is finished (June 2022).

Finally, I am also aware that I will be asked to nominate queer youths to participate in the second phase of this study, if I wish. These queer youths are those (1) have faced significant adversities in their lives and (2) have managed to maintain or achieve well-being. I understand that I will be asked to provide these youths with the information about this study, so that they can voluntarily
contact the researcher regarding study participation. I understand that this nomination request is optional and that I can say no to this request without any penalty.

I hereby consent to participate in this study.

Participant: ________________________           ___________________________
Print Name              Signature

Date:  ________________________

Researcher: _________________           ___________________________
Name                                                 Signature

**Consent for Audio Recording:**

This study requires this interview to be audio-recorded. Please sign here if you are willing to have this interview audio-recorded. I agree to have this interview audio-recorded.

Participant: ________________________           ___ ________________________
Print Name     Signature

Date:  ________________________

Researcher: ________________________           ________________________
Name      Signature

**Consent for Future Contact:**

I understand that the researcher may contact me over the course of the study period to nominate more queer youths for study participation. Furthermore, I understand that the researcher may contact and ask me to participate in a second interview in order to further clarify the issues raised or to later meet with me to get my feedback about initial findings of the study. I understand that any of these requests for additional meetings are optional and I can decline without any penalty.

I consent to have the researcher contact me after this interview meeting.

Participant: ________________________           ___________________________
Print Name              Signature

Date:  ________________________

Researcher: ________________________           ________________________
Name      Signature
Appendix E

Study Consent Form (Youth Version 1)

Title of Research: Developing a Theory about Resilience of Queer Youth

Affiliation: Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto

Researcher: Kenta Asakura, MSW, RSW, Doctoral Candidate
(416) 951-1787
kenta.asakura@mail.utoronto.ca

I have read the information sheet about this study and understand that Kenta Asakura, a researcher from University of Toronto, is doing an interview about resilience (“doing well in the face of challenges”) of queer youth, ages 16-24 in the Greater Toronto Area. I understand that I will participate in an interview that will last approximately one to one and a half hours. I understand that with my permission the interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed. Fake names will be used in individual interview transcripts. I am aware that the audio-tapes and transcripts will only be used by Kenta Asakura and his supervisor, Peter A. Newman, Ph.D.

I understand that results may be published in social work and social service journals or presented at conferences, but no identifying information about me (e.g., real name, school name) will be reported. The results might also be shared with social service agencies serving queer youth. The results can be sent to the participant via email once the project is finished and approved by the university.

I have read the information sheet and completely understand the risks and benefits associated with this study. I understand that my participation is completely up to me (i.e., voluntary) and that others will not know about my decision either to participate or not. Also, I have asked all the questions I needed to ask and am satisfied with the answers from the researcher. I understand that as a voluntary participant I may choose not to answer any questions that make me feel uncomfortable. I also understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without explanation or consequences until the researcher starts analyzing the interview data. I have been told that data analysis starts about one month after the interview and I cannot withdraw from the study at that point and on.

All research documents (e.g., consent forms) will be safely kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s office. All other computer-based research data (e.g., interview transcripts) will be stored in secure servers protected by a personal password. All data will be destroyed seven years after the study is finished (June 2022).

Finally, I am also aware that I will be asked to nominate other queer youths to participate in this study if I wish. These queer youths are those who have (1) experienced big challenges in their lives and (2) have managed to “do well.” I understand that I will be asked to share these youths the information about this study,
so that it is up to them to contact the researcher. I understand that this request is optional, and I can say no to this request without any consequence. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant: ________________________      ________ ___________________
                        Print Name     Signature

Date:  ________________________

Researcher ________________________       _______________________
                        Name                                             Signature

Consent for Audio Recording

This study requires this interview to be audio-recorded. Please sign here if you are willing to have this interview audio-recorded.

I agree to have this interview audio-recorded.

Participant: ________________________      ________ ___________________
                        Print Name     Signature

Date:  ________________________

Researcher ________________________      _______________________
                        Name                                             Signature

Consent for Future Contact

I understand that the researcher may contact me over the course of the study period to nominate more queer friends for study participation. I also understand that the researcher may contact and ask me to participate in a second interview in order to further clarify the issues raised. I understand that researcher may contact and ask me to meet again to review and give feedback about the initial results of the study. I understand that researcher's request for these additional meetings is completely optional and I can say no to any or all of these requests without any consequences.
I consent to have the researcher contact me after this interview meeting.

Participant: ________________________      ________ ___________________
                        Print Name     Signature

Date:  ________________________

Researcher ________________________      _______________________
                        Name                                             Signature
Appendix F

Study Consent Form (Youth Version 2)

Research Project Title: Theorizing Pathways to Resilience among Queer Youth: A Grounded Theory Study

Affiliation: Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto

Researcher: Kenta Asakura, MSW, RSW, Doctoral Candidate
(416) 951-1787
kenta.asakura@mail.utoronto.ca

I have reviewed the information sheet about this study and understand that Kenta Asakura, doctoral candidate at University of Toronto, is conducting an interview about resilience (“doing well in the face of challenges”) of queer youth, ages 16-24 in the Greater Toronto Area. I understand that I will participate in an interview that will last approximately one to one and a half hours. I understand that with my permission the interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed. Pseudonyms will be used in individual interview transcripts. I am aware that the audio-tapes and transcripts will only be used by Kenta Asakura and his supervisor, Peter A. Newman, Ph.D.

I understand that anonymous aggregate results may be published in scholarly journals or disseminated at peer-reviewed conferences. The results might also be shared with social service agencies serving queer youth. The research findings can be sent to the participant via email upon the completion of the project and its acceptance by the University.

By reviewing the study information sheet, I have been made aware of the potential risks and benefits associated with my participation in this study. I understand that my participation is completely voluntary and that my decision either to participate or not will be kept completely confidential. Furthermore, any questions I have asked about the study have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that as a voluntary participant I may choose not to answer any questions that make me feel uncomfortable. I further understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without explanation or consequences until data analysis begins. I have been informed that data analysis begins approximately one month following the interview and I cannot withdraw from the study at that point and on.

All research documents (e.g., consent forms) will be securely kept in locked cabinet in the researcher’s office. All other electronic research data will be stored in a secure server protected by a personal password. All data will be destroyed seven years after the study is finished (June 2022).

Finally, I am also aware that I will be asked to nominate queer peers to participate in this study, if I wish. These queer youths are those who have (1) faced significant challenges in their lives and (2) have managed to maintain or achieve well-being. I understand that I will be asked to provide these peers with the information about this study, so that they can voluntarily contact the researcher regarding study participation.
I hereby consent to participate in this study.

Participant: ________________________           ___________________________
Print Name              Signature

Date:  ________________________

Researcher     ________________________            _______________________
Name                                                 Signature

__Consent for Audio Recording__

This study requires this interview to be audio-recorded. Please sign here if you are willing to have this interview audio-recorded. I agree to have this interview audio-recorded.

Participant: ________________________      ________ ___________________
Print Name          Signature

Date:  ________________________

Researcher        ________________________      _______________________
Name           Signature

__Consent for Future Contact:__

I understand that the researcher may contact me over the course of the study period to nominate more queer youth peers for study participation. I understand that this request for peer nomination is optional, and I can decline without penalty. Furthermore, I understand that the researcher may contact and ask me to participate in a second interview in order to further clarify the issues raised. I understand that researcher may contact and ask me to later meet with me to review and give feedback about the initial results of the study. I understand that researcher’s request for these additional meetings is also optional and that I can decline any or all of these requests without penalty.

I consent to have the researcher contact me after this interview meeting.

Participant:     ________________________           ___________________________
Print Name              Signature

Date:  ________________________

Researcher     ________________________            _______________________
Name                                                 Signature
Appendix G

Demographic Information (Service Provider)

Please provide the following information as part of your participation in the study.

(1) How old are you?
   _______ Years old

(2) What is your gender?
   Cis Female _____  Cis Male _____  Trans _____
   Gender queer _______  Two-Spirited _____
   Other (please specify) _______________________

(3) What is your preferred gender pronoun? _______________________

(4) What is your ethno-racial background?
   White _____  Black (African) ____  Black (Caribbean) _____
   Asian _____  South Asian _____  Latino/Hispanic _____
   Aboriginal _____  Other (please specify) _______________________

(5) How do you identify your relationship with queer communities?
   Gay man _____  Lesbian _____  Bisexual _____
   Queer _____  Questioning _____  Trans _____
   Intersex _____  Two-spirited _____  Gender Queer _____
   Straight ally _____  Other (please specify) _______________________

(6) What is your highest level of education and degree? _______________________

(7) How long have you worked with queer youth in what capacity?
   I have worked with queer youth for _______ years  as (please specify your role/roles)
   ______________________.
Appendix H

Demographic Information (Youth)

Please provide the following information as part of your participation in the study.

(1) How old are you?
    _______ Years old

(2) What is your gender?
    Cis Female _____  Cis Male _____  Trans _____
    Gender queer _____  Two-spirited _____
    Other (please specify) _______________________

(3) What is your preferred gender pronoun? ___________________

(4) How do you identify your race/ethnicity?
    White _____  Black (African) _____  Black (Caribbean) _____
    Asian _____  South Asian _____  Latino/Hispanic _____
    Aboriginal _____  Other (please specify) _______________________

(5) How do you identify your relationship with queer communities?
    Gay male _____  Lesbian _____  Bisexual _____
    Queer _____  Questioning _____  Trans _____
    Intersex _____  Two-spirited _____  Gender Queer _____
    Other (please specify) _______________________

(6) What is your highest level of education?
    Some high school _____  Currently in high school _____
High school diploma _____ Currently in college _____
College diploma _____ Currently in university _____
University degree _____

(7) Were you born in Canada?
Yes _____
No _____ Where were you born? ___________________
How long have you been in Canada? For _____ years

(8) Where were your parents born?
Parent 1: Canada ____ Elsewhere (please specify) ___________
I don’t know _____
Parent 2: Canada ____ Elsewhere (please specify) ___________
I don’t know _____

(9) Who do you currently live with?
Alone/Roommate ____ Boyfriend/girlfriend/partner ____
At least one parent ____ Extended family ____
Foster parent(s) ____ Group home ____ Shelter ____
Other (please specify) _____