

How Do School Resource Officers Foster Resilience in Sexual and Gender Minority Youth?

by

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### **Abstract**

Sexual and gender minority (SGM) youth face higher rates of discrimination, comprehensive health challenges, and negative social repercussions than their heterosexual and cisgender peers. As a result, they are more likely to engage in substance use; ideate about, attempt, or die by suicide; drop out of high school; and be involved with the justice system. Researchers have found that having one supportive adult can help vulnerable youth mitigate these risks and build resilience. As SGM youth do not always have supportive parents, they may need to rely on other caring adults for support. Police officers, including those working as School Resource Officers (SROs), have been largely absent from research on the importance and impact of caring adults in the lives of SGM youth. To help address this dearth, this research involving two Edmonton high schools investigated how SROs working with SGM youth can foster positive outcomes and support asset-building. Both SROs and the SGM youth with whom they work participated in open-ended interviews to inform this case study research. Through thematic analysis, it was found that SROs who are supportive and affirming can indeed foster positive outcomes and help SGM youth grow into resilience. To conclude, the role of SROs in supporting the unique needs of underserved youth today and the implications of the current study for future research and practice are discussed.

## **Preface**

This thesis is an original work by Emily Pynoo. The research received ethics approval from the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board 1, Pro00090578, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Subsequent approval to conduct the research within designated Edmonton Public Schools was received November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

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## Glossary of Terms

**Cisgender:** When a person identifies with their natal sex; that is, the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Cis–normative:** The assumption that all individuals are cisgender.

**Coming out:** The process of disclosing one’s sexual orientation or gender identity to others.

**Demisexual:** When a person is only able to develop a sexual attraction to another person after an emotional bond has been formed.

**Gender:** A term used to identify the social constructs that are applied to a particular sex (i.e., masculine or feminine).

**Genderism:** Discrimination or prejudice against an individual based on their gender.

**Gender expression:** How an individual expresses their gender externally (i.e., style of dress, hairstyle, makeup, etc.).

**Gender identity:** How an individual personally/internally perceives and affirms their gender.

**Heteronormative:** The assumption that all individuals are heterosexual or that heterosexuality is the ‘normal’ or preferred sexual orientation.

**Heterosexism:** Discrimination or prejudice against individuals who do not identify as heterosexual.

**Heterosexual:** Sexual attraction to the opposite sex.

**Homo/bi/transphobia:** Discrimination or prejudice against or fear of individuals who identify as homosexual (e.g., attracted to the same sex or gender); bisexual (e.g., attracted to more than one sex or gender); or transgender (e.g., when one’s gender identity does not match the sex or gender they were assigned at birth).

**LGBTQ2S+:** An acronym broadly used to describe sexual and gender minorities, including those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or Two-Spirit.

**Non-binary:** Any sexual or gender identity that falls outside of traditional binaries demarcated as male and female or masculine and feminine.

**Panromantic:** An individual who is romantically attracted to people regardless of their gender identity.

**Pansexual:** An individual who is romantically, sexually, or emotionally attracted to people regardless of their sex or gender identity.

**Sex:** A medical categorization assigned at birth based on the appearance of one's genitalia.

**Sexism:** Discrimination or prejudice against individuals based on their sex.

**Sexual and gender minority:** An umbrella term used to define individuals who fall outside of traditional sexual and gender binaries; often used as an inclusive term to describe those who identify as LGBTQ2S+.

**Sexual orientation:** An individual's attraction or non-attraction to other individuals that may include physical, emotional, romantic, and spiritual elements.

## **Introduction**

The primary aim of this thesis is to investigate how police officers working as school resource officers (SROs) can foster resilience in sexual and gender minority (SGM) youth. Situated within resilience theorizing, my study takes a strengths-based approach by examining how SROs can help SGM youth navigate schools and other social institutions, locate and utilize both human and material assets, shift from focusing on surviving to focusing on thriving, and in doing so, support their growth into resilience. This case study research is qualitative and is shaped by tenets of resilience theorizing. I conducted open-ended, semi-structured interviews with SROs and vulnerable SGM youth with whom they work in order to gain rich qualitative data directly through the voices of the research participants. Just as it is important to me to include these voices as integral to my study, I feel it is important to contextualize the study within my own experiences and share my process in developing this research project.

## **Locating the Researcher**

Prior to beginning graduate studies at the University of Alberta, I worked in Calgary public schools in a variety of roles from Education Assistant to Test Centre Coordinator. I gained experience working in both short-term and long-term roles as well as in casual positions in various schools from elementary to high school. During this time, the importance of having a safe and caring school environment became increasingly clear to me. Although I experienced some challenges during my years in grade school—as many students do—I was fortunate to have a supportive family and friends, a safe home to go to, food to eat, and resources I could access to support my success. When I began working in schools, I quickly learned that my work would primarily be with diverse children and youth, many of whom did not have these supports and

resources, and who consequently faced barriers to their learning and success, both within and outside of their school environments.

Many of the children I worked with did not have supportive families or safe home environments, many lived in poverty and did not have access to sufficient food, and many did not have resources like computers or books to supplement and assist with their learning. I had to make some difficult phone calls to Children's Services during this time, reporting for instance when a child came to school without a coat in the middle of winter, or when I discovered bruises on a child that a parent had hidden by making them wear long pants and sleeves during the warm summer months. Seeing firsthand the harsh realities of these children's lives, and the often limited supports they could access, weighed heavily on me.

The majority of my work during this time was with elementary aged children. Due to the age of these children, issues of systemic discrimination were not always as apparent as they might have been with older children and youth. Once I started working in more junior high and high school settings, however, I began to see below the tip of the iceberg and recognize some of the greater systemic challenges that these young people and their families often face. I worked with Indigenous families experiencing intergenerational trauma because parents or grandparents had suffered in the residential school system. I also worked with low socioeconomic status families who did not have access to the necessities of life, families who immigrated to Canada and struggled with adapting to alterations in language and culture, and children who identified as sexual and gender minorities (SGMs) who were rejected by their families. The mitigating circumstances and challenges these children and families faced contextualized their experiences, providing me with a deeper understanding of their lives and a growing recognition of the systemic inequalities that exist within our society. The diversity of experiences within the

schools where I worked was huge—and these schools only made up a small percentage of the K–12 schools in Calgary.

Although Alberta Education has implemented an increasing number of policies prioritizing inclusion and diversity within the province’s Safe and Caring Schools Framework (Government of Alberta, n.d.), there are still many children and youth who fall through the cracks, with those who identify as SGMs of particular concern because schooling has historically ignored their presence (Taylor et al., 2011). Through my work in schools, in addition to personal connections with close family members and friends, I began to recognize how SGM youth remained a notably underserved population. Working with these children and youth and learning more about the barriers that they and their families faced further motivated me to find a way to work meaningfully with them in caring and supportive ways. I also developed a growing interest in learning more about the youth justice system and Children’s Services, and how youth across differences are treated within such systems.

I began searching for psychology graduate programs where I could pursue these interests. My search led me to the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta where I learned about the School and Clinical Child Psychology (SCCP) Program. The SCCP program seemed like the ideal fit for my interests, combining my passion for supporting school-aged children and youth with my interests in working in clinical settings. At this time, I also learned about Dr. André P. Grace’s resilience research and outreach work in his Canada Research Chair program focused on SGM youth. After connecting with Dr. Grace, my path became clearer; my burgeoning research interests aligned well with his, and my professional goals aligned well with those delineated by the SCCP program.

Upon entering the SCCP program, I began working as a research assistant on Dr. Grace's research project for the Ministry of Children's Services. This research focused on the plight of SGM young people across a variety of social institutions including family, social services, healthcare, justice, and education (Grace et al., 2019). I was then able to make connections between the research work I was involved with and the experiences and knowledge I had gained from working in various schools in Calgary. In recognizing these connections, I continued to ponder how I could conduct meaningful research of my own.

I soon learned about the Community Health Empowerment and Wellness (CHEW) Project. The CHEW Project, which Dr. Grace established in inner city Edmonton in 2014, works with SGM youth who face barriers, such as challenges with comprehensive health, family rejection, homelessness or street involvement, substance use issues, and engaging in survival crimes and sex work. The project takes a wraparound approach to holistic care by utilizing the C3 model, which involves comprehensive health education and outreach, community support services, and compassionate policing (Grace et al., 2019). These three domains align well with my interests and goals, so I was excited to get involved with CHEW.

Later in the first year of my graduate program, I began to meet some of the youth who accessed CHEW's services and became more directly involved with the Project. This provided me with more firsthand knowledge of the lack of resources and supports that these youth have and the daily challenges they face due to homo/bi/transphobia, which is often why they require the assistance of organizations like CHEW. I learned that many of the youth who access CHEW are street-involved, often couch surfing to avoid homelessness as many of them do not feel safe going to shelters that tend to be heteronormative and cis-normative (Grace et al., 2019). As well, many do not have access to laundry services, a place to bathe or shower, or food and clean

drinking water; and many have dropped out of school and have had some sort of involvement with the youth justice system, Children's Services, or both (Grace et al., 2019).

My involvement with CHEW reinforced my desire to work with underserved youth populations; my experiences there in addition to my work in schools and research with Dr. Grace collectively led me to develop this research project for my master's thesis. I wanted to develop a project that could link research to advocacy and highlight the voices of SGM youth, which are so often silenced or ignored. I became familiar with a report published by the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (OCYA) Alberta, which provides extensive research and firsthand accounts of SGM youths' experiences within social services and justice (OCYA, 2017). Although the report primarily focuses on these two social institutions, it acknowledges that SGM youth face unique challenges within the other intersecting social institutions, including family, healthcare, and education (OCYA, 2017). As children and youth spend so much of their time at school, learning how to navigate social relationships and gain important knowledge that will contribute to their future successes, I wanted to explore education as an incredibly important and relevant social institution that warrants further research in relation to SGM youths' experiences there.

The OCYA (2017) report proved helpful in the development of my research project and desire to add to the growing body of literature addressing the unique challenges faced by SGM youth. The authors outline how caring adults play a significant role in the lives of SGM youth across all five social institutions (OCYA, 2017). They describe how teachers, healthcare workers, and social workers have often been highlighted as caring professionals, while police officers are not typically included despite justice being one of the five primary social institutions (OCYA, 2017). Many SGM youth face additional barriers compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers due to homo/bi/transphobia, which can result in challenges at school and

involvement with the youth justice system. I therefore decided to explore the roles of police officers working in school environments as school resource officers (SROs) and wanted to investigate how they could potentially be considered caring adults and professionals in the lives of these youth. This would involve investigating their role at the intersection between education and justice and could provide meaningful insights for linking research to advocacy when working with SGM youth.

### **Locating the Project**

Youth variously navigate social institutions including the family, social services, healthcare, justice, and education (Grace et al., 2019; OCYA, 2017). During this process, youth face challenges and risks while also coming across opportunities to build both human and material assets that can enable them to grow into resilience (Grace, 2015). Schools are social institutions in which youth spend a significant portion of their time and, as such, they are important sites to include in research involving youth. Although navigating social institutions including schools tends to be a common youth experience, each young person will have a unique experience as they do so. Some relational factors like being an SGM increase the likelihood of facing additional challenges and risks during this process (Taylor et al., 2011).

Approximately 5–10% of Canadian youth self-identify as an SGM person (Lalonde et al., 2018). A national climate survey indicated that Canadian SGM youth are significantly more likely to experience verbal, physical, and sexual harassment at school than their heterosexual and cisgender peers (Taylor et al., 2011). As a result, 64.2% of Canadian SGM youth report feeling unsafe at school, with 30.2% having skipped school to help ensure their safety (Taylor et al., 2011). Due to these high rates of victimization, SGM youth are more likely to use substances to the point of abuse; ideate about, attempt, or die by suicide; drop out of high school; and



participate in criminal activities leading to involvement with the youth justice system (Felix et al., 2009; OCYA, 2017; Palmer et al., 2016; Russell, 2005; Taylor et al., 2011). In order to address such risk taking, researchers have been studying how protective factors—such as support from caring adults—can help SGM youth mitigate these risks and become more resilient (Grace, 2015; Johnson, 2017; Russell, 2005). Having one supportive or affirming adult to connect with can have a powerful, positive impact on SGM youth (Grace, 2015; Harvey, 2012; Johnson, 2017; OCYA, 2017; Russell, 2005). Caring adults are often considered to be those who accept and affirm SGM youths' identities and are able to provide them with advice, guidance, and resources when needed (OCYA, 2017). This asset is highlighted in contemporary resilience research involving SGM youth whereby caring adults are often identified as primary caregivers or school staff members; police officers, including those who work as SROs, are not often included in this research (Dwyer, 2011; Harvey, 2012; OCYA, 2017)

Various Canadian SGM groups have highlighted their historical mistreatment by police officers. Locally, the Edmonton Police Service (EPS) has been working to improve the role of its members as caring professionals within SGM communities (CBC News, 2019; EPS, n.d.-a; Perkins, 2020). In doing so, EPS instituted a Sexual Minorities Liaison Committee that emphasizes the importance of equitable, SGM-inclusive access to police services (EPS, n.d.-a). EPS has also strengthened its longstanding SRO program, which allocates police officers to Edmonton schools to work with youth, many of whom are vulnerable or marginalized due to characteristics such as having a perceived nonnormative sexual orientation or gender identity, being Indigenous, being a youth of colour, or dealing with circumstances like living in foster care or group homes.

SROs work to foster positive, supportive, and caring relationships, and to problem solve with interdisciplinary teams so youth can hopefully avoid involvement with the youth justice system (EPS, n.d.-b). SROs are in a unique position in that they can nurture a connection between the education and justice systems by working as police officers in school settings. They therefore have the opportunity to support youth in navigating these significant social institutions.

This thesis is organized into three chapters. Chapter One provides a review of the existing literature and discusses both the risk and protective factors that SGM youth may encounter. Chapter Two delineates the project outline and design, the theoretical framework, and concomitant considerations outlining the pragmatics of how the study was conducted, such as participant recruitment, data collection and storage, and data analysis procedures and limitations. Chapter Three presents the thematically organized results of the interviews using the voices of the research participants and offers an analysis of the results with respect to the research questions and methodological considerations. Finally, the document concludes by presenting a discussion of how this research reflects and expands upon the current literature by exploring the role of SROs in supporting the contemporary needs of youth and providing recommendations for both future research and practice. References and appendices are provided following the conclusion of the text.

## Chapter One: Literature Review

### Resilience as a Dynamic Construct and Process

Resilience is a complex construct that is difficult to define, with many scholars and researchers providing unique conceptualizations of what it means to be resilient (Hatchel & Marx, 2018). When the term *resilient* began to appear in the field of psychology in the 1980s, it was often clinically defined as “the ability for individuals to recover from exposure to chronic and acute stress” (Ungar, 2012, p. 13). This early definition often resulted in resilience being conceptualized as a static characteristic that does not change over time (Hatchel & Marx, 2018). As emergent research over the last four decades indicates, resilience is a much more dynamic biopsychosocial and cultural construct (Grace, 2015); it is an ongoing process that develops over time and is influenced by many relational and contextual factors (Brown & Colbourne, 2005; Hatchel & Marx, 2018).

In understanding resilience as a construct and process, it is important to acknowledge the heterogeneity that exists in individuals’ responses to stressors and adversity (Rutter, 2012). These responses differ depending on numerous factors, including physical, psychological, cultural, and societal influences (Rutter, 2012). Some individuals are able to ‘bounce back’ with less strain than others, despite facing comparable challenges (Grace, 2015; Rutter, 2012). This is part of what makes resilience so nonlinear as a process, resulting in it being difficult to define; what is considered resilient for some may be less so for others, depending on each individual’s past experiences and baseline functioning.

One way this difference has been conceptualized in resilience research is by categorizing responses to adversity as having either a ‘sensitizing’ or a ‘steeling’ effect (Rutter, 2012). When exposure to stressors and adverse experiences results in a sensitizing effect, the individual is

likely to become increasingly vulnerable and less able to cope with future stressors (Rutter, 2012). Conversely, when exposure to stressors or adverse experiences results in a steeling effect, the individual then has the capacity to develop an increased resistance to future stressors, therefore exhibiting strengths rather than being sensitized (Rutter, 2012). In sum, sensitizing effects typically result in the avoidance of a negative outcome whereas steeling effects are more likely to result in a desire to problem solve and build agency, leading to the development of a positive outcome (Mustanski et al., 2011; Rutter, 2012).

Grace (2015) discusses how individuals can “steel life in the face of adversity” (p. 3), which involves navigating stressors and risk taking, building both human and material assets, and showing signs of thriving. In doing so, individuals are able to ‘grow into resilience’— a term that Grace (2015) uses to describe this dynamic process. Therefore, for the purpose of this research, resilience is defined as a dynamic, everchanging process that involves one’s ability to problem solve and overcome challenges in one’s daily life, resulting in increased positive outcomes, such as being happy, healthy, and hopeful. Resilience theorizing will be further discussed in relation to the study’s methodology and theoretical framework in Chapter Two.

### ***Resilience and SGM Youth***

Although resilience is a well-researched topic, especially among some vulnerable and marginalized groups such as those who experience racism and poverty, there is a paucity of resilience research involving SGMs (Asakura, 2016a). SGMs—those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and Two-Spirit (LGBTQ2S+)—experience oppression due to longstanding heteronormative and cis-normative perceptions that their sexual and gender identities are aberrant and even pathological (Grace, 2015). As Brown and Colbourne (2005) discuss, SGM youth, like heterosexual and cisgender youth, come from a range of ethnic,

religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds; they grow up within or outside their families of origin; they navigate social and cultural demands, including peer relationships; and they cope with a variety of challenges that accompany the usually turbulent developmental period of adolescence. However, SGMs have been historically subjugated and targeted due to homo/bi/transphobia and therefore face these ebbs and flows of life with the added marginalization that unfortunately still accompanies having a sexual orientation or gender identity that society perceives as nonnormative. As such, research involving SGM youth must address oppression based on sexual orientation and gender identity as well as layers of oppression complicated by the intersectionality with other factors like race and class that are inherent and composite in all SGM identities (Grace, 2015).

SGM resilience research remains a developing field, with many researchers highlighting the importance of examining resilience within the SGM population (Asakura, 2016a; Kosciw et al., 2015). Much of the existing research involving SGM youth has focused on risk factors and negative outcomes, with few studies to date having investigated possible protective factors and positive outcomes (Hatchel et al., 2019).

### **Protective Factors**

Although SGM youth face many increased risks compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers—this will be discussed in detail later in this chapter—some hope can be found in examining the influences of possible protective factors. Protective factors can help mitigate risk, highlight human and material asset-building, and encourage resilience (Grace, 2015; Ungar, 2012). Some of the protective factors indicated in research with SGM youth include family connectedness, teacher caring, other adult caring, school safety, and self-compassion (Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006; Hatchel et al., 2019). These factors have been demonstrated to protect against

many of the risks that SGM youth face, including suicidality, homelessness and street involvement, early school leaving, and substance use (Asakura, 2016b; Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006; Harvey, 2012; Hatchel et al., 2019).

### ***Caring Professionals***

One of the most well-documented protective factors for SGM youth is having the support of a significant adult such as a caring professional or other caring adult who has a positive impact on the life of an SGM youth (Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006; Grace & Hankey, 2016; Grace et al., 2019; Marshall et al., 2015; OCYA, 2017; Russell, 2005). Significant adults can be anyone from biological parents to foster or adoptive parents, older family members or friends, to caring professionals who work with SGM youth in some professional capacity. This category can include teachers and other school staff members, social workers, nurses and other healthcare professionals, and police officers working as SROs (OCYA, 2017).

As Grace (2015) notes, the notion of caring is often disengaged from that of professionalism, which has implications for the comprehensive health of SGM youth who are already a misunderstood and underserved population. In order to enhance the link between the notion of caring and professionalism, work with SGM youth should be “grounded in a professional ethics that sets aside private morals tied to heterocentrism, genderism, and homo/bi/transphobia” (Grace, 2015, p. 20). Caring should be an inherent component of professionalism without having to be explicitly stated; unfortunately, this notion continues to need to be reinforced, especially in fields of work involving vulnerable populations such as SGM youth where support and accommodation are at stake.

Since youth spend a significant portion of their time at school, it is important that schools have caring professionals in place who can support all students, including SGM youth (Marshall

et al., 2015). While unsupportive school staff members can place SGM youth at a greater risk, supportive and affirming school staff members can constitute protective factors and support SGM youths' growth into resilience (Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006; Hatchel et al., 2019). Much of the research on the supportiveness of school staff members has focused on teachers and administrative staff, without much consideration being given to other staff members, including SROs (Dwyer, 2011; Harvey, 2012).

**Police Officers.** Police officers are not often associated with the term 'caring,' especially when it comes to their work with SGM populations. In fact, discrimination and harassment are terms more often associated with police officers in this context (Mallory et al., 2015). This negative perception continues to persist as a result of the long history of mistreatment of SGMs by police and other law enforcement and government officials (Dwyer & Hotten, 2009; McCandless, 2018). As a result, SGMs are often hesitant to report crimes or engage with police and the justice system as a whole due to fears of discrimination and harassment (Dwyer, 2011; Mallory et al., 2015). Despite some positive strides being taken by government and law enforcement officials, tensions between SGMs and police continue to be elevated (CBC News, 2019; Dwyer, 2011). Still, police inevitably have contact with SGMs, especially because of the increased risk factors that this population continues to face (McCandless, 2018).

In terms of SGM youth in schools where SROs are present, education and justice compose intersecting social institutions. The *school-to-prison pipeline* is a term used in existing literature in speaking to risks that youth face at school and beyond that can lead to involvement with the justice system (Palmer et al., 2016). To reduce negative outcomes such as early school leaving and justice system involvement, it is important to have teachers and SROs team up as caring professionals who provide SGM youth with an array of supports in school settings

(Palmer et al., 2016). Here, it is important that teachers and SROs have sufficient training and knowledge regarding how to work effectively with SGM youth and avoid the school-to-prison pipeline (Grace, 2015).

SROs can play a significant role in achieving, promoting, and maintaining school safety. Learning and other positive outcomes can only be accomplished at school when basic needs like the need to be safe and secure are met (James et al., 2011; Johnson, 2017). The school-based roles of police continue to grow and expand to meet the unique needs of students and other school staff. SROs have traditionally been tasked with encouraging prosocial behaviour by educating students on topics such as personal safety, substance use awareness, safe driving, and gang avoidance (James et al., 2011). Their roles in schools are often thought of as a triad, consisting of enforcement, education, and mentoring (McKenna et al., 2016). Although these three areas have remained relatively constant over time, the topics addressed in each area have continued to expand (McKenna et al., 2016).

SROs are increasingly becoming more integrated into school crisis response teams and other coordinated school-based efforts to increase school safety as they work with teachers, administrative staff, school counsellors, and psychologists (James et al., 2011). Their increasing involvement and integration with other school staff members has allowed SROs to become more directly involved in supporting youth dealing with a variety of concerns and challenges in both school and community contexts (Robles-Piña & Denham, 2012). As SGM youth are disproportionately impacted by in-school victimization, they are more likely than their heterosexual and cisgender peers to be involved with school crisis response efforts, and in turn, with SROs (Hatchel et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2011).



Due to the tumultuous history between police and SGM communities, as discussed later in this chapter, it is crucial that SROs in the role of caring professional receive proper training in order to support SGM youth effectively (Palmer et al., 2016). The need for training has become even more pronounced as SROs' roles continue to expand and as SROs work to enhance collaboration with other school staff members in employing a wraparound approach to care (Grace et al., 2019; James et al., 2011; Palmer et al., 2016). However, training of SROs, replicating training within law enforcement sectors as a whole, has been slow to progress in terms of knowledge building focused on supporting SGMs (Palmer et al., 2016). Moreover, existing research on SROs providing supports to vulnerable groups like SGM youth has been limited and unfortunately it has not been promising (Palmer et al., 2016).

Although the inclusion of SROs in school settings has been on the rise, their impacts on school climate and their effectiveness in supporting vulnerable groups requires significant research (Palmer et al., 2016). To this point, the majority of existing research on SROs—including that which addresses their role in supporting SGM youth—has been conducted in the United States, with little research to date having been conducted in Canada (Palmer et al., 2016). Research involving SROs as caring professionals has also been limited, with mixed findings indicating a complex relationship between SROs and the youth they work with (Theriot, 2016). Additionally, little research has been conducted on what to consider when policing SGMs in general, especially youth (Dwyer, 2011). Finally, very little of the current research has been conducted from a qualitative perspective. Investigating the roles of SROs as caring professionals working with SGM youth could provide richer information by including firsthand accounts from both SROs and SGM youth.

In order to contextualize the firsthand accounts from SROs and SGM youth that were collected for the purpose of this study, and to gain a better understanding of why protective factors are so important in the lives of SGM youth, it is necessary to examine the risk factors that these youth face.

### **Risk Factors**

Traditionally, society has assumed and reinforced the existence of only two sexes (male and female), two corresponding genders (masculine and feminine), and the notion that heterosexuality is the only “‘normal’ and viable option” (Kosciw et al., 2015, p. 168). As such, those who fall outside of these strict heteronormative and cis–normative binaries have traditionally faced stigma, prejudice, discrimination, bullying, and victimization, which can lead to isolation and traumatization (Grossman et al., 2011; Harvey, 2012). Expressions of heterosexism, sexism, genderism, and homo/bi/transphobia can be either overt or covert and they can range from passive denial that anyone exists outside of these heteronormative and cis–normative constructs to active oppression and repression of SGMs (Harvey, 2012). Regardless of the nature of these expressions, they continue to place SGMs at risk as they navigate surrounding social institutions. In order to better understand the risk factors that SGM youth face, it is important to examine and understand the historical mistreatment that underlies such factors.

### ***Historical Mistreatment of SGMs in Canada***

Contemporary risk factors that SGMs continue to face have a strong historical precedence rooted in violence, discrimination, and disenfranchisement in culture and society (Grace, 2015). In order to better understand these complex risk factors and contextualize the experiences of SGM youth today, it is important to examine the history of SGM rights in Canada. Prior to June 1969, homosexuality was criminalized in Canada. This meant that any individual living fully in a

same sex relationship could be treated as a criminal and, consequently, punished. Although homosexuality was decriminalized in 1969, this simply marked the beginning of a “turbulent long-term struggle for recognition and accommodation of sexual (and later) gender minorities in legal and legislative contexts” (Grace, 2017, p. 43). It was not until 1973 that homosexuality was no longer considered pathological in the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Grace, 2015). Identifying as transgender was still categorized as a mental disorder by the World Health Organization until 2019 (Queer Events, n.d.).

Diverse critical incidents over time have highlighted the violence perpetuated against SGMs in Canada. In October 1977, Montreal police raided two gay bars; this was considered more of a military operation than a typical police intervention, as officers wore bulletproof vests and went in with weapons drawn, including machine guns (The Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity [CCGSD], 2018). There were 50 police officers and only 146 patrons, all of whom were arrested. All of these patrons were homosexual men. They were forced into crowded holding cells, forced to take venereal disease tests, and were forbidden from calling their lawyers (Queer Events, n.d.). This resulted in protests the next day, with protestors and police clashing, and police again using significant force to disperse the crowds (CCGSD, 2018). This was considered the first major clash between SGMs and police in Canada, and sparked activism advocating for the increased rights of SGMs (Queer Events, n.d.).

Other raids followed in major cities including Toronto and Edmonton, and protests continued to accompany them (Queer Events, n.d.). As a result, the Parliamentary Committee on Equality Rights released a report in 1985 that outlined the harassment, violence, discrimination, abuse, oppression, and targeted propaganda that homosexual individuals faced in Canada (Grace,

2017). Despite this step being taken to support the rights of SGMs, it was not until ten years later in 1995 that sexual orientation was deemed a personal characteristic analogous to race and gender, making it a protected category in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Grace, 2017). Then in 1998, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in the *Vriend v Alberta* case that provincial governments could not exclude individuals from human rights legislation based on their sexual orientation (Grace, 2017). Despite these strides, same sex couples were still prohibited from marrying and did not have the same rights as opposite sex couples. That changed in 2005 when Canada became the fourth country in the world to legalize same sex marriage (Queer Events, n.d.). Still, a pride flag was not raised on Parliament Hill in Ottawa until June 2016, just four years ago (Queer Events, n.d.).

In June 2017, the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code of Canada were both expanded to include the terms ‘gender identity’ and ‘gender expression,’ which made it illegal to discriminate against any person based on their gender identity or expression (Queer Events, n.d.). 2017 was also the year that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau apologized to SGM Canadians for the longstanding history of state-sponsored laws and policies that led to violence and discrimination against them (Harris, 2017). Locally, the Edmonton Police Service issued a similar apology for their actions in 2019, with the police chief stating that “our actions caused pain. They eroded trust. They created fear” (CBC News, 2019). The recency of these apologies speaks to the unfortunate reality that mistreatment of SGMs is not a topic from the past. It also speaks to the need for research like mine, which can be linked to advocating for SGMs and their inclusion across contemporary social institutions, including education and justice.

**Implications for SGM Youth.** As mistreatment of SGMs continues to be a significant issue in Canada and around the world, it is important to note the resulting increased risks that

SGM youth face. They are tasked with navigating these complexities during critical stages of their development, often without the support of families or peers (Aragon et al., 2014; Brown & Colbourne, 2005). A significant component in one's development is the exploration and growth of one's personal identity (OCYA, 2017). This identity development begins in childhood and continues throughout adolescence and into adulthood, making it a lifelong process of being and becoming (Grace, 2015). Sexual orientation and gender identity are important aspects of one's overall identity, adding an additional layer of complexity for SGM youth who fall outside of heteronormative and cis-normative identity categories. Not only are SGM youth tasked with navigating their identity development with the added layers of exploring and understanding their sexual orientation and gender identity, they must do so in a society that has a history of mistreating SGMs. As identity development is informed by such factors as heritage, religion, beliefs, and culture, it is important to understand and acknowledge how the historical mistreatment of SGMs might shape SGM youths' development, which in turn can impact their worldviews and relationships with others (OCYA, 2017).

With the mistreatment and harm of SGMs constituting a historical issue long impeding an inclusive society in Canada, negative and often hurtful outcomes have permeated core social institutions like education and justice that SGM youth navigate. Once SGM rights began to be addressed and included in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, schools and other social institutions had to respond by developing their own policies and procedures to protect SGM students and staff members against discrimination on the grounds of their sexual orientations and gender identities (Grace, 2017). In 2002, the Canadian Teachers' Federation made it a national modus operandi to expose and address homo/bi/transphobia in our nation's schools (Grace & Wells, 2016). The organization began to develop educational resources and

make policy changes to support their advocacy work to better support SGM students and staff. Although the Canadian Teachers' Federation and other affiliated teachers' associations became leaders in addressing SGM issues and concerns in K–12 schools, similar work in school districts remained inconsistent and was often delayed (Grace, 2017). In order for schools to become safer spaces for SGM youth, policy development and implementation reflecting legal and legislative changes protecting SGMs both federally and provincially must be an integral part of the core work of schoolboards. However, it has proven to be a difficult process to develop and maintain SGM-inclusive policies in schools (Grace & Wells, 2016). Consequently, education continues to lag behind national progress in law and legislation (Grace & Wells, 2016).

The historical mistreatment of SGMs negatively impacting inclusivity and delaying progress in the development of meaningful policy changes is not only evident in education. Exclusion and harm are also evident in other social institutions. Indeed, the effects of historical mistreatment of SGM youth across social institutions continues to impact them in a multitude of ways (Grace, 2017). Stigmatizing and discriminating against SGMs is perpetuated in social institutions when meaningful changes are not made and accommodating climates supported by policy as protection are not fostered (Grace & Wells, 2016). Thus, it is vital to provide policies, strategic practices, resources, and supports in order to build knowledge and understanding of the particularities of SGM identities, needs, and concerns (Grace & Wells, 2016). In the case of schools, supports need to be available for both SGM students and staff members, and they need to be complemented by building knowledge of SGM identities into school curricula to prevent further stigmatization and discrimination, much of which stems from ignorance (Grace & Wells, 2016). Grace and Wells (2016) outline some tenets that schools should follow in order to foster safe and caring environments for their students, such as ensuring that students can grow and

learn as individuals, and that all children and youth have opportunities to develop to their fullest potential. As these authors outline, such tenets are most effective when they are SGM-specific rather than generic (Grace & Wells, 2016). This is because SGM students' needs and rights have particularities in terms of creating safe and caring school environments respecting their personal characteristics. It is also vital to address homo/bi/transphobic bullying specifically rather than just addressing bullying in general terms (Grace & Wells, 2016).

### ***Family Rejection***

Just as it is important that schools are safe and caring environments for all children and youth (Government of Alberta, n.d.), having a safe and caring place to live is vital as well. As has been discussed, due to traditional heteronormative and cis-normative beliefs, some individuals continue to harbor negative feelings towards SGMs. This can result in rejection and abuse, even from those who should be a child's first line of support and protection from the outside world: their family (Grace & Wells, 2016). Indeed, families can be sources of both "intentional and unintentional psychological abuse" for SGM youth (Dysart-Gale, 2010, p. 27). Asakura (2016a), like an increasing number of other researchers, found that many SGM youth face rejection from their families upon coming out (i.e., revealing their SGM identity) (Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006; Grace et al., 2019; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Hatchel et al., 2019; McConnell et al., 2016). Family rejection can take many forms, from silencing the topic to verbal, physical, and sexual abuse (Asakura, 2016a); this notion is unfortunately reinforced by the accounts of youth who participated in this study, as discussed later in the thesis. The emotional toll of coming out is often further complicated for youth who are part of religious or cultural groups that reject non-heteronormative identities (Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006; Robinson, 2018). As families provide a core support system for youth, family rejection often

leads to a domino effect in which SGM youth begin to face an increasing number of additional risks (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; McCormick, 2016; Tierney & Ward, 2017). Being forced to seek alternative living arrangements outside of their family home is one such risk (Grace et al., 2019; OCYA, 2017; Tierney & Ward, 2017).

### *Alternative Living Arrangements*

If SGM youth are rejected by their families, their home living environments often become unsafe or unlivable, even to the point that these youth may become homeless, as discussed below. To avoid homelessness, SGM youth may have to seek alternative living arrangements, such as foster care or group homes, as they often do not yet have independent living options due to their age or income (OCYA, 2017; Wilson & Kastanis, 2015). As outlined in OCYA's 2017 report, placements in alternative living facilities can present additional risks for SGM youth. For example, youth who participated in research for the OCYA report (2017) described being placed in recovery facilities for addicts despite not having substance use issues; religious homes that strongly reject and discriminate against SGM identities; group homes where other youth or staff members are discriminatory or threaten their safety; or homes where caregivers refuse to affirm the youth's gender identity by ignoring their pronouns or chosen names. As these youths' accounts demonstrate, SGM youth in care often continue to face rejection and both violent and nonviolent victimization in these alternative living facilities (Grace et al., 2019; OCYA, 2017; Tierney & Ward, 2017).

In research conducted by Grace and colleagues in 2019, it was found that many SGM youth in Edmonton who had accessed Children's Services had experienced some form of abuse, with 16% experiencing sexual abuse, 20% experiencing physical abuse, and 32% experiencing emotional abuse. Thirty six percent of participants also indicated that they did not feel their



sexual orientation was respected when accessing services, and 32% indicated that no one listened to them (Grace et al., 2019). As a result, many of these youth reported leaving their out-of-home placements and experiencing homelessness.

### *Homelessness*

When SGM youth are rejected from their families of origin and when placements in alternative living facilities arranged through government programs like Children's Services do not work out, it is likely that these youth may become homeless. A report released by LaLonde and colleagues in 2018 found that 25–40% of youth experiencing homelessness in Canada identified as SGMs, compared to only 5–10% of Canadian youth who identify as SGMs. This demonstrates a disproportionate representation of SGM youth within the Canadian homeless population (LaLonde et al., 2018). It was also noted that the number of homeless SGM youth may actually be higher than this, as many SGM youth choose not to disclose their SGM identity and do not access shelters for homeless individuals due to fears of violence and discrimination (LaLonde et al., 2018). Homeless SGM youth often experience increased risks, with 29.4% reporting not having access to clean drinking water daily, 77.9% reporting experiencing criminal victimization (e.g., theft, sexual assault, etc.), and 35.6% having been victims of nonconsensual sexual touch within the previous 12-month period (LaLonde et al., 2018).

In a 2015 study that Kidd and colleagues conducted on youth homelessness in Canada, it was found that SGM youth had significantly lower quality of life, poorer mental health outcomes, and higher rates of substance use and suicide attempts than their heterosexual and cisgender peers (Kidd et al., 2017). Despite homeless SGM youth being at a greater risk for negative comprehensive health outcomes, there is a lack of SGM-friendly housing alternatives

and shelters in Canada, which further compounds this complicated issue (Abramovitch & Shelton, 2017; Grace et al., 2019; LaLonde et al., 2018).

Homeless and street involved SGM youth face additional barriers when it comes to other social institutions, such as education. If school environments are not safe and inclusive, “the risk of sustaining cycles of poverty and homelessness is increased” (Wheeler et al., 2017).

Discriminatory policies and procedures across social institutions impact SGM youths’ housing options, economic empowerment, comprehensive health, and educational attainment (Wheeler et al., 2017). In order to adequately address SGM youth homelessness—and in turn, support SGM youth across all social institutions—a national strategy would need to be implemented; to date, no such strategy exists (Abramovitch & Shelton, 2017; Grace et al., 2019).

### ***In-School Victimization***

Similar to the delay in developing and implementing a national strategy to address SGM youth homelessness in Canada (Abramovitch & Shelton, 2017; Grace et al., 2019), policy changes to support the inclusive education of SGM youth across provincial and territorial schoolboards have also faced delays (Grace & Wells, 2016). Although progress continues to occur throughout the Canadian education sector, the slow nature of this progress has impacted the inclusivity of schools today; they are often not consistently aligned with federal policy changes that have been implemented. As a result, schools remain another social institution where SGM youth face increased risks compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers.

Adolescence is a time when individuals should be able to develop a secure identity, a positive sense of self, and the capacity to form strong interpersonal relationships (Aragon et al., 2014; OCYA, 2017). Schools are settings where much of this development occurs. However, schools often fail to be “conducive to the learning, personal growth, and other educational needs”

of SGM youth (Aragon et al., 2014, p. 2). This can be attributed, at least in part, to the slow progress in policy development and implementation, which has contributed to the continued presence of homo/bi/transphobia in such institutions (Grace & Wells, 2016). As a result, many SGM youth report feeling unsafe at school (Taylor et al., 2011).

In the first national climate survey on homo/bi/transphobia in Canadian schools, which was released in 2011, up to 49% of the SGM youth participants reported experiencing sexual harassment at school and 21% reported experiencing physical harassment due to their sexual orientation and gender identity (Taylor et al., 2011). Due to the increased rates of victimization that SGM youth face in school settings, SGM youth are also at a greater risk of fear-based truancy, which can negatively impact academic outcomes and even lead to youth dropping out of school (Seelman et al., 2012). SGM youth are more likely to become caught in a negative cycle, in which victimization at school leads them to experience more mental health challenges and become fearful of attending school, which in turn negatively impacts their school performance and further discourages them from attending (Kosciw et al., 2013; Kosciw et al., 2015; Palmer et al., 2016; Seelman et al., 2012). Breaking this cycle is again a difficult task, especially because victimization can occur in many forms, with both peers and school staff members contributing to this issue (Marshall et al., 2015; Palmer et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2011).

**Peer Victimization.** In the aforementioned national climate survey, it was found that 70% of participants, both SGM and non-SGM youth, reported hearing derogatory remarks towards SGM youth daily at school (Taylor et al., 2011). In addition to verbal abuse, peer victimization can include active bullying and harassment, physical violence, behaviours intended to do harm or intimidate others, the spreading of rumors, and exclusion from social activities or groups (Hatchel & Marx, 2018). Experiencing peer victimization is related to poor outcomes

such as increased substance use and sexual risk, poor psychosocial adjustment, decreased academic performance, and increased mental health issues (Hatchel et al., 2019). Peer victimization is also associated with suicidality among SGM youth (Hatchel et al., 2019). The consequences of peer victimization therefore include SGM youths' negative feelings regarding their safety at school, including a lack of school connectedness and diminished feelings of belonging (Hatchel et al., 2019). When SGM youth are victimized by their peers, schools quickly become environments in which youth feel rejected, excluded, isolated, and unsafe. This is further compounded when school staff are unsupportive, or even contribute to the victimization of SGM youth (Hatchel et al., 2019).

**Unsupportive School Staff.** When SGM youth are victimized by their peers, one might assume that turning to school staff members for help would be the next appropriate course of action. Unfortunately, school staff members are not always supportive and affirming either, with some even contributing to the victimization of SGM students (Hatchel et al., 2019). Although victimization perpetrated by school staff members is less likely to be as overt as peer victimization, it can still occur in more covert ways. Negative treatment of SGM youth by staff members tends to be rooted in staff members' personal beliefs, which can become apparent through their use of inappropriate language and their (un)willingness to support their SGM students (Hatchel et al., 2019). In the national climate survey, 10% of SGM youth reported hearing homophobic comments from school staff members on a daily or weekly basis (Taylor et al. 2011). SGM youth shared concerns that they believed school staff would take little or no action to respond to bullying incidents targeting SGMs (Aragon et al., 2014; Taylor et al., 2011). As a result, it was noted that such incidents often go unreported and consequently do not get addressed (Aragon et al., 2014).

As a result of these discriminatory practices and behaviours, SGM youth commonly do not feel safe disclosing their true SGM identities. In their study, Kosciw and colleagues (2015) found when SGM youth reported higher levels of outness (i.e., being open about their SGM identities) to both peers and school staff members, they experienced increased levels of in-school victimization from both groups. As a result, SGM youth reported that they often do not feel safe coming out to their peers and school staff members, and therefore choose to keep their identities hidden at school in an effort to protect their personal safety (Kosciw et al., 2015). When youth do not feel safe disclosing their identities and being true to themselves, they are more likely to become truant and fall behind at school, which can again lead to poor comprehensive health outcomes (Kosciw et al., 2013).

As children and youth spend so much of their time at school, it is important that schools are safe and welcoming environments for all students (Government of Alberta, n.d.). To summarize, feelings of safety, belonging, and connectedness stem from a multitude of intersecting factors; these factors are discussed through the voices of this study's research participants later in the thesis. Starting more broadly, both federal and provincial/territorial laws impact schoolboards who are then responsible for developing and implementing policies. Individual schools follow, engaging in new schoolboard sanctioned practices under the guidance of their administrative staff. Here, it is important to consider the bigger picture. At the school level, individual school policies as well as staff knowledge, training, and personal beliefs and attitudes further impact the school environment. And, of course, those who make up the student body contribute to the nature of this environment and the social ecology of the school (Grace, 2015; Ungar, 2012).

In order to ensure that schools can be safe and welcoming environments for all students and staff, it is necessary to continue SGM-inclusive policy work and its implementation (Grace & Wells, 2016). Such inclusive policy work is needed across social institutions that work with SGM youth and should be informed by meaningful research that includes the perspectives of staff members such as SROs, as well as the SGM youth with whom they work. As these youth continue to face increased risks at school and in other social institutions due to heterosexism, sexism, genderism, and homo/bi/transphobia in their everyday lives (Grace, 2015), growing into resilience can be a most challenging task. In order to better support SGM youths' growth into resilience, a proactive approach can be taken by conducting research and informing policy work that shifts the focus from risk factors to protective factors and asset-building.

## Chapter Two: Data Gathering and Methodology

### Theoretical Perspective: Resilience Theorizing

In order to interpret and analyze qualitative data within a process of making meaning and sense, it is important to articulate and utilize a theoretical framework (Collins & Stockton, 2018). A theoretical framework can be used to guide interpreting complex social phenomena, such as how SGM youth—whose sexual orientations and gender identities intersect with racial, class, and other relational identities—deal with the challenges of life in schools and other social institutions (Collins & Stockton, 2018; Grace, 2015). In this research, I employ a theoretical framework grounded in resilience because my study is focused on asset-building and protective factors, which represents a positive shift in focus from past studies focused on challenges and risk factors.

Contemporary theorizing of resilience as a construct, process, and outcome is rooted in the notion that research foci can be and should be shifted away from pathology to focus on strengths and thriving in the face of adversity (Grace, 2015; VanBreda, 2001). Although risk taking and risk factors remain important components to address in resilience research, the focus on protective factors grounds resilience as a process within a proactive and productive strengths-based approach. In making this shift, it becomes possible to examine how individuals facing adversity and trauma can thrive with the support of a variety of protective factors.

Resilience theorizing that focuses on becoming resilient as a social ecological process addresses the resilience of individuals in the context of families, communities, and social institutions where individuals can demonstrate different levels of resilience (Ungar, 2012; VanBreda, 2001). It is this comprehensive approach that is well suited to the current study, as the focus is on individuals within the context of social institutions. Although individuals'

experiences at the intersection of the education and justice systems is the primary focus of the current study, individuals' growth into resilience is also impacted by their interactions with other social institutions such as family, social services, and healthcare (Grace, 2015). This notion of intersectionality is inherent in resilience theorizing as it addresses the complexity of individuals' responses to adversity as being informed and influenced by the interest groups and contexts of the social institutions with which they interact (VanBreda, 2001). Therefore, the current study fits well within a comprehensive resilience framework.

Another aspect of resilience theorizing that is well suited to the current study is the idea that "resilience is a theory that can inform action" (Ungar, 2008, p. 22). Utilizing resilience as a social ecological construct and process not only aims to highlight individuals' strengths and asset-building capabilities, it also encourages those in associated helping professions, such as SROs, to intervene and provide youth with opportunities to grow (Ungar, 2008). In doing so, following a resilience framework can encourage positive, meaningful action to be taken in order to support youths' growth into resilience. In the context of the current study, gaining the perspectives of SGM youth and SROs allows for both individual and institutional factors to be considered. As a result, both caring professionals and SGM youth can inform meaningful action that directly impacts them.

### ***Asset-Building***

In the context of resilience theorizing, protective factors can lead to the development of assets for SGM youth, and in turn, "assets enable individuals to develop a resilient mindset" (Grace, 2015, p. 297). A visualization of this process is presented in Figure 1 below.

### **Figure 1**

#### *Growing into Resilience*





*Note.* This figure illustrates the typical progression of how individuals can grow into resilience, as discussed by Grace (2015).

When individuals can develop and utilize a resilient mindset, they are better positioned to cope with life's challenges and confront their problems from a strengths-based perspective (Grace, 2015). As discussed in the previous chapter, assets can be both human and material, and can come from individuals, as well as from family, communities, and social institutions.

Although there are some common protective factors that can help SGM youth build assets and grow into resilience, there are heterogeneous factors that are unique to each individual (Grace, 2015). Consequently, "the degree to which assets protect an individual from the effects of risk is apparently predicated on a person's vulnerability, the level of adversity or trauma, and environmental influences" (Grace, 2015, p. 297). Considering the unique nature of individuals' paths to growing into resilience, the current study utilizes the voices of research participants to contextualize the existing literature on protective factors, asset-building, and resilience theorizing, and to add to the growing body of literature on SGM youths' experiences in social institutions.

### **The Current Study**

The current study is framed using resilience theorizing to indicate what constitutes protective factors and asset-building for SGM youth transgressing adversity and trauma to move forward and become resilient. This framework positions SROs as caring professionals who can be assets assisting vulnerable SGM youth. The study is reflexive as it takes up the perspective

that meaningful action can be taken from and informed by impactful research. Much of the current research on protective factors suggests that such factors moderate the relation between risk factors and poor outcomes, or that they have direct main effects on outcomes (Hatchel et al., 2019). A majority of these studies have used survey methods and various forms of statistical modeling to demonstrate the impacts of possible protective factors quantitatively (Hatchel et al., 2019). Few studies have used qualitative methodologies, such as case studies, to gain a more thorough understanding of protective factors and their impacts on SGM youth from personal accounts shared by the youth and caring professionals themselves (Asakura, 2016a; Hatchel et al., 2019).

In order to contribute to the existing literature, a qualitative case study design rooted in resilience theorizing was developed. As a type of qualitative inquiry that strives to conduct in-depth analysis of a particular case—often an individual, group, or program—that is bounded by time and activity, a case study can be adapted to fit with the topic of interest (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Flyvbjerg, 2011; Yin, 2014). Case studies typically involve conducting interviews in order to get exploratory, first-hand accounts of the phenomenon of interest (Yin, 2014)—in this context, the role of SROs as potential caring professionals in the lives of SGM youth.

Two Edmonton high schools were included as research sites for this case study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the SROs from each school as well as with some of the SGM youth with whom they work. The goal of these interviews was to investigate what individuals from each group might consider as protective factors for SGM youth. In addition to exploring protective factors, the role of SROs in promoting, achieving, and maintaining school safety for *all* students—specifically for those who identify as SGMs—is explored. Because two

high schools were involved in this research, it was developed as a multiple case study, with each school acting as an individual case to be compared and contrasted with the other (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

### ***Ethics Approval***

As the participants of this research study are members of a vulnerable group, additional care was taken in developing and implementing the selected research design (Fine & Weis, 2005; Grace, 2015). This process began with applying for ethics approval from both the University of Alberta and Edmonton Public Schools. Ethics approval from the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board 1 (Pro00090578) and subsequent approval from the school district (see Appendices A and B, respectively) was received.

Because the study consisted of open-ended interviews in which SGM youth were asked to discuss their experiences as SGM individuals, including the risks and challenges they have experienced, it was important to ensure that supports were put in place should participants have requested them. In accordance with the ethics guidelines, all interviewees were offered the opportunity to contact the CHEW Project, which offers no-cost crisis intervention and counselling services to SGM youth in Edmonton. The youth research participants were also offered a list of other SGM-inclusive community supports and resources. In addition to implementing these safeguards, care was taken in developing the interview questions and in conducting the interviews themselves whereby individuals had right of refusal and control over what they chose to share.

### ***Qualitative Interviewing with Vulnerable Populations***

Individual semi-structured interviews have been found to be used to good effect in qualitative research focused on SGMs; in particular, regarding inclusion and exclusion, justice,

and emancipation (Fine & Weis, 2005; Fontana & Frey, 2005; Grace, 2015). Semi-structured interviews allow for in-depth, open-ended responses, while still providing some structure to focus the study (Fontana & Frey, 2005). This approach also allows researchers to establish rapport and gain some trust from their participants; factors which are important to consider when conducting research with vulnerable populations, such as SGM youth (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

Over the past decade, reshaping the interview within the context of vulnerable populations, including SGMs, has occurred (Grace, 2013; Plummer 2011a, 2011b). This reshaping has included recognizing particularities of SGM identities (i.e., using affirming language and proper pronouns/chosen names) in the interviews and the analysis of the data; addressing the nature of SGM experiences; and acknowledging the importance of addressing systemic inequities (Grace, 2013; Kong et al., 2001). Reshaping the interview also addresses the importance of considering the space in which the interview is conducted (i.e., Does the participant feel safe in that setting?); the potential biases of the researcher; and the necessity of giving voice to vulnerable groups rather than speaking on their behalf (Kong et al., 2001).

With these considerations in mind, in-person interviews were conducted on-site at the SGM students' schools and the SROs' places of work. The interviews were conducted in private meeting rooms in order to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants. The interview questions were designed to be open-ended, with opportunities for participants to expand on their responses and share additional information should they so choose. The open-ended nature of the interview questions helped ensure that participants had the opportunity to adequately express and share their thoughts, feelings, and opinions without restriction. Participants were also told at the beginning of the interviews that they could stop at any time or skip any questions that they did not feel comfortable answering. Participants were given the opportunity to share information

about themselves, including their interests, priorities, and how they identify in terms of sexual orientation and gender identity prior to proceeding to the rest of the interview questions. This enabled them to share their name and pronouns to ensure that affirming language could then be used by the interviewer throughout.

### **Research Question and Objectives**

From a positive, strengths-based perspective, I developed this research with the aim of addressing the following research objectives, informed by resilience theorizing:

1. *Enabling positive outcomes*: To investigate how SROs work with SGM youth to enable positive outcomes in both school and community contexts.
2. *Enhancing SRO roles*: To investigate how police officers can become more successful caring professionals in their roles as SROs.
3. *Building assets*: To investigate how SGM youth can build both human and material assets in order to support their growth into resilience.
4. *Improving relationships*: To explore how SGM youth perceive their relationship with their assigned SRO and explore what they consider to be indicators of a positive working relationship.

These objectives are informed by my desire to connect my research with advocacy and practice, while providing a safe space for those directly impacted by such work to share their perspectives and experiences. As such, I invited both SROs and the SGM youth with whom they work to participate in my research. To achieve the aforementioned research objectives, I focused on the following overarching research question, as indicated in the title of my thesis: How do school resource officers foster resilience in sexual and gender minority youth? This research is timely and important, as it adds to a growing body of literature that addresses how SGM youth

can become better able to navigate social institutions while experiencing intersecting layers of oppression that can make doing so much more challenging.

### **Procedure**

Initially, the researcher proposed that three Edmonton high schools would be involved in the research project. Edmonton Public Schools approved this request and specified which three schools could be contacted. This required contacting the school principals to request permission to conduct the research within their schools. All research materials, including research approval letters (see Appendices A and B), an information letter for SROs (see Appendix C), consent and assent forms (see Appendices D, E, and F), and interview protocols (see Appendices G and H) were shared with the participating schools. Due to staffing changes with one of the school's SROs, the principal was unable to grant the researcher permission to conduct interviews at that school until shortly before the novel coronavirus was found in Alberta in March 2020. As a result, that school was unable to participate in the research. Two other high schools were involved, with the principals from each school granting the researcher permission to move forward with the research. In order to protect the privacy and confidentiality of all participants as required by the school district, school names will not be provided. The participating schools will be referred to as School One and School Two.

With approval obtained from the two school principals, the researcher met with each school's administrative staff and assigned SRO in person. SGM youth were recruited through their respective SROs. Due to the nature of the study and the discussion of particularities of SGM identities, the youth had to have disclosed their SGM identity to the SRO at their school in order to be identified for inclusion in the study. It is important to note that not all SGM youth choose to disclose their identities to school staff members, including SROs, due to fears of

violence and discrimination (Taylor et al., 2011). Youth participants under the age of 18 also had to provide parent or guardian consent to participate in the research, which required that they had also disclosed their SGM identity to their parent or guardian. Due to the requirement that SGM youth participants had to disclose their SGM identity to both their assigned SRO as well as their parent/guardian, in addition to the fact that SGMs belong to a minority group and only represent 5–10% of Canadian youth overall (LaLonde et al., 2018), the pool of SGM youth participants from only two Edmonton high schools was limited.

As research participants, both SROs and SGM youth were invited to take part in semi-structured, open-ended interviews with the researcher. As noted in the earlier discussion of the ethics protocol, all interviews were conducted individually in private meeting rooms in order to respect and protect each participant's privacy. Additionally, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants and minimal information outside of the interview questions was collected.

The information that was collected fell into three categories: contextual, demographic, and perceptual (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Contextual information included the school the research participant attended or worked at; demographic information included the participants' sexual orientation and gender identity and, in the case of students, their current grade; and perceptual information included the participants' responses to the interview questions. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed with the permission of the participants. The data were stored on an encrypted hard drive and all identifying information was destroyed once pseudonyms were assigned to each participant.

## **Participants**

A total of five participants took part in this case study research ( $N=5$ ). As each high school has one assigned SRO, a total of two ( $n=2$ ) SROs participated in the research. SROs each

provided their independent informed consent to participate (see Appendix D). Both SROs identified as cisgender females, with one identifying as heterosexual and one identifying as lesbian.

One SGM youth from School One and two SGM youth from School Two participated in this study, resulting in a total of three youth participants ( $n=3$ ). All three youth participants were under the age of 18 and were therefore required to provide both parent/guardian consent and personal assent to participate in the research (see Appendices E and F). Two youth participants self-identified as cisgender females (one self-identified as bisexual, and the other as panromantic and demisexual); one youth participant self-identified as a transgender gay male (please refer to the Glossary for definitions of these terms). All three youth participants were enrolled in Grade 12 at the time of their interviews.

The full interview protocols for both SGM youth and SROs are included in the appendix (see Appendices G and H, respectively).

### **Coding and Thematic Analysis Procedures**

Prior to beginning the coding and thematic analysis of the data, member checking procedures were implemented. Member checking is used to enhance the credibility of qualitative research by ensuring that research participants have opportunities to provide additional feedback on their interview data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). This process limits the researcher's potential to influence the interpretation of the findings with their personal biases (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Stake, 1995). All participants were provided with the opportunity to review their interview transcripts and provide additional feedback on their responses prior to the inclusion of their transcripts in the study in order to implement member checking procedures. Unique password-protected documents containing their transcripts were shared with each participant via



email and the participants were asked to approve their transcripts prior to their inclusion in the study. At this time, participants were also given the opportunity to add, change, or remove anything in their transcripts to ensure that their perspectives were adequately represented by what they initially shared (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). All participants approved their transcripts with no revisions and all transcripts were therefore included in the final coding and thematic analysis procedures for the study.

When analyzing qualitative interview data from more than one site (e.g., two schools) and with more than one set of participants (e.g., SROs and SGM youth), it is necessary to have protocols in place that are not dependent on “mere intuition and good intention to ‘get it right’” (Stake, 1995, p. 107). In addition to the aforementioned member checking procedures, thematic analysis and cross–case synthesis (Yin, 2014) were used to merge and compare findings between the two schools and the two sets of participants. Each school was considered to be an independent case, subdivided by participant type. In analyzing the findings from each case study, the goal is not to generalize the results; rather, it is “to understand and interpret the individual cases thoroughly in their own special contexts” (Aaltio & Heilmann, 2010, p. 74).

First, the researcher independently open–coded the interview transcripts to determine possible themes (Nowell et al., 2017). The tenets of resilience theorizing, in addition to the review of the literature and the research participants’ responses were used to frame and guide this process. In reviewing the literature, the researcher was able to identify and explore the most common risk and protective factors, as discussed in Chapter One. These factors were then considered within the context of resilience theorizing and, in particular, in relation to the process of asset–building and the development of a resilient mindset (see Figure 1). Based on this knowledge, initial themes were developed. Upon reviewing the interview transcripts, the themes

were then winnowed to better reflect the participants' unique responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Next, a coding scheme was developed to describe and differentiate between each theme (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The coding scheme was subdivided by participant type in order to best reflect and present the unique perspectives of both SRO and SGM youth participants. The coding scheme was also organized by school in order to further categorize the findings; however, the same themes were utilized for each school to ensure consistency in the data analysis procedures. A summary of the coding scheme is presented in Table 1 below. Definitions of each theme are included in Chapter Three.

**Table 1**

*Coding Scheme*

Participant Type	Theme	Research Objective(s) Addressed
School Resource Officers	The C3 Approach (Wraparound Care)	1, 2
	Building Connection	1, 2
	Inclusivity	1
	Risk Factors for SGM Youth	1
	Training and Professional Preparedness	2
	Police Challenges	2
Sexual and Gender Minority Youth	Risk Factors/Negative Life Experiences	3
	Growing into Resilience	3
	Relationship with SRO	4
	Protective Factors/Positive Life Experiences	3
	Experiences with SGM Identity	3

The aforementioned thematic analysis procedures then informed the creation of an individual case profile for each of the two schools (Yin, 2014). The case profiles reiterate the key

themes that emerged in the coding scheme and provide a summary of the findings from each of the interviews, corresponding with each theme. The case profiles act as a means of expanding upon the coding scheme and summarizing the findings by connecting the themes with quotes from each of the interview transcripts. These procedures were implemented with the intention of minimizing possible misperceptions of the findings and thereby strengthening the interpretation of the overall case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). The case profiles along with a summary and analysis of the data are presented in the following chapter.

### Chapter 3: Data Presentation and Analysis

The themes that were identified for inclusion in the analysis and interpretation of the interview data were informed by the review of the literature as discussed in Chapter One, the tenets of resilience theorizing as discussed in Chapter Two, and the voices of the research participants themselves, which are shared in this chapter. An overview and description of the themes for both the SRO participants and the SGM youth participants are provided. The findings are then organized by school. Each section begins with a table summarizing the contextual and demographic information of the participants from each school, followed by tables highlighting key quotes from each participant in an effort to support and contextualize the selected themes. A summary of the presented data from each research participant is then offered. Finally, the chapter concludes with a comparative analysis of the findings to address the similarities and differences between the SRO participants and the SGM youth participants from each school; the themes are used to organize this analysis.

#### Themes

The themes used to categorize and analyze the data from the SRO interviews, as well as descriptions of each theme, are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*School Resource Officer Themes and Descriptions*

Theme	Description
The C3 Approach (Wraparound Care)	The C3 approach involves comprehensive health education and outreach, community support services, and compassionate policing (Grace et al., 2019). It is a type of wraparound care that involves coordinating supports provided by caring professionals.

Building Connection	Building connection refers to the SROs working to form positive caring professional relationships with the SGM youth with whom they work.
Inclusivity	This theme refers to when SROs embrace diversity and make SGM youth feel welcome and included at school. This involves using proper pronouns and chosen names, contributing to the development of a warm and welcoming environment, treating SGM youth fairly and equitably when compared to non-SGM youth.
Risk Factors for SGM Youth	This theme refers to how SROs perceive the risk factors and challenges that are unique to SGM youth.
Training and Professional Preparedness	This theme is centered on the training that SROs have to work with SGM youth specifically and how well prepared they feel to work with this vulnerable population.
Police Challenges	This theme refers to the challenges that SROs feel they face in their profession due to the stigma around police and, specifically, police-SGM relations.

The themes used to categorize and analyze the data from the SGM youth interviews, as well as descriptions of each theme, are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Sexual and Gender Minority Youth Themes and Descriptions*

Theme	Description
Risk Factors/Negative Life Experiences	This theme encompasses the risks and challenges that the SGM youth have faced/continue to face, including bullying, victimization, and involvement with Children's Services or the youth justice system.
Growing into Resilience	This theme includes statements that represent youth growing into resilience by overcoming adversity, problem-solving, and experiencing an increase in positive outcomes, such as hope, health, and happiness.

Relationship with SRO	This theme includes the youths' perceptions of their relationship with their assigned SRO.
Protective Factors/Positive Life Experiences	This theme includes positive life experiences that may act as possible protective factors for the SGM youth.
Experiences with SGM Identity	This theme includes youths' descriptions of their SGM identity and how it impacts their daily lives.

### School One

One SRO and one SGM youth from School One participated in this research. Their contextual and demographic information is summarized and presented in Table 4.

**Table 4**

#### *School One Participants*

Participant	Pseudonym	Grade	Sexual Orientation	Gender Identity
SRO #1	Megan	N/A	Heterosexual	Cisgender female
SGM Youth #1	Alexis	12	Bisexual	Cisgender female

### *Megan*

Organized by theme, a selection of key quotes from Megan's interview are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5**

#### *School Resource Officer 1: Megan*

Theme	Examples
The C3 Approach (Wraparound Care)	"I do what I can or help them move onto somebody else who has better skills or resources to help in whatever way they can."
Building Connection	"Just 'Who do I see in front of me right now?'—And all of those people are in vulnerable positions at that moment."  "I might not have some of the same experiences or preferences or whatever's going on, you know, but I'm there, I'm listening."

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“I try to make a point just to look at any group I walk by. It’s a busy hallway, but just to nod or say hello or good morning, like I’ll say that a thousand times a day.”

“When I’m the person they seek out before anybody else. When they can be honest with me, or when they’re at a very distressed moment and if I can calm them down, I know we’ve got a good relationship.”

“If someone’s listening actively to you and being open and genuine with you and really letting you say your piece.”

“They feel like they can actually be honest with me, and I’m not going to freak out, I’m not going to take it personally, I’m not going to twist their words, I’m just going to take what they say and deal with it.”

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Inclusivity

“I treat them as a human being, and I treat them the same as any other person who has full agency over their life.”

“I’m not going to belittle anybody; I’m not going to make any of my opinions impact them.”

“I know the limits of my experience and I find, in general, just having an honest approach with them and just treating them like human beings, and no different, no better, no worse, just them, you know?”

“There’s a lot of people who have a lot of hate towards different sectors. Whether it’s racism, whether it’s sexism, or hatred towards sexual orientation or gender preference, all of that kind of stuff, and it’s like, they’re all coming from a place where they think they’re right. And where their experiences have taught them that they’re right. And I’m not the person to take that away from them. What I am there, is to teach them how to work through it and how to exist and work with other people, you know?”

“All of the LGBTQ kids that I see are, you know, just normal kids. It’s just a thing now.”

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Risk Factors for SGM Youth	<p>“I don’t know that if—that their biggest challenges are different than [those of] other kids.”</p> <p>“I find that a lot of the GSA members here or people that are part of the LGBT community have gone through a lot more thinking or introspection or emotional growth. And I think sometimes they’re isolated, sometimes because of that.”</p>
Training and Professional Preparedness	<p>“As an SRO, we don’t really receive any extra training when it comes to youth.”</p> <p>“I think anybody in general could use more training with kids. And really... I don’t know, for me it’s always just kind of been easy to work with kids.”</p>
Police Challenges	<p>“So sometimes I’m dealing with somebody who has a lot of prejudice, has a lot of negative experiences, and I am a very big barrier to a lot of that, not me personally, but my uniform.”</p> <p>“Some kids will continue that barrier regardless of what I do, and that’s them, you know? They’re never going to trust a police officer. There’s not much I can do about that.”</p> <p>“I guess it’s still kind of like a male-dominated profession or, it’s still kind of old school that way, kind of military.”</p>

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Megan recognized the limits of her training and her abilities, and was willing to connect students with other resources, should they require it. She shared how she does her best to help all students who come to her for support, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or any other personal characteristic. She spoke to the importance of forming positive, caring relationships with all students that she encounters. Megan emphasized the importance of being able to put her own feelings and beliefs aside in order to best support youth and focus on their needs and particularities. She shared that doing so helps her form positive working relationships in her interactions with students. Elaborating on this further, Megan shared that she feels she has



successfully developed a strong connection with youth when they come to her for support before reaching out to other staff members, when they are honest with her, and when she is able to calm them down even when they are feeling distressed.

Addressing the theme of inclusivity, Megan shared that she believes in treating all students as human beings who have full agency over their lives. She shared how she prefers to engage in an honest approach in her work in order to best teach others how to exist and work with one another, regardless of personal feelings, beliefs, or characteristics. Megan also shared that she feels SGM youth are no different from other youth. She shared she is not sure whether the challenges SGM youth often face are any different from those non-SGM youth face. However, she noted that SGM youth often seem to be more introspective and may be more isolated as a result.

In speaking about her training to work as an SRO, Megan shared that SROs do not receive extra training to work with youth or those who are SGMs. She noted that she believes that anyone could benefit from more training to work with youth in general. In terms of working as an SRO, Megan noted that she feels her uniform can act as a barrier to helping some individuals because of negative experiences that they may have had with police or negative perceptions of police. She also noted that policing remains a male-dominated, old-school, often military profession.

One of the SGM students Megan frequently works with and supports is Alexis.

### *Alexis*

Organized by theme, a selection of key quotes from Alexis' interview are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6***Sexual and Gender Minority Youth 1: Alexis*

Theme	Examples
Risk Factors/Negative Life Experiences	“I used to be a really bad kid. Like be into like drugs and stuff.”
	“I got raped by my Dad last year.”
	“In January, my life went down a bad path for six months. I was really bad into drugs.”
	“Child Services, I was in it since I was born. Like in and out. And then when I hit 7 years old my Dad sent me—cause I lived with my mom in Ontario and I got sent to Edmonton by my Dad to live with him and then everything was going good and then all of that happened and I was just like hmmm. And now I’m back with Child Services and stuff.”
	“I used to hang out with the wrong crowds and do the wrong things.”
	“My charges, recently they were robbery and mischief, I think. But I only got charged with robbery which is stupid because I wasn’t even in that situation, but guilty by association. So that’s why my charges got dropped... And then past charges were hanging out with the wrong crowd and I was just drunk all the time, so I had assault, mischief, theft under \$5000.”
Growing into Resilience	“Just not being judged. Just like me for who I am, not having to pretend to be someone I’m not, which I always had to do with my Dad.”
	“I’m focused on graduating and just getting my life together...three years ago I was a totally different person and I probably wouldn’t have graduated down that path and now I’m just headstrong and focused on graduating.”
	“And now I’m sober.”
	“I put myself in a group home and I have no one in Edmonton, so that’s what made me want to get on the right path.”

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	“But they’re done and over with [her criminal charges] so I’m happy with that.”
Relationship with SRO	<p>“We talk all the time, like I go, and I talk to her, get candy [laughs], stuff like that.”</p> <p>“I talk to her a lot.”</p> <p>“Like a friend.”</p> <p>“She be’s [sic] herself. Like it’s not always just about work when I talk to her, it’s just more like ‘How are you doing?’, just as a person, you know?”</p> <p>“She just gives me different ideas to cope with things instead of, like ‘I’m going to beat this person up’, you know? [laughs], she’s just like ‘Just calm down’, like ‘Relax’, and yeah.”</p> <p>“Like a moral support.”</p>
Protective Factors/Positive Life Experiences	“I’m living with my best friend instead of a group home.”
Experiences with SGM identity	<p>“I’m bisexual.”</p> <p>“I mean I find girls attractive, but I don’t usually date them cause they’re crazy [laughs], but I have a boyfriend so it’s fine.”</p> <p>“It’s not really hard to be [bisexual]— it’s like, back in the days it would’ve been really hard to open up, but nowadays it’s just so open, so it’s easier I guess.”</p>

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As Alexis discussed her experiences with sexual assault, it is important to note that the researcher confirmed this was an historical disclosure, which Alexis had previously reported to police and had received resources and supports to help her cope. Alexis shared her experiences with a multitude of other risk factors and negative life events as well, including engaging in substance use to the point of abuse, extensive involvement with Children’s Services since she

was an infant, and involvement with the youth justice system. She also shared that she felt she was often judged and had to pretend to be someone else around her father, which negatively impacted her mental health. Despite facing so many challenges in her life, Alexis shared that she is now sober, focused on graduating high school, and has more positive relationships in her life that have helped her grow into resilience. Although she is still involved with Children's Services, Alexis lives in an apartment with a close friend rather than a group home, which she shared has helped her in her journey to becoming more happy, healthy, and hopeful. Additionally, Alexis shared that her relationship with her assigned SRO, Megan, is very positive. She shared that she often goes to Megan when she needs someone to talk to and that Megan feels like a friend to her. She shared that she feels her relationship with Megan is so strong because Megan treats her like a person and focuses on positive things, rather than always focusing on the negative. Alexis shared that Megan also helps her cope with challenges and work through problems by providing alternative solutions, including helping her calm down and respond to conflict non-violently.

In terms of Alexis' experiences with her SGM identity, she shared that she identifies as bisexual; however, she noted that although she finds females attractive, she prefers to have relationships with males and currently has a boyfriend. She shared that she finds it easy to be open about her SGM identity and that, for the most part, others are inclusive. She feels she has not faced discrimination because of her SGM identity. Alexis also noted that because of past negative experiences in her life, she now primarily focuses on developing positive relationships and is no longer in contact with many of the people who treated her poorly in the past. Therefore, only her current supportive friends and family members are aware of her SGM identity.

**School Two**

One SRO and two SGM youth from School Two participated in this research. Their contextual and demographic information is summarized and presented in Table 7.

**Table 7**

*School Two Participants*

Participant	Pseudonym	Grade	Sexual Orientation	Gender Identity
SRO #2	Carol	N/A	Lesbian	Cisgender female
SGM Youth #2	Colton	12	Gay	Transgender male
SGM Youth #3	Lindsay	12	Panromantic, demi-sexual	Cisgender female

**Carol**

Organized by theme, a selection of key quotes from Carol’s interview are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8**

*School Resource Officer 2: Carol*

Theme	Examples
The C3 Approach (Wraparound Care)	<p>“We have three school counsellors that will step in and help. We have a mental health counsellor that’s here one day a week. We have an addictions counsellor. We more refer to her as like a substance kind of abuse or just a substance counsellor. So, she’ll meet—cause [for] a lot of them, substances are an issue—that’s coping for them. And so, they get to know her quite well. She’s here two days a week.”</p> <p>“They’ll tell me the stresses that are happening and then rather than them having to tell everybody, I’ll go talk to the admin and the counsellors ... And then outside of school, what we’ll do is maybe I might look to involve Child and Family Services—we’ll try to make sure they’re placed somewhere.”</p> <p>“A lot of them have caseworkers and the caseworkers will come in and we’ll have big meetings—like with the kid, with the caseworker, with</p>

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the counsellor, with me, with their assistant principal. Just so that we're all on the same page with what's happening in life for this kiddo."

"We basically try to surround this kid with as many safe, responsible, positive influencing adults and just try to keep motivating them."

"I've brought in some guest speakers. One in particular who's part of our resource group...he is a queer member as well. He came in and was talking about how—he's a person of colour as well—to come and talk about healthy relationships with people."

"We actually had several teachers come forward because they were so uncomfortable in a way that they didn't want to offend anybody. So, me and the GSA teacher put together a little presentation for a staff meeting and I played them a Ted Talks video... 'How to Talk to Transgender People'."

"You will make mistakes. That was a big thing—just teaching them [other staff members] that you will make mistakes, but it's okay... I still do."

"We actually had the admin come in...She listened to all their concerns they had."

"I'll talk to the assistant principal for the student, maybe I'll reach out to the teachers, find out a bit more about the student, like we don't need to arrest and charge right away. We have—for certain charges we have up to six months. Like it doesn't have to be immediate. So, I like to involve the parents, let them know about what's happening with the kiddo, any other supports we can wrangle in."

"All they're going to get is community service, maybe a monetary fine. But probably community service. We could just do that here... I'll look at their schedule and see what they have and try to pick stuff that's within that interest. So, if they have drama or improv, they'll serve their time with the drama teacher, like staying late to help organize the costume room."

"In three years, I've arrested one kid, only because he would not stop stealing stuff."

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Building Connection	<p>“That was the first thing that I wanted to find out more about—is how can I be a resource to the queer kids here at school and, you know, just kind of show them my life and my wife and kind of show them a professional who’s open and out and can be who they are without any judgment.”</p> <p>“We have a very small population of those high-risk youths, which helps me a lot because I can pour so much time into that rapport building and the support because there’s not many of them here.”</p> <p>“They’ll just come because they just want to talk. And we just—we become friends basically.”</p> <p>“They get a chance to put together all their questions and I just say, ‘Green light. As long as you’re asking respectfully, I’ll answer it’.”</p> <p>“Our GSA meetings have become quite fascinating sharing circles.”</p> <p>“We’ll come down here and we’ll have some talks, we’ll try to find out what’s going on.”</p> <p>“It comes down to support, building that relationship right from the get go, building that trust with them.”</p> <p>“That you can trust a police officer and then also just me as a gay woman too. We can talk about that stuff.”</p> <p>“They’ll just call out my name all the time. Another one that’s cute is when they want me to come to their stuff.”</p> <p>“The GSA kids call me their gay mom.”</p> <p>“Empowering them.”</p> <p>“The open-door policy is a thing too.”</p>
Inclusivity	<hr/> <p>“Our emphasis is that school is a safe place for them.”</p> <p>“It’ll start with our GSAs that we have here.”</p> <p>“For them, I’m open right from the get-go, so they know about me. I have brought my wife in before for them to meet her and it’s fun just to</p> <hr/>

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see us have some banter between the two of us and just to show them a healthy relationship because for a lot of them that doesn't happen."

"We had quite a small GSA and I know a lot of the students for them this is—they're finally meeting people who accept them for exactly who they think they are, or in the transition that they're in, there's no judgment."

"If there's any bullying, like the kids know that it absolutely won't be tolerated, and I step in very quickly and come down pretty hard."

"Our queer kids feel comfortable holding hands in the hallway, wearing what they want, going through hormone therapy, physically changing, and people don't care."

"It looks like those name tags that say, 'Hello my name is...', this just says 'Hello my pronoun is...'—it says 'She/her'. So, I gave that to [a transgender student]. And yeah, she wore it for quite some time until her teachers kind of got it."

"Really working on a sense of community with the kids—and they're learning to support each other."

"I think for some of them it helps to see like 'Hey, I'm not alone'."

"That peer support is just huge."

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Risk Factors for SGM Youth

"Stories are coming out of self-harming, lots of cutting, lots of stress, sometimes not accept—no acceptance at home, things like that, and so after we have some of those, I keep track of those students who said those things and I make sure to follow up with them."

"We had a student who tried to overdose."

"A lot of the trans kids are having some issues with mandatory phys. ed."

"The gender dysphoria that happens for a lot of these kids during that is so hard."

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Training and Professional Preparedness	<p>“How few gender identity counsellors there are... we need that support, but the wait times to get in to see a counsellor for that kind of stuff is so hard.”</p>
	<p>“When you’re [on] patrol, you end up having to do about 5 training days a year. It almost—the way they have it structured is almost like you’re not getting paid for those days but you end up owing those hours at the end of the year, so it’s at the end of your set of four days, the last thing you want to do is go and sit there and so it wasn’t—I think it was a great idea, but I think it could be delivered a little bit better.”</p>
	<p>“Myself and another member—he initiated our EPS LGBTQ resource group within the Edmonton Police.”</p>
	<p>“We didn’t have any other training other than just living our lives and kind of going through our experiences.”</p>
	<p>“We had an amazing opportunity to go to Toronto in June for the World LGBTQ Conference for Law Enforcement Professionals.”</p>
	<p>“There are opportunities for us to take. It just comes down to money to try to get us down, cause a lot of it’s in the States.”</p>
	<p>“For me, I’ve found I really struggled right off the get-go understanding the teenagers. Cause I would come at it from this old school mentality of you know, ‘Fix it and get out of here’.”</p>
	<p>“One thing that did help was trauma-informed training. So, I saw Alberta Health Services has a free online PowerPoint of it, so I was actually going to send it out to the teachers here cause a lot of them still come at the kids that way.”</p>
	<p>“Just some kind of ‘Teenager 101’ kind of training. Like just about the struggles that they have, because I think that’s the generational disconnect that I get from a lot of the students sometimes... I think that would be something that would really help us as school resource officers, just to understand where these teenagers are coming from.”</p>
Police Challenges	<p>“One in particular we had where she—her mom is a career criminal—we’ve actually got to meet a couple times which has been fun because she has hated police, but her daughter and I had such a good rapport</p>

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going that even she was like ‘Wow’—like she’s even changed her view on things that we’re [police officers] not all the same.”

“We’ve got a lot of homophobic members [on the police force] still. We’ve got a lot of really old members who have kind of an old way of thinking.”

“We looked at me for kind of being a liaison within the schools, so like I’ll go to other GSAs at other schools and talk to them about my coming out story, just tell them about being a gay police officer, how that works for me, kind of thing. But other than that, that’s it for our training.”

“I pulled her into the office, just her and I, and I just said ‘I get it. I know you’re upset. I know you have a lack of trust with authority. I completely understand—you were taken from your parents at a young age, you were with foster parents and that didn’t work out. How could you possibly have any trust or faith in any adults?’... Even just acknowledging that calmed her down.”

“Building that positive relationship with the kids too and showing them that police aren’t just those jerks that are just out to make their days—give tickets and just ruin everything for them.”

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Carol focused on employing a wraparound approach to care in her work as an SRO. She discussed the importance of working collaboratively with school administrators and other staff members, including mental health and addictions counsellors, in order to best support youth. Carol shared how she recognizes the stress that typically accompanies youths’ disclosures of negative experiences and their requests for help and, as such, she discussed the importance of advocating for youth and speaking to other professionals and caregivers on their behalf. In addition to addressing community support services, Carol addressed the importance of comprehensive education and discussed how she brings external educators and guest speakers in to speak with the youth and other staff members at her school. Finally, in terms of compassionate policing, Carol discussed the uniqueness of the SRO role and shared that SROs have more

flexibility in terms of arresting and charging youth. If possible, Carol tries to give youth community service as an alternative measure. She also tries to ensure that the community service will be meaningful and beneficial to the youth and the school community by finding tasks that align with the youths' interests and class schedules.

As Carol identifies as a member of the SGM community, she discussed the importance of supporting the SGM youth at her school and being a positive mentor for them. She discussed the importance of sharing some aspects of her personal life with the SGM youth she works with, such as introducing them to her wife, in order to share with them what a healthy SGM relationship can look like. In terms of making meaningful connections with youth, she shared that she believes in having an open-door policy for her students, answering their questions, and empowering them.

Carol shared the importance of ensuring that school is a safe place for all youth. She shared that she believes the school's Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) makes a big difference in supporting the SGM students at the school by providing them with a safe space to connect with one another. Additionally, Carol discussed the importance of actively preventing bullying at the school and shared that she takes bullying very seriously and does not tolerate it from any student. Finally, she shared the importance of helping the youth feel supported and connected, both with other youth and with school staff.

Carol discussed the challenges that SGM youth face and shared that she has seen and heard about many additional risk factors that SGM youth face compared to non-SGM youth in the school where she works. Some of the risk factors she listed include engaging in self-harm, increased stress and anxiety, a lack of acceptance at home, substance use to the point of abuse, gender dysphoria, and sexual assault. She discussed the challenges that come with having a

mandatory physical education program and overnight camps for trans students, as having gendered changing facilities can increase their feelings of gender dysphoria and anxiety. On that topic, she also voiced concern over the lack of gender identity counsellors in Edmonton and the long wait times that SGM youth often face when seeking support from inclusive counsellors, which she believes makes it more difficult to support youth who are struggling with navigating their gender identities.

In terms of her training and professional preparedness, Carol discussed how there is limited training within the Edmonton Police Service (EPS) to work with SGMs in general, and with SGM youth specifically. She shared that although there have been some training opportunities, the delivery of such training programs has been ineffective due to financial and time constraints. Consequently, she shared that much of her professional preparedness has come from her own personal experiences. In order to improve training and professional preparedness within the EPS, she shared that she and another EPS member initiated an LGBTQ2S+ resource group to improve EPS–SGM relations. Despite these positive strides, Carol shared that homophobia continues to be a significant issue within the EPS. In expanding training within the EPS in general, Carol shared she believes that including trauma–informed training and practice, as well as youth–focused training and SGM–specific training would be beneficial in improving the roles of SROs.

Finally, Carol discussed some of the challenges that accompany working as a police officer. Like Megan, Carol shared that it can be difficult to build relationships with people who have had negative experiences with other police officers, or who have negative perceptions of police. She shared that being able to form positive relationships with youth and develop a strong

rapport with them can help mitigate such negative perceptions and contribute to her being seen as a trusted adult. One SGM youth who considers Carol to be a trusted adult is Colton.

### *Colton*

Organized by theme, a selection of key quotes from Colton’s interview are presented in Table 9.

### **Table 9**

#### *Sexual and Gender Minority Youth 2: Colton*

Theme	Examples
Risk Factors/Negative Life Experiences	<p>“I’m technically not out as gay to my family—they think I’m bi still cause that’s what I told them. I just haven’t wanted to change that cause it’s like, it just gives them a little bit of hope that I might end up with a girl type thing, might be a straight relationship type hope.”</p> <p>“Every so often I obviously get like the low-key homophobic/transphobic jokes that people don’t realize are homophobic/transphobic because they don’t realize that they’re affecting people in that way, but that happens everywhere and it’s hard to break that because of the fact that it’s so ingrained in society today. Junior High was super homophobic/transphobic. Mostly because I went to a really small junior high in the middle of [a community] [laughs], which is not the best place to be a gender/sexual minority. At all.”</p> <p>“Super bad mentally. My mental health went really downwards. Got a—developed an eating disorder... anxiety, depression. Normal teenage—not normal, but like mental health got really bad just because I was very much the constant attention of bullying, like my friend group was the outsiders of the school and we still were up until we graduated.”</p> <p>“On and off. It started really bad. Family was not for any of it [his SGM identity]. They were like ‘No, not allowed, against the law’. Brother didn’t find out until last year and he reacted super violently. He thought it would be fun to throw me against a wall. I wasn’t hurt,</p>

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but my coat was, that was the only casualty. My hood broke off my coat.”

“I never see him [my dad].”

“Community in general, I mean, it’s okay. Like obviously once again there’s the homophobic comments... there have been a few times where I’m holding hands with a partner or something and called fags or something or the D slur. Like that was before I transitioned when I was with another trans guy and I was not super well passing and a few people called us the D slur as we were walking down the street. But like... I haven’t been physically attacked. It’s mostly just the verbal attacking from very, very few people in the community. Just because that’s who people are—ingrained in society. It doesn’t bother me too much, but it’s never been super bad.”

“There was a little bit of suicide baiting and someone threatened me online.”

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Growing into Resilience

“High school’s been really good, everyone’s super accepting, haven’t had anyone beat me up yet, so I’m good.”

“We’re [he and his friends] getting better. All of us are slowly getting better at our own rates.”

“It’s fine now, because my parents came—my mom and my stepdad came with me to gender therapy... we go see a family counsellor with mom, my stepdad, and my brother and me.”

“Like friends, accepting school places, so being able to go to school and be accepted and not be bullied on a daily basis type thing. Teachers having an understanding and being respectful and open-minded to learning things—are things that I find really help with that because then it’s like, then not only can I help you grow but you can help me grow type thing.”

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Relationship with SRO

“Consty’s amazing. I love her, she’s great.”

“I’m in the GSA and she comes to the GSA every week and I think that’s just where it started with all of us, like all the members of GSA

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and Consty are really close. We joke around. We make jokes. There's a few people in GSA who call her mom. Like just, that's a thing we do because it shows that we love her and we appreciate her so much, like everything she does."

"I've talked to Consty about my beliefs versus her beliefs and stuff like that because everyone has different beliefs and things like that. And she's asked me for help on a presentation that she showed to a bunch of the senior detectives I believe, of how to talk to trans youth who have been—are in custody or reporting something. And she asked me and a few of my other friends to help her with talking to people at [an SGM store in Edmonton] because she didn't know if they'd let police officers in there. I feel like that's just kind of made us and a few of my other friends closer to her."

"I also love Consty because she gives us the opportunity to do these things [the interview] and she comes to us for these things and she trusts us, and she talks to us like actual human beings, which is nice. Like a lot of adults like to undermine kids, but she's definitely not one of them. And she's also just super sweet. And just, I really like her."

"She makes jokes with us in the hallways all the time."

"We know that she's there for us type thing. She's very open about being there for us and if we ever need anything and her door is always open. She has candy in her office, which is really nice. Whenever she's in there she's like 'Take all of it, do it'."

"She's really good at giving resources."

"She's just there for us. Like she offers her support, and she talks about her experiences and she shares what she can help us with. And if she knows she can't help us with something because it's like out of her expertise for example, like if it's a personal problem and less so a legal thing, she's completely open to giving you resources and giving numbers to places and emails and websites and things like that. And just being super open to help us grow, that kind of thing."

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Protective Factors/Positive Life Experiences	<p>“I’m a theatre technician here at [School Two], so I work on the plays, the musicals...”</p> <p>“I really enjoy to cook, so I do this thing where I hold dinner parties once a month with friends and I make them three different meals.”</p> <p>“I enjoy to sing. I’m in a choir, I have that every Tuesday, as well as tech. So, I go from tech to choir immediately pretty much right after school.”</p> <p>“All of my friends know [about my SGM identity]. Cause I talk about it a lot and I have a boyfriend, so I talk to them about my boyfriend a lot.”</p> <p>“[School Two]’s pretty accepting.”</p>
Experiences with SGM identity	<p>“I came out as trans in Grade 9. I started questioning myself Grade 7 because two of my really close friends who I’m still friends with today came out. Pretty much like, one came out, the other one came out three months after. And then I was like, ‘Wait, I can do that?’ Cause I grew up in [a hamlet outside of Edmonton] so we didn’t talk about anything like this.”</p> <p>“I didn’t start medically transitioning or seeing anyone as a gender therapist until last year.”</p>

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Colton shared that he has experienced many risk factors and negative life experiences to date, including challenges with coming out to his family members and feeling as though he had to hide part of his SGM identity in order to be accepted; hearing homophobic and transphobic jokes and slurs; experiencing negative mental health outcomes including developing an eating disorder, anxiety, and depression; and experiencing bullying, violent and nonviolent victimization, suicide baiting, and online threats. He shared that many of these negative experiences occurred when he was in junior high school and that now that he is in high school and has a supportive group of friends, he has experienced fewer negative outcomes. He also



shared that his family members have agreed to see a family counsellor and go to gender therapy with him, which has helped improve their relationship and understanding of his SGM identity as well.

In terms of Colton's relationship with his SRO, Carol, he shared that he feels very positively about her and her role in his school community. He shared that her involvement with the GSA at his school has been very positive as well, and that her lighthearted attitude and ability to joke around with him and his friends helps him to feel more connected with her. He also shared that Carol is willing to have open conversations with him, to connect him with important resources, and to involve him in both school and community work that she does to advocate for the SGM community. In addition to his positive relationship with Carol, Colton shared that there are some other protective factors that influence his growth into resilience in a positive way. He discussed his involvement with arts programs such as theatre and choir, cooking with his friends, being able to be open about his SGM identity with his friends, and the accepting nature of his current school environment as protective factors.

Another SGM student from School Two, Lindsay, also shared her experience with growing into resilience.

### ***Lindsay***

Organized by theme, a selection of key quotes from Lindsay's interview are presented in Table 10.

**Table 10**

#### *Sexual and Gender Minority Youth 3: Lindsay*

Theme	Examples
Risk Factors/Negative Life Experiences	"I have experienced bullying all through elementary and part of junior high, I actually had to move schools because of it and that was not fun."

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“I came home crying every day.”

“My dad is completely different. He actually—the one-year anniversary of the Pulse night[club] shooting came up and I—it was just out there and it was an important thing. So, I was just like ‘Oh it’s been one year since the nightclub shooting’ and my dad—I don’t know if he was joking, he’s got a weird sense of humour, but it kind of sat with me... and he said ‘The one mistake that the shooter made is that he ran out of bullets’... Yeah and so I’m like ‘Is that a joke?’”

“He [my dad] was the last person that I came out to. And I don’t think he fully knows... Like he knows that I date guys, I date girls, I date transgender people, I don’t care... I don’t want to sit down and ask him, because... he’s very opinionated with what he thinks.”

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Growing into Resilience

“The fact that being gay is becoming more normalized.”

“We had two openly out members of staff in the school.”

“The fact that people are starting to be a lot less scared about it and starting to talk about it more, talk about their experiences, what’s gone wrong, what’s gone right, and just being there for them.”

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Relationship with SRO

“It’s basically like ‘I’m a human, you’re a human, but I’m also a police officer, so if you’re being hurt by somebody, you can come to me, but also if you just want to goof off, you can come to me’. So, it’s a pretty chill relationship between Consty and my friend group and everybody we’re associated with in the GSA. So yeah, it’s pretty good!”

“I could come to her, I could just email her, something like that, and just ask her a random question, and she’d be happy to answer it.”

“Calm, caring, friendly.”

“Like, ‘I’m here, I’m just another staff member, but I’m also your friend’.”

“But in personal life, there was one day that I just was not feeling good at all and she [Carol] happened to just be right by my class and I came crying to her and she was like ‘Okay, we’re going to call your

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	<p>mom’... She did not leave my side until she knew my mom was on the way and so she was just really caring, helpful, and just made sure that the best thing was happening.”</p>
<p>Protective Factors/Positive Life Experiences</p>	<p>“My mom is a lot more—I don’t like the word accepting, because unless I do something really, really, REALLY wrong, my parents won’t kick me out—but my mom is a lot more ‘Okay, what do you need?’”</p> <p>“Since about Grade 10, my friends and I have been going to Queer Prom.”</p> <p>“I try to go to Pride... And I’m a Girl Guide—or I was a Girl Guide—and we did a lot of Pride things.”</p>
<p>Experiences with SGM identity</p>	<p>“With my parents that’s a different subject because they don’t know much about it. I just say that I’m pansexual to make it super easy—not easy, but a lot less complicated for them. But I prefer panromantic, demisexual.”</p> <p>“Yeah, so for me, panromantic is the fact that I don’t care what’s between your legs. I don’t care what’s in your head about who you think you are, as long as you’re a nice person. And since I’m a human, everybody has standards. If you’re attractive to me, you got a chance. And if you’re nice to my friends. And demisexual is, for me, I have to have a stronger emotional connection with you before I feel a sexual feeling towards you. Like my last relationship I was in, it was a little bit more... yeah. But the one that I’m in now, it’s a lot more personal, and... yeah.”</p> <p>“Nothing bad has happened to that part of who I am.”</p> <p>“It’s [my SGM identity] not a big part of who I am.”</p>

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Lindsay shared that she experienced frequent bullying throughout elementary and junior high school, resulting in her moving schools. She also shared that her SGM identity is not a big part of who she is, explaining that only her close friends and family members are aware of it.

Because Lindsay is not always overt with sharing her SGM identity, she shared that she feels her negative experiences with bullying are unrelated to her SGM identity. She noted that although the bullying was not specifically tied to her SGM identity, she has still had some difficulty sharing her full identity with her family members and friends. She shared that her father does not fully understand her SGM identity and that he has made derogatory remarks towards the SGM community in the past. Lindsay also shared the difficulty of fully explaining her SGM identity to her parents, stating that her identity of panromantic and demisexual is too complicated for them to understand; instead, she tells them that she is pansexual, a term she feels they understand. Despite navigating these negative experiences, Lindsay shared that she feels being an SGM is becoming more normalized in society, which has helped her grow into resilience.

Lindsay also shared that her involvement in community events, such as Queer Prom (a prom event for school aged SGM students), Pride, and Girl Guides has helped her grow into resilience. Another protective factor that has helped Lindsay is the support of her SRO, Carol. Like Colton, Lindsay shared that Carol is supportive of SGM students at their school and that Carol's involvement with the GSA is positive. Lindsay shared that she feels comfortable seeking help from Carol and that Carol has supported her with both academic and personal challenges. She shared that she views Carol both as a staff member who can help and support her, and as a friend.

## **Comparative Analysis**

### ***School Resource Officers***

The SROs from both schools spoke to the importance of utilizing a wraparound approach to care, such as the C3 Approach (Grace et al., 2019). Although Megan discussed the importance of recognizing her limits and being willing to involve other staff members and caring

professionals when a student's needs fall outside of her expertise, this was a small part of her interview. Carol, on the other hand, spoke extensively about the wraparound approach to care. Her responses could be directly linked to each of the components of the C3 Approach, and therefore contributed to the inclusion of this theme in the final analysis. She specifically addressed the importance of comprehensive health education and outreach in her work as an SRO; she shared that she involves healthcare professionals when necessary to support youth, in addition to bringing in external presenters to speak to important health and education topics. In terms of community support services, Carol shared how she connects youth with external resources and prioritizes finding them supports both within and outside of their school community. Finally, Carol discussed compassionate policing and shared her belief in the importance of providing youth with meaningful opportunities to grow and learn rather than arresting and charging them by default.

The utilization of the C3 Approach to wraparound care was also discussed in relation to building connection between the SROs and the youth they work with. As building connection with the youth went above and beyond what was discussed in relation to the C3 Approach, it was included as a separate theme. Both Megan and Carol spoke to the necessity of building strong connections with the SGM youth they work with in order to provide them with support. They both addressed the importance of forming caring and compassionate relationships with youth regardless of their circumstances, needs, and particularities. In other words, both Megan and Carol shared how important it is to them to help and support all youth at their schools. Carol expanded on her ability to build connection with SGM youth and shared how her experiences as an SGM individual have helped her connect with these youth and support them with issues both related and unrelated to their SGM identities.

Carol's lived experience as an SGM seemed to help her in fostering a more inclusive environment at School Two. Fostering an inclusive environment appeared to be related to the SROs' experience with SGMs and their ability not only to connect with SGM youth, but also to support SGM youth in feeling like they belonged at school as much as non-SGMs. Carol emphasized the importance of ensuring that school can be a safe place for all youth and discussed the importance of having a GSA to support SGM youth in feeling safer at school. Megan also emphasized the importance of fostering a safe school environment, however, she noted that she feels SGM youth are no different from other youth and that all youth should be treated equitably. As Megan did not have personal experience with being an SGM like Carol did, she was less vocal about the particularities of SGM identities and focused more on inclusivity in general.

In discussing inclusivity and the idea that all youth should be treated equally, Megan shared that, in her opinion, the challenges SGM youth face are often no different than those faced by their non-SGM peers. She later added that SGM youth tend to be more introspective and potentially more isolated as a result. However, this was the only risk factor specific to SGM youth that Megan mentioned. On the other hand, Carol was more explicit about recognizing the particularities of SGM identities and the risk factors they often face, noting many risk factors specific to the SGM youth she has worked with.

In recognizing the increased risk factors that SGM youth often face, Carol was also more open than Megan about speaking to the necessity of increased training for SROs working with SGMs. Both Megan and Carol discussed the lack of training to work with SGMs and with youth in general, and shared that youth-specific training would be beneficial to help minimize the generational gap that often exists between SROs and the youth they work with. Carol expanded

on this notion by discussing the importance of including trauma-informed training in addition to SGM-focused training. Carol also shared the importance of involving other police officers and caring professionals who work with SGM youth, such as teachers, in this type of training. In doing so, Carol connected the importance of inclusive training back to the notion of employing a wraparound approach to care as well.

Finally, both Megan and Carol discussed the barrier of wearing a police uniform when it comes to working with youth and with people in general. They both shared personal experiences of working with youth and parents of youth who had negative perceptions of police or had negative experiences with police in the past. Both SROs therefore shared the increased difficulty that comes with forming positive relationships and building rapport with individuals based on their uniform and role as police officers. Finally, they both shared that systemic issues including homophobia and sexism remain predominant in the police force and can limit the training and experience that they receive, as well as their effectiveness in their role as SROs.

### ***Sexual and Gender Minority Youth***

Although all three youth participants had varying levels of involvement with Children's Services and the youth justice system, they had all experienced a multitude of risk factors and negative life experiences to date. Despite their negative experiences, they each discussed their own paths towards growing into resilience and the protective factors, positive life experiences, and opportunities for asset-building that supported them in doing so. All three SGM youth reported positive relationships with their SROs, with all of them referring to their assigned SRO as 'Consty', regardless of the school they attended. They all discussed their SROs having an open-door policy, which they felt allowed them to build more meaningful and positive relationships with their SRO and to be more willing to go to their SRO for support.

Although all three of the youth were positive about their relationships with their assigned SRO, they all discussed the importance of having other caring professionals to go to. All of them mentioned going to trusted teachers or other school staff members for support in addition to their SRO. They all also shared that they have not had to go to their SRO for policing and justice–related issues specifically; rather, they were more likely to go to them for someone to talk to more generally. Even Alexis, the SGM youth who had extensive involvement with the youth justice system, shared that she has case workers and lawyers outside of school who have supported her through her various interactions with justice rather than Megan, her SRO.

Each of the SGM youth reported challenges with their families, from Alexis being sexually assaulted by her father and being involved with Children’s Services since birth, to Colton being attacked by his brother upon coming out, to Lindsay feeling she has to hide some of her SGM identity from her parents. Although each of the youth had different negative experiences with various family members, they all discussed the importance of having significant relationships outside of their families, from romantic relationships to meaningful friendships. Positive relationships seemed to be a common protective factor for all three SGM youth participants and their growth into resilience.

Each of the youth shared their experiences with their SGM identities and how predominant their identities were in their day–to–day lives. Both Alexis and Lindsay shared that although they identify as SGMs, their SGM identities do not always take precedence in their daily interactions with others. They both shared how trusted family members and close friends are aware of their SGM identities; however, they do not always feel inclined to share their identities and openly discuss them with others. Colton, on the other hand, shared how his SGM identity is a significant component of his overall identity and how it influences his daily



interactions with others. As Colton is actively medically transitioning and identifies as a transgender male, his SGM identity is more salient. Colton discussed the importance of his SGM identity and his openness in sharing it with others, as he shared that it is a core part of who he is.

The findings from both the SRO and SGM youth interviews will be discussed further in relation to the research objectives and literature review in the following section. Directions for future research and practice will be provided as well.

## **Concluding Perspectives**

### **Contextualizing the Findings**

In order to contextualize the findings from the SRO and SGM youth interviews shared in Chapter Three and to summarize the thesis, concluding insights will be discussed by connecting the findings to the research objectives discussed in Chapter Two and the literature review shared in Chapter One. The thesis concludes with recommendations for both future research and practice.

#### ***Objective One: Enabling Positive Outcomes***

Both SROs who participated in this research discussed the importance of enabling positive outcomes for SGM youth in school and community contexts. The SGM youth echoed this by discussing how their SROs helped them to grow into resilience by providing them with support, both in and out of their schooling environments. The importance of both relational and contextual factors in the process of growing into resilience was apparent here (Brown & Colbourne, 2005; Grace, 2015). The SGM youths' growth into resilience was impacted by their relationships with their assigned SROs, as well as with other caring professionals, such as teachers and counsellors, and with their family and friends. Contextual factors, such as their home environments and life experiences also played an important role. Regardless of the youths' personal contextual and relational factors outside of their relationship with their SRO, both SROs enabled positive outcomes with the youth with whom they worked by developing and practicing the notion of caring within their professional role (Grace, 2015).

Although the two SROs who participated in this research were able to connect caring to professionalism, the SGM youth discussed the importance of receiving supports from other caring professionals as well. They each shared how they viewed their assigned SRO as more of a

friend than a professional; someone they could joke around with, go to for support with personal and school-related issues, and who could connect them with other resources. The SROs also discussed the importance of establishing strong relationships with both the youth they assisted and other staff members and caring professionals working with the youth. This is reflective of the current literature on caring professionalism and team approaches to meeting the diverse needs of youth (OCYA, 2017). In doing so, SROs can connect youth with other human and material assets and resources to best support them (OCYA, 2017). Although SROs primarily work at the intersection of the education and justice systems, the SRO participants shared the importance of connecting youth with resources in other social institutions, such as their family, social services, and healthcare. Again, this is synchronous with existing literature that emphasizes the importance of a wraparound approach to care (Grace, 2015; OCYA, 2017).

### ***Objective Two: Enhancing SRO Roles***

As discussed in Chapter One, one of the challenges that SROs face is the ability to connect the notion of caring to that of professionalism (Grace, 2015). As SROs and police officers in general have not typically been associated with the term ‘caring’, it is important that they receive proper training in order to best work with those needing their assistance and support (Palmer et al., 2016). Both SROs who participated in this research discussed the lack of training they had within the police force to work with youth and SGMs, and they shared how that lack of training coupled with their association with the police service in general, have been barriers to their work.

In the existing literature, the school-to-prison pipeline is discussed in relation to the risks youth face at school that could lead to involvement with the youth justice system (Palmer et al., 2016). SROs play a large role in this, as they are often tasked with determining disciplinary

actions for students at their schools (Theriot, 2016). As marginalized students such as SGMs are disproportionately impacted by negative outcomes at school, they are more likely to become truant, drop out of school, and become involved in criminal activity, thus patterning the school-to-prison pipeline (Palmer et al., 2016). Because SROs play such an active role in school discipline, they have the capacity to intervene and potentially prevent youth from heading down this path by using restorative rather than punitive approaches in dealing with youth (James et al., 2011). For example, as she discussed in her interview, Carol actively avoids arresting and charging youth by default. Instead, she discussed the importance of providing youth with opportunities to give back to their school communities by participating in community service. This type of restorative intervention has the potential to help youth avoid the school-to-prison pipeline by providing alternative measures and encouraging prosocial behaviour (James et al., 2011).

Although Carol's disciplinary choices involve alternative measures, this is not always the case with SROs (Na & Gottfredson, 2013). Rather, the presence of SROs in schools can lead to an increase in referrals to law enforcement for nonviolent crimes and consequently result in an increase in school-based charges (Na & Gottfredson, 2013). In this sense, Carol's practice focused on community service and alternative measures seems to be an anomaly in the context of the existing literature. Her focus on supporting youth on a more positive path rather than defaulting to arresting and charging them is an example of how SROs could improve their roles as caring professionals and help youth avoid the school-to-prison pipeline rather than pushing them further towards it. Carol's restorative approach should be incorporated into SRO training as a vehicle for proactive problem solving intended to assist and benefit vulnerable youth. Such an approach could be part of having SROs reconsider their roles as caring professionals in schools

by revitalizing professional preparation to focus on enacting these prosocial roles to guide and support students. This notion will be discussed further in relation to linking the current study to research and practice later in this section.

***Objective Three: Building Assets***

The SGM youth who participated in this research all discussed the importance of building assets and utilizing protective factors to support their growth into resilience. Although each of them discussed unique risk factors and negative life experiences they had faced, they also shared protective factors and positive life experiences that contributed to their growth. This highlighted the complex nature of resilience as a construct, process, and outcome, as each youth participant experienced developing resilience in a multitude of ways (Grace, 2015; Hatchel & Marx, 2018). It also emphasized that although there is heterogeneity in individuals' responses to risk factors and processes of growing into resilience, building resilience is a possibility regardless of the nature of one's experiences (Rutter, 2012). The process of growing into resilience (as shown in Figure 1) could be seen in the youths' responses, as they each discussed the protective factors they had experienced and how these factors contributed to their ability to build assets and develop a resilient mindset. The process illustrated in Figure 1 was especially evident in Alexis' interview. She shared how the support of caring family members and friends constituted protective factors contributing to her ability to build assets. This led to positive outcomes such as finding more supportive housing and focusing on positive relationships, which in turn contributed to the resilient mindset she had developed, including her drive to stay sober and graduate from high school.

In sum, the experiences and perspectives shared by SGM youth in this research were therefore reflective of much of the current literature that emphasizes asset-building as integral to

growing into resilience (Grace, 2015). Like the youth who participated in the research for the OCYA report (2017), these SGM youth discussed risk factors. Importantly though, they shared how, despite facing numerous challenges, they were able to develop a resilient mindset and build assets to support them in their journeys to become more happy, healthy, and hopeful (Grace, 2015; Grace et al., 2019; OCYA, 2017, Ungar, 2012).

#### ***Objective Four: Improving Relationships***

The SGM youth who participated in this research spoke positively about their SROs as individuals. They shared what aspects of their relationships with their SROs they considered to be indicators of a positive relationship, such as being able to talk to their SROs like friends and their SROs' open-door policies. This indicated that although SROs often have complicated relationships with their students due to the nature of their role as police working in schools (Theriot, 2016), there are opportunities for SROs to have a positive influence on SGM youth.

As reflected in the chosen themes in Chapter Three, the SROs who participated in this research demonstrated that SROs can positively contribute to their role as caring professionals by employing a wraparound approach to care, building connections with their students, and fostering inclusive school environments. Still, SROs can be inhibited in their role as caring professionals when they lack sufficient knowledge and understanding of the particularities of the youths' identities, which can be further compounded by a lack of training and professional preparedness, and the barriers that accompany wearing a police uniform. These are all concerns that were reflected in the existing literature, which perhaps speaks to the reason SROs have often been excluded from research and dialogue regarding caring professionalism (CBC News, 2020; James et al., 2011, Robles-Piña & Denham, 2012; Ryan et al., 2018; Theriot, 2016). The positive aspects of SROs that were shared in this study were more reflective of the personal traits of the

SROs who participated, rather than signifying their position as police officers working in schools. The challenges associated with connecting the notion of caring professionalism to the SRO role appeared to be directly related to the training, professional preparedness, and policing challenges that accompany them in their roles, which is again synchronous with existing literature (James et al., 2011; Ryan et al., 2018; Theriot, 2016).

Although the presence of SROs in schools and on school-based crisis response teams has been on the rise, so has the amount of questions regarding the roles of SROs, their relationships with students, and their accountability to students, staff, schools, and the community as a whole (CBC News, 2020; James et al., 2011; Na & Gottfredson, 2013; Taylor et al, 2011; Theriot, 2016). In order to address these concerns, especially in relation to marginalized students such as SGMs who are among youth likely to be impacted by the school-to-prison pipeline, it is necessary to expand this research and connect it to current practices in the education and justice systems.

### **Recommendations for Research**

Although the findings of this research reflect the current literature on the resilience of SGMs and expand upon it by adding the unique perspective and contribution of SROs, only two SROs and three youth were able to participate in the current study. As the goal of this case study research was not to generalize findings, and instead to highlight the unique experiences of research participants within each of the two schools involved, it is important to avoid generalizing the experiences of these research participants to SROs and SGM youth overall (Aaltio & Heilmann, 2010). Instead, this research can be used as a starting point to begin reflecting on current research and practice at the intersection of education and justice. This research supports the notion that SROs have the potential to be effective caring professionals in

the lives of SGM youth. Here, however, the findings indicate that the role is more dependent on the personal traits of the SROs rather than the police-based role itself. It became evident through this research that there is concern with the lack of training SROs receive to work with SGMs and with youth in general. Concerns regarding the barriers of wearing a police uniform while working in school environments were also evident. In order to expand upon this research and further explore both the positive outcomes and the challenges that were expressed by the current research participants, it would be necessary to involve more SROs and SGM youth in future research. As there are currently 29 SROs working within Edmonton Public Schools (EPS, n.d.-b), more research is needed to capture the range of SRO experiences and perspectives. Similarly, interviewing with more SGM youth is needed to capture a fuller range of SGM youths' experiences and perspectives.

Additionally, the nature of the research, in which youth have to disclose their SGM identity to both their SRO and their parent/guardian in order to participate was a limitation. In future research, it would be beneficial to include more SGM youth by removing this criterion, which is imposed by Edmonton Public Schools. Since such disclosure could put SGM youth at risk in unaccepting family or other living situations, it should not be required in order to keep students safe and to allow a greater diversity of SGM youth to participate. Including non-SGM youth could be beneficial as well, in order to compare the experiences of SGM and non-SGM youth with SROs (e.g., Are SGM youth treated differently by SROs compared to non-SGM youth?).

In conducting this research, the importance of exploring the role of SROs in working with all underserved youth became increasingly apparent. Not only is the role of SROs in working with SGM youth an under-researched area, so is the role of SROs in working with other



underserved youth populations, such as youth who are Black, Indigenous, or People of Colour (BIPOC). Underserved youth variously embody intersections of relationalities including race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and class, which can further marginalize them and place them at greater risk (Grace et al., 2019). Locally, a report was recently released on the history of anti-Black racism in Edmonton policing, with a specific focus on the SRO program (Mohamed, 2020). This report has sparked calls to review EPS' SRO program, with many individuals advocating for it to be abolished, as occurred in Toronto in 2017 (CBC News, 2020).

In conducting the research for the current study, I was contacted by an EPS member who expressed interest in reading my thesis and having me present my findings to EPS officials. As I am continuing my graduate studies by beginning a doctoral program in September 2020, the research sector of EPS has also inquired as to whether I would be interested in expanding the current research with additional SROs and youth beyond SGMs. In working with my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Melissa Tremblay—who has extensive experience working with Indigenous communities—I have proposed to expand this research by exploring the roles of SROs more broadly in connection with other underserved youth populations, including Indigenous youth. The expansion of this research is timely and critical given the current calls to action to reform the SRO program in Edmonton, with a focus on how to better serve and support underserved youth (CBC News, 2020).

### **Recommendations for Practice**

In light of the recent calls to reform or even abolish the SRO program in Edmonton (CBC News, 2020; Mohamed, 2020), the relevance of this research has become increasingly apparent. Although the findings from this research cannot be generalized, they can be used as a starting point to reflect upon current practices (Aaltio and Heilmann, 2010). Both SROs who participated

in this research called for improvements in training to work with SGMs and with youth in general. They noted that when training opportunities are available, they are often inaccessible due to financial and time constraints. This aligns with the current literature, which highlights the need to improve and expand training for SROs should they remain in schools, and to improve policing practices in schools overall, especially with underserved populations (Dwyer & Hotten, 2009; Dwyer, 2011; Ryan et al., 2017; Theriot, 2016).

The SGM youth who participated in this research were positive about their relationships with their SROs; however, they noted the importance of being able to rely on other caring professionals and significant adults in addition to their assigned SRO for support. This echoes the findings in the OCYA report (2017), which suggest that although one significant adult can make a difference in a youth's life, having a wraparound approach to care in which many caring professionals collaborate to support the youth is often the most effective strategy. This is also relevant when considering the current debate regarding the necessity of SRO programs, in which activists have advocated for social workers and other youth workers trained in mental health and trauma-informed practice to replace SROs (CBC News, 2020; Mohamed, 2020). One of the SRO participants, Carol, also advocated for the inclusion of more trauma-informed training and practice with school staff members, regardless of their role, and with police in general.

It is important to consider the characteristics that SGM youth highlighted that contributed to their positive relationship with their SRO, namely the implementation of an open-door policy, the willingness of the SROs to support the youth both in and out of the school context, and the emphasis on fostering positive and inclusive school environments. Despite the SROs contributing in these positive ways, the SGM youth who participated in the current study did not rely on their assigned SRO for concerns specific to justice and policing; even Alexis, who had

extensive involvement with justice shared that she relies on case workers and lawyers for support with justice-related concerns rather than her assigned SRO. Therefore, it seems that the characteristics that contributed to these SROs forming positive caring relationships with SGM youth were more related to their personal characteristics rather than to their professional role as SROs. In fact, characteristics specific to their policing role were primarily seen as a barrier by both the SROs and the SGM youth, as they shared the challenges of navigating negative perceptions around police in general and the barrier of wearing a police uniform in connecting with youth.

As has been suggested in recent calls to action, a review of the SRO program is necessary (CBC News, 2020). Because the program has historically lacked any review process, it consequently lacks accountability to students, staff, and the community overall. If SROs are to stay in Edmonton schools, it would be important that the program undergo a review process in which training and professional preparedness are examined, in addition to receiving feedback from important stakeholders, including youth. This is especially important when working with underserved and marginalized youth who are more likely to experience increased risk factors and fall into the school-to-prison pipeline (Palmer et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2016).

In conclusion, this research supports the need to further explore the role of SROs in school communities, both in working with SGMs and with other underserved youth populations, such as BIPOC. Although the SROs who participated in this research had positive caring professional relationships with SGM youth which allowed them to support the youths' growth into resilience, those relationships were primarily predicated on the SROs' personal traits rather than their roles as police officers working in schools. The responses of SROs and SGM youth spoke to the importance of expanding training for SROs to better address the contemporary

needs of youth, as well as the importance of actively working to counter the longstanding history of mistreatment of underserved populations that continues to persist in policing institutions today.

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## Appendix A: University of Alberta Research Ethics Approval

### Notification of Approval

Date:	June 5, 2019	
Study ID:	Pro00090578	
Principal Investigator:	Emily Pynoo	
Study Supervisor:	Andre Grace	
Study Title:	How Do School Resource Officers Foster Resilience in Sexual and Gender Minority Youth?	
Approval Expiry Date:	Wednesday, June 3, 2020	
Approved Consent Form:	Approval Date	Approved Document
	6/5/2019 6/5/2019	PynooE_Consent_SROs_Revised2.docx PynooE_Consent_18+_Revised2.docx

Thank you for submitting the above study to the Research Ethics Board 1. Your application has received a delegated review and been approved on behalf of the committee.

A renewal report must be submitted next year prior to the expiry of this approval if your study still requires ethics approval. If you do not renew on or before the renewal expiry date, you will have to re-submit an ethics application.

Approval by the Research Ethics Board does not encompass authorization to access the staff, students, facilities or resources of local institutions for the purposes of the research.

Sincerely,

Stanley Varnhagen, PhD.  
Chair, Research Ethics Board 1

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system).

## Appendix B: Edmonton Public Schools Ethics Approval



### BOARD OF TRUSTEES

WARD A Cheryl Johner  
 WARD B Michelle Draper  
 WARD C Shelagh Dunn  
 WARD D Trisha Estabrooks  
 WARD E Ken Gibson  
 WARD F Michael Janz  
 WARD G Bridget Stirling  
 WARD H Nathan Ip  
 WARD I Sherry Adams

### SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Darrel Robertson  
  
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November 7, 2019

Dr. Denise Larsen  
 Associate Dean, Research  
 845 Education South  
 University of Alberta  
 Edmonton, Alberta  
 T6G 2G5

Dear Dr. Larsen:

**Approved Research Project: How Do School Resource Officers Foster Resilience in Sexual and Gender Minority Youth?**

The above noted research project application has been approved, subject to the following conditions:

- participation in the study is voluntary and participants are free to withdraw at any time;
- absence of written, informed consent will be interpreted as the absence of consent;
- personal information may only be used for the stated purpose for which the information was collected or compiled;
- anonymity of the participants and confidentiality of information obtained is assured;
- the researcher must be in compliance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and Regulation.


By acceptance of this letter, the researcher will:

- submit a final report to Research and Innovation for Student Learning and agrees to dissemination of the research results within Edmonton Public Schools;
- comply with the conditions to conduct research in Edmonton Public Schools.

Emily Pynoo may now make the necessary arrangements to proceed with this project by contacting the principals noted on page 2 of this letter in order to obtain their approval to conduct research in their school. It is the responsibility of the researcher to provide the principal with a copy of the proposal and all related documents if requested. Please note that it is at the discretion of Edmonton Public Schools to rescind this approval at any time.

If you require further information, please contact Jan Favel, District Information Coordinator at 780-429-8191 or [research@epsb.ca](mailto:research@epsb.ca).

Sincerely,

  
 Ann Parker  
 Director Research and Innovation for Student Learning



**Appendix C: Information Letter for School Resource Officers**

Dear [school resource officer name]:

My name is Emily Pynoo, and I am a master's student in the School and Clinical Child Psychology Program in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta. As part of my master's degree, I will be conducting a research project that will inform the development of my master's thesis. For my thesis, I am interested in exploring the relationship between school resource officers (SROs) and the vulnerable youth with whom they work. In particular, I am planning to focus on sexual and gender minority (SGM) youth, including the LGBTQ2S+ community.

The key purpose of this study is to investigate the notion of caring professionalism and ways to enhance it in relation to working with SGM youth. SROs will be the caring professionals that this research is focused on. It will include investigating how SROs enable positive outcomes for SGM youth in schooling and community contexts, and exploring how SROs believe their role could be improved or expanded upon to better support vulnerable SGM youth. The research will involve participation in an open-ended interview. I will be interviewing SROs initially, followed by interviews with SGM youth they serve. Interested SROs will be provided with a report following the completion of the research, which will summarize the results from all involved schools and will have all identifying information from participants removed in order to protect all participants' privacy. It is anticipated that the interview will take up to one hour, and can be conducted on-site at the SRO's place of work.

If you are willing to participate in this research or have any questions, please contact me at [pynoo@ualberta.ca](mailto:pynoo@ualberta.ca). My research will be supervised by Dr. André P. Grace, Canada Research Chair in Sexual and Gender Minority Studies (Tier 1) at the University of Alberta. He can also be reached with any questions at: [andre.grace@ualberta.ca](mailto:andre.grace@ualberta.ca).

Sincerely,

Emily Pynoo, BA

Master's Student in School and Clinical Child Psychology  
Department of Educational Psychology  
Office: 651 Education South, University of Alberta  
[pynoo@ualberta.ca](mailto:pynoo@ualberta.ca)

*The plan for this study has been reviewed by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have questions about your rights or how research should be conducted, you can call (780) 492-2615. This office is independent of the researchers.*

## Appendix D: Consent Form for School Resource Officer Participants

### **How Do School Resource Officers Foster Resilience in Sexual and Gender Minority Youth?: Form for School Resource Officer Research Participants**

Attention:

\_\_\_\_\_

[Research Participant's Name]

You are invited to participate in this research study. The key purpose of this study is to investigate the notion of caring professionalism and ways to enhance it in relation to working with sexual and gender minority (SGM) or LGBTQ+ youth and young adults. School Resource Officers (SROs) will be the caring professionals that this research is focused on. It will include investigating SROs knowledge levels in relation to working with SGM youth, including how SROs enable positive outcomes for SGM youth in schooling and community contexts, and exploring how SROs believe their role could be improved or expanded upon to better support vulnerable SGM youth. The research will inform the development of the principal investigator's master's thesis, and the results will also be used to develop and improve educational resources and supports for SGM youth. The research will involve participation in an open-ended interview. Following the initial SRO interviews, the SGM youth with whom they work will be independently interviewed. Interested SROs will be provided with a report following the completion of the research, which will summarize the results from all involved schools and will have all identifying information from participants removed in order to protect all participants' privacy. The research will be carried out as stated, and there is no deception involved. It is anticipated that the initial interview used to collect data will take up to one hour.

You are invited to sign this consent letter in the space provided below once you read the following guidelines for participation:

- As a research participant, you are asked to provide signed informed consent in order to take part in this research.
- You recognize that as the research is being conducted by an outside researcher, choosing to participate or not should not affect any existing relationships between you and the students or staff at your assigned school(s).
- You have the right to refrain from answering any particular interview questions that make you uncomfortable.
- You will be able to review research material as part of an iterative process. You will be provided with drafts for your correction, amendment, and editing. Your changes will be taken into account in rewriting and editing processes.
- You will have the right to opt out of the research at any time without penalty, and you can withdraw your research data up to the point that you sign off on the edited transcript.
- Processes to provide accuracy of data, security, confidentiality, and anonymity are implemented in the design of the study. A technical recording device will be used to ensure accuracy of data collected from the interviews. Security and confidentiality measures will be implemented, including the back-up of data, secure storage of recorded material, and a plan for deleting electronic and taped data. If you are uncomfortable being audio-recorded, you will be provided with the option to have the researcher take notes on your interview as an alternative.
- You recognize that although the researcher will do their best to ensure anonymity is fully maintained, due to the small number of participants, anonymity cannot be guaranteed.
- Names and email addresses will be collected for correspondence between the principal investigator and research participants (i.e., to set up interview times, share transcripts).

Only Emily Pynoo as the principal investigator and her research supervisor, Dr. Grace, will have access to this information as well as any data that contains identifying information. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms will be used in the final report and all identifying information (i.e., names and email addresses) will be removed and destroyed.

- You agree that my research supervisor and I can use information in secondary writing beyond the research report, which includes such writing as conference papers, book chapters, or journal articles. The same ethical considerations and safeguards will apply to secondary uses of data, and all future use of data will again go through an approval process with the university's research ethics board.
- You will be provided with a copy of the research report culminating from this study should you so choose.
- You recognize that although the research will be used to develop the principal investigator's master's thesis, as well as educational and support resources for SGM youth, there may be no direct benefit to you for participating in this research.

If you have questions, please email Emily Pynoo at [pynoo@ualberta.ca](mailto:pynoo@ualberta.ca), or her research supervisor, Dr. André P. Grace at [andre.grace@ualberta.ca](mailto:andre.grace@ualberta.ca).

*The plan for this study has been reviewed by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have questions about your rights or how research should be conducted, you can call (780) 492-2615. This office is independent of the researchers.*

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and I will receive a copy of this consent form after I sign it. I provide my own independent consent to participate in this research:

Participant's Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Print Name: **Emily Pynoo**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Research Supervisor's Print Name: **Dr. André P. Grace**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: Consent Form for Parents/Guardians of Youth Participants

### **How Do School Resource Officers Foster Resilience in Sexual and Gender Minority Youth?: Form for Parents/Guardians of Youth Participants 17 years old or younger**

This research project is designed to explore sexual and gender minority (SGM, including LGBTQ2S+) individuals' resilience and their relationships with school resource officers (SROs) at their high schools. Your child is invited to participate in an open-ended individual interview. The results will be used in the researcher's master's thesis, as well as being used to develop and improve educational resources and supports for your child and other SGM youth. This research gives your child an opportunity to share their thoughts and provide input on this important work.

As the parent/guardian of the above-named youth, it is requested that your consent be provided should you choose to support their participation in this research project. Please read the following before providing your consent:

- As a parent/guardian of a research participant 17 years old or younger, you are consenting on their behalf to allow them to participate in this research. Your child will also have the opportunity to provide their assent to participate.
- You recognize that as the research is being conducted by an outside researcher, choosing to participate or not should not affect any existing relationships between your child and their SRO or other school staff.
- You recognize that your child has the right to opt out of the research at any time, without penalty and without anyone being notified of their withdrawal.
- As your child is an individual 17 years old or younger, you accept that the researcher will follow up on any verbal disclosure of abuse in keeping with the duty to report as well as provide them with assistance from counseling and outreach staff. The duty to report is a legal requirement and is not at the researcher's discretion. If they disclose self-harm or dangers to themselves or others, the researcher will have counseling or outreach staff members follow up and support them as well.
- Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. If they are uncomfortable being recorded, I can take notes instead. Youth participants will have an opportunity to read their transcript or notes and make changes, including adding or removing information.
- As the parent/guardian of the youth participant, you have the right to withdraw your child's research data from the study up to 30 days after their interview has taken place.
- Processes to provide security, confidentiality, and anonymity are built into the design of this research study. Although the researcher will do their best to ensure anonymity is fully maintained, due to the small number of participants, anonymity cannot be guaranteed.
- Names and email addresses will be collected for correspondence between the principal investigator and research participants (i.e., to set up interview times, share transcripts). Only Emily Pynoo as the principal investigator and her research supervisor, Dr. Grace, will have access to this information. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms will be used in the final report and all identifying information (i.e., names and emails) will be removed and destroyed.
- You agree that the researcher and her research supervisor can use information in secondary writing beyond the research report, which includes such writing as conference papers, book chapters, or journal articles. The same ethical considerations and safeguards will apply to secondary uses of data, and all future use of data will again go through an approval process with the university's research ethics board.

- You can ask the researcher to provide you with access to the research report resulting from this research.
- You recognize that although the research will be used to develop the principal investigator’s master’s thesis, as well as educational and support resources for SGM youth, there may be no direct benefit to you or your child for participating in this research.

If you have questions, please email Emily Pynoo at [pynoo@ualberta.ca](mailto:pynoo@ualberta.ca), or her research supervisor, Dr. André P. Grace at [andre.grace@ualberta.ca](mailto:andre.grace@ualberta.ca).

*The plan for this study has been reviewed by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have questions about your rights or how research should be conducted, you can call (780) 492-2615. This office is independent of the researchers.*

I have read this research form and understand the terms and conditions of a minor youth’s participation. I freely consent and voluntarily agree that my child/ward can participate in the research as detailed in this consent form:

Parent/Guardian’s Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher’s Print Name: **Emily Pynoo**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Research Supervisor’s Print Name: **Dr. André P. Grace**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F: Assent Form for Youth Participants

### **How Do School Resource Officers Foster Resilience in Sexual and Gender Minority Youth?: Form for Youth Participants 17 years old or younger**

This research project is designed to explore sexual and gender minority (SGM, including LGBTQ2S+) individuals' resilience and their relationships with school resource officers (SROs) at their high schools. You are invited to participate in an open-ended individual interview. The results will be used in the researcher's master's thesis, as well as being used to develop and improve educational resources and supports for you and other SGM youth. Additionally, a report will be provided to all interested participants following the completion of the research – the report will have all identifying information removed, with any information that you provide being fully anonymized to protect your privacy. This research gives you an opportunity to share your thoughts and provide your input on this important work.

You are invited to provide assent to participate in this research. As you are under 18, it is requested that your parent/guardian provide consent on your behalf. We invite you to read the following guidelines for participation before agreeing to participate in this research:

- As a research participant 17 years old or younger, you are assenting to participate in this research with the informed consent of your parent or guardian.
- You recognize that as the research is being conducted by an outside researcher, choosing to participate or not should not affect any existing relationships between you and your SRO or other school staff.
- You have the right to opt out of participating in the research at any time, without penalty and without anyone being notified of your withdrawal.
- You have the right to refrain from answering any particular interview questions that make you uncomfortable.
- As an individual 17 years old or younger, you accept that the researcher will follow up on any verbal disclosure of abuse in keeping with the duty to report as well as provide you with assistance from counseling and outreach staff. The duty to report is a legal requirement and is not at the researcher's discretion. If you disclose self-harm or dangers to yourself or others, the researcher will have counseling or outreach staff members follow up and support you as well.
- Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. If you are uncomfortable being recorded, I can take notes instead. You will have an opportunity to read your transcript or notes and make changes, including adding or removing information.
- You can withdraw your research data up to the point that you sign off on the edited transcript/notes.
- Processes to provide security, confidentiality, and anonymity are built into the design of this research study. Although the researcher will do their best to ensure anonymity is fully maintained, due to the small number of participants, anonymity cannot be guaranteed.
- Names and email addresses will be collected for correspondence between the principal investigator and research participants (i.e., to set up interview times, share transcripts). Only Emily Pynoo as the principal investigator and her research supervisor, Dr. Grace, will have access to this information. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms will be used in the final report and all identifying information (i.e., names and emails) will be removed and destroyed.
- You agree that the researcher and her research supervisor can use information in secondary writing beyond the research report, which includes such writing as conference papers, book chapters, or journal articles. The same ethical considerations and safeguards will

apply to secondary uses of data, and all future use of data will again go through an approval process with the university’s research ethics board.

- You can ask the researcher to provide you with access to the research report resulting from this research.
- You recognize that although the research will be used to develop the principal investigator’s master’s thesis, as well as educational and support resources for SGM youth, there may be no direct benefit to you for participating in this research.

If you have questions, please email Emily Pynoo at [pynoo@ualberta.ca](mailto:pynoo@ualberta.ca), or her research supervisor, Dr. André P. Grace at [andre.grace@ualberta.ca](mailto:andre.grace@ualberta.ca).

*The plan for this study has been reviewed by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have questions about your rights or how research should be conducted, you can call (780) 492-2615. This office is independent of the researchers.*

***Please sign here to indicate your willingness to participate in this research:***

Youth’s Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher’s Print Name: ***Emily Pynoo***

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Research Supervisor’s Print Name: ***Dr. André P. Grace***

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix G: Interview Protocol for Youth Participants**

1. Tell me a bit about yourself. What are your interests and priorities in life right now?
2. As you are comfortable, tell me about how you identify/describe yourself in terms of sexuality and gender.
3. As you are comfortable, tell me about your current or past involvement with either the youth justice or child welfare systems.
4. What is your experience living as a SGM like:
  - a. At school?
  - b. At home?
  - c. In the community?
5. As you are comfortable, tell me about your involvement with the school resource officer (SRO) at your school – when and why did you first connect with them?
6. What outcomes mark your experiences working with SROs? Do you feel your relationship with them is more positive or negative, and what influences that?
7. How does your assigned SRO help you deal with challenges in your daily life, both in school and in your community?
8. Being resilient means becoming more happy, healthy, and able to problem solve and move past barriers or challenges you might face. How does your assigned SRO help you to become more resilient?
9. What other factors contribute to you becoming more resilient?
10. Do you have any questions for me?



**Appendix H: Interview Protocol for School Resource Officer Participants**

1. Tell me a little bit about your professional interests – what inspired you to become a school resource officer?
2. Tell me about best practice in your profession. Is there any emphasis on particular vulnerable populations of youth or of youth put at risk?
3. Have you received any training specific to working with sexual and gender minority (SGM) youth?
4. How do you work with vulnerable SGM youth to enable them to problem solve and achieve in ways beneficial to their individual and social development?
5. As a caring professional doing this work, what do you consider to be markers of a positive working relationship?
6. From your perspective, what are some of the biggest/most pressing issues facing SGM youth in personal, social, school, and/or community contexts today?
7. What kinds of training, resources, and supports do you need to be more effective and successful in this role?
8. Do you have any questions for me?