The Hidden Resilience of Street-Involved and Homeless

Sexual and Gender Minority Young Adults Who Engage in Sex Work

by

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Abstract

This dissertation explores innovative and nuanced conceptions of resilience useful to understanding this construct, process, and outcome in a diverse population of street-involved and homeless sexual and gender minority (SGM) young adults. These young persons deal with significant adversity and trauma and have engaged in sex work as one coping and problem-solving strategy. Accordingly, I consider how these individuals are positioned within a sociocultural ecological model that conceptualizes resilience as a complex, non-linear biopsychosocial and cultural process and outcome. I expand possibilities for understanding resilience by employing qualitative interviewing using a natural conversation model embedded in a queer critical posthuman methodological framework to examine how street-involved and homeless SGM young adults navigate and ascribe meaning to daily life in community and institutional contexts that affect their capacity-building, adaptation, and perseverance in the face of stressors and risk-taking.

With this study, I employ a multifaceted sociocultural ecological lens and engage in queer critical posthuman theorizing, shaping my methodology as I investigate mainstream psychological notions of normative development, coping, and capacity-building, and challenge dominant cultural narratives around agency and choice. Such theorizing highlights the interlaced subjectivities and life circumstances of multifarious SGM young people who often find inventive and unconventional means to cope with severe hardship. Qualitative interviewing aligns with a sociocultural ecological approach to enhancing the wellbeing of SGM young adults, providing a thick, deeply contextualized description and rich understanding of their experiences, promoting their visibility and empowerment as change agents.

Research participants were recruited from the Community ~ Hope ~ Empowerment ~ Wellness (Chew) Project, an inner-city intervention and outreach project serving homeless and street-involved SGM young people in Edmonton. Data for this study are comprised of eight interviews: six interviews with five current or former Chew Project clients ages 25 to 38 and two interviews with the Chew Project's full-time lead intervention and outreach worker. In all, five primary themes emerged from the data: *Stressors and Risks*; *Harm Reduction*; *Building and Recognizing Assets*; *Atypical Coping and Problem-Solving Strategies*; and *Hopefulness and (Hidden) Signs of Thriving*. Bringing these conversations and themes to light, this study examines how street-involved and homeless SGM young adults with particular intersectional subjectivities and positionalities (e.g., queer, Indigenous, homeless) build assets that enable them to survive and thrive under unique challenges. The notion of hidden resilience evokes how the vulnerable young participants in this study, when seeking to overcome severe hardship, have resorted to non-normative behaviour that reflects adaptive, if atypical, coping such as engaging in sex work. This study is premised on the perspective that fostering resilience in helping young people who are struggling to survive and thrive requires approaches focused on asset-building as a basis for overcoming adversity and trauma. The ultimate goal of this study is to influence effective social policymaking and engaged practices focused on enhancing positive outcomes for vulnerable SGM young people.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Jeffrey R. Hankey. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “The Meaning of Resilience for Street-Involved and Homeless Sexual and Gender Minority Young Adults Engaged in Sex Work”, No. Pro00092803, November 5, 2019.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to Sam, Chris, Tanner, Jeremy, Brennan, and Darcy (they're pseudonyms, but you know who you are). Thank you for trusting me with your words and your wisdom. You have humbled and inspired me.

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First, thank you to Dr. André Grace. Your mentorship and expertise have been invaluable over the past seven years, and I would not have blossomed into the confident, reflective, and determined young scholar I am today without your exuberant encouragement, calm reassurance, and impassioned advocacy throughout the tumult of graduate studies. André, you are the consummate role model, brimming with integrity, wisdom, compassion, and humour, and I will be forever grateful for your support.

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Overview

The primary aim of this doctoral study is to explore novel conceptions of resilience with a unique population of sexual and gender minority (SGM) young adults who engage in sex work. Situated in a transformative paradigm, my study employs queer critical posthuman theorizing and social ecological lenses to interrogate mainstream psychological notions of normative development, coping, and capacity-building, and to challenge dominant cultural narratives around agency and choice. In particular, I build from Ungar's (2011, 2012) social ecological model of resilience, Grace's (2015) emergent resilience typology, and Mertens' (2009, 2010) transformative research paradigm for socially impactful research with vulnerable populations. I steep Ungar's social ecological model in queer critical posthuman perspectives, attending to gaps and absences in his model, particularly around SGM considerations. Queer critical posthumanism also shapes my reflexive posture—my "critical ethos and set of dispositions" (May & Perry, 2017, p. 150)—with respect to the relational and ethical dilemmas imposed by the unavoidable influence of my privileged, categorically white, male, cisgender, middle-class researcher subjectivities in the inquiry (Finlay, 2012; Gemignani, 2017). It also frames my interrogation of the categorical (McDonald, 2013, 2016).

This study is qualitative, with transformative, interdisciplinary perspectives shaping my queer critical posthuman methodology for conducting semi-structured, conversational interviews with vulnerable street-involved and homeless SGM young adults who engage in sex work. My chosen form of qualitative inquiry is *generic* insofar as it does not adhere to foundational qualitative methodologies such as phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, or narrative inquiry—though it may contain elements of each (Kahlke, 2014; Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). Instead, it emerges from within a queer framework of fluidity and flux without essence or

logical prescription (Levy & Johnson, 2011; Rasmussen & Allen, 2014). Adding contextual and relational knowledge to complement the stories of these young adults, I also conducted interviews with two older adults who engaged in sex work when they were younger, including the lead intervention and outreach worker at Edmonton's inner-city Community ~ Health ~ Wellness ~ Empowerment (Chew) Project.

The central goal of this study is to interrogate notions of coping and resilience in a particular population of vulnerable young people served by the Chew Project. Dr. André P. Grace initiated this intervention and outreach project for homeless and street-involved SGM young people in Edmonton (Grace, 2017), and I have been involved with the project since its inception in 2014. In this study, I argue that engaging in sex work within this population can be construed as a manifestation of positive adaptation and even an indicator that these emerging adults (Arnett, 2006) are thriving, using queer critical posthuman perspectives to address the tensions emanating from ample evidence that sex work is also associated with risk and the potential for negative outcomes.

Consistent with Ungar's (2004) social ecological definition of resilience as "the outcome of negotiations between individuals and their environments to maintain a self-definition as healthy" (p. 81), I claim that any rigorous appraisal of risk and resilience must be co-constructed by the researcher and research participant, which motivates an illuminating qualitative methodology. My research objectives, informed by Grace's (2015) resilience typology, are as follows:

Objective 1: Deepening Resilience Theory: To investigate and assess how vulnerable SGM young adults name and describe experienced stressors, risk-taking, asset-building, coping

mechanisms, and indicators of thriving as they self-determine what it means for them to become resilient as they deal with adversity and trauma.

Objective 2: Enhancing Young Adult Resilience and Agency: To explore how transformative research methods can be used to advocate for young adults, helping them problem-solve so they can grow into resilience and become agents involved in their personal recognition and accommodation in social settings.

These objectives are linked to my emerging role and identity as a reflexive researcher-advocate seeking synchronicity among research, policy, and practice. For me, this involves working with the SGM young adult population, engaging in research that informs knowledge-building, policymaking, and social and cultural practices focused on recognition and accommodation of this vulnerable constituency and, in particular, those whose survival strategy involves engaging in stigmatized and sometimes illicit behaviours. Emanating from these objectives, my multifaceted research question is as follows:

Research Question: How does the non-normative subsistence strategy of sex work among homeless and street-involved SGM young people in Edmonton reflect the following:

- Risk factors associated with sex work internationally and in the context of current Canadian law (Bill C-36);
- Coping, and in particular atypical coping, mechanisms found in the literature;
- Assets that have been shown to support resilience; and
- Indicators that young people are doing well, considering evidence that positive outcomes may be hidden by normative assumptions in marginalized populations?

This research is timely and important, as numerous scholars have called for more strengths-based research with vulnerable SGM young people and for the study of coping and resilience in a

framework that considers how they navigate unique sociocultural ecologies (see Asakura, 2016a, 2016b; Colpitts and Gahagan, 2016; Craig, Austin, & Huang, 2018; Goldbach & Gibbs, 2015; Grace, 2015; Higa, Hoppe, Lindhorst, Mincer, Beadnell, Morrison, et al., 2014).

This manuscript is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 reviews the literature on resilience as an emergent construct, concept, process, and outcome (Grace, 2015), as well as key constituent concepts such as stressors, risk factors, risk-taking, coping, asset- and capacity-building, young adult development, and indicators of thriving. As it unfolds, this chapter explores the empirical risk and resilience literature, troubling normative development against the more nuanced trajectories of sexual and gender minorities, and particularly those occupying other intersecting axes of differentiation (Braidotti, 2011) such as Indigeneity and homelessness. I argue that *hidden resilience,* which I broadly define as the manifestation of positive outcomes attributable at least in part to atypical or non-normative coping strategies, is a key construct when working with marginalized and stigmatized populations such as the young people in my study. The chapter also provides evidence for the merits of a destigmatization, decriminalization, harm-reduction framework surrounding sex work. Finally, I close the chapter with a discussion of the role of police officers as social actors and significant adults who can exacerbate or mitigate risk for vulnerable populations.

Chapter 2 delineates the project design and concomitant considerations such as sampling, data collection, and limitations, outlining the pragmatics of how the study was conducted. In Chapter 3, notions of hidden resilience, decentrality, and reflexivity are developed through a queer critical posthuman lens that is ecological in its scope. A synthesis of queer, critical, and posthuman theories, nested in a transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2009, 2010), has guided my qualitative interview methodology, constellates my reflexive process in developing this

dissertation, and situates me in the tenuous position of researcher-advocate seeking to be a queer critical change agent (Grace, 2015). Chapter 4 presents the thematically organized results of the interviews, centring the voices of my research participants. Chapter 5 offers a discussion of the results with respect to my research questions and methodological considerations, and Chapter 6 posits clear, actionable recommendations based on study outcomes, concluding insights, and future research directions.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Conceptualizing Resilience & Risk

A Brief History of Resilience

Resilience, which can be defined in the broadest terms as the demonstrable capacity to survive and thrive in the face of pronounced adversity and trauma, is a nuanced process and outcome marked by complexities and contexts that influence human psychological development (Masten, 2001; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990). Here, thriving as an indicator of resilience is building the mental capacity and acquiring the physical resources and supports to stay alive and maintain positive self-appraisals instead of being consumed by substance use and addictions as well as suicide ideation, attempts, and completions, which comprise the fate of too many street-involved and homeless queer young people (Grace, 2015). Why, all too often, are some young people immobilized by hopelessness and helplessness, while innumerable others somehow find the capacity to transcend debilitating adversity and trauma and press on to reshape their environments, to endure with optimism and zest? To my mind, this troubling conundrum is at the heart of resilience research and the articulation of resilience as a concept and construct.

Rutter (2012) and Masten (2001) relate that the first wave of resilience research can be traced to the 1970s as pioneering scientists in developmental psychopathology conducted studies with children who had developed successfully in the face of risk and adversity, such as Garmezy's (1974) study of children living with parents with mental illness. Masten (2001) discusses how these early studies saw conceptual ambiguities around resilience, as it was sometimes conflated with competence, invulnerability, and even invincibility (see Garmezy, 1971, 1974; Werner & Smith, 1982 for examples). Nonetheless, as Wright, Masten, and Narayan (2013) outline in their review, these pioneers shifted the frame from a pathological and deficit-

centred model to one exemplifying and encouraging methodologically rigorous research that sought to identify assets and protective factors and promote positive outcomes through evidence-based intervention and policy decisions (see also Masten, 2001; Rutter, 2012; Ungar, 2012).

Over the last few decades, research has pointed to resilience as a concept distinct from competence and invulnerability. In the context of human adversity, the latter concepts may be overly summative, simple, and generic, failing to acknowledge that an individual can be competent in several life domains but vulnerable and lacking in one or more others (Masten, 2001; Rutter, 1993, 2012; Woodier, 2011). Resilience, Rutter (1993, 2012) claims, is interactive and must be inferred from differential outcomes among those who have experienced significant adversity or trauma. What is key, he claims, is the *interplay* between people and their environments: "We must get away from thinking in terms of characteristics that are always risky or protective in their effects and, instead, focus on the specific processes that operate in particular circumstances for particular outcomes" (1993, p. 627). For instance, Leontopoulou (2006) has identified interaction effects between family discord and socioeconomic status, suggesting upper class youth suffer self-esteem effects of family-level adversity more so than youth from less affluent environments. Similarly, Rutter (2012) suggests that some variables are neutral or positive in low-risk situations but produce stressor effects in difficult contexts, such as, I would suggest, an SGM young person wanting to attend prom openly with their date.

Grace (2015) delineates how, most recently, resilience studies have emphasized the dynamic, complex, and multi-level biopsychosocial interactions impacting the process of growing into resilience. These interactions, as Masten (2015) claims, include those "within the individual (genetic, neural, immunological, cognitive, etc.) and also between the person and the environment, including interactions with family, peers, school, community, and the natural built

environment" (p. 187). A more culturally-embedded ecological approach has also been gaining prominence in resilience research (see Grace, 2015; Harvey, 2012; Masten, 2015; Ungar, 2011, 2012), with Ungar (2012) spearheading a contextualized social ecological perspective that takes into account elements of temporality, opportunity, and meaning, thus constituting an "interactional, environmental, and culturally pluralistic" (p. 14) lens that "de-centers the individual as the primary unit of analysis" (p. 18). The notion of *decentrality* is, irony notwithstanding, central to my current research. Viewed from the multi-perspective of ecological decentrality, the all-too-common outcome of suicide ideation, attempts, and completions in this study's population of focus is a testament to the power of systems and structures to deprive the most vulnerable among us of hope and purpose. It is not about blaming the young person as victim or labelling involvement in sex work or a tragic death by suicide as some ultimate failure by that person.

Resilience as Construct, Process, & Outcome

Numerous resilience scholars, including Bottrell (2009), Grace (2015), Pessoa, Coimbra, Noltemeyer, and Bottrell (2017), and Ungar (2004, 2007, 2011), have operationalized resilience as not just a psychological construct, but also a social and cultural one. Grace (2015) claims resilience is "multidimensional, non-linear, and fluid**"** (p. 27) and Bottrell (2009) contends that identity work, cultural management, and negotiation are central processes to the development of resilience: "Thus, to speak of resilient individuals is to refer to young people's engagement in processes that accrue positive outcomes, not only as normatively defined but also on their own terms" (Bottrell, p. 323). Nonetheless, my review turned up numerous scholars who have argued that the social and cultural construction of resilience must be interrogated since it has historically pathologized non-normative behaviour, minimized the significance of social positioning and

cultural diversity, and discursively disempowered populations under study (Asakura, 2016a, 2016b; Bottrell, 2009; Colpitts & Gahagan, 2016; de Finney, Dean, Loiselle, & Saraceno, 2011; Grace, 2015; Pessoa et al., 2017; Ungar, 2004, 2007, 2011). In response, this study endeavours to be socially and culturally sensitive, engendering a non-pathologizing and discursively empowering approach to researching resilience.

Grace's (2015) resilience typology constellates resilience into interactional factors that include stressors, risks, assets, and indicators of thriving. For historically disenfranchised populations, stressors are by and large the effects of structural, sociocultural factors (e.g., heterosexism, racism, homo/bi/transphobia) that commonly exacerbate risk and lead to risk-taking (Grace, 2015). Meyer (2015) refers to this matrix as minority stress—challenges, unique to marginalized populations, that permeate a continuum of proximal and distal contexts and that can lead to an array of adverse mental and physical health outcomes. Stressors are markers of adversity and systemic disturbances that threaten development, while risks are more measurable factors that tend toward specific negative outcomes (Wright et al., 2013). Drawing from Grace's (2015) typology, risks can include internalizing and dispositional elements such as depression and low self-esteem, externalizing and behavioural ("risk-taking") elements like self-harm and substance abuse, and third-party perpetrations such as bullying, peer pressure, and sexual abuse.

As with stressors and risks, assets—resources or promotive factors (Wright et al., 2013)—operate ecologically, cutting across an array of internal and external dimensions. Defined as building blocks of success that enable individuals to build a resilient mindset (Grace, 2015), normative assets include cognitive and affective factors such as mastery motivation, environmental mastery and autonomy, intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy, internal locus of control, hopefulness, and having a broad repertoire of coping strategies (Çelik, Çetin, & Tutkun,

2015; Corcoran & Nichols-Casebolt, 2004; Fava & Tomba, 2009; Grace, 2015; Hippe, 2004; Leontopoulou, 2006; Masten, 2001, 2015; Woodier, 2011). Positive parenting or the presence of another caring adult is also a crucial factor contributing to a resilient mindset in youth (Busso, 2014; Çelik et al., 2015; Corcoran & Nichols-Casebolt, 2004; Grace, 2015; Masten, 2001, 2015), as are community assets like access to culturally-relevant educational resources and role models (Grace, 2015; Meyer, 2015).

Indicators of thriving are factors that demonstrate a young person is doing well despite experiences of trauma and adversity (Grace, 2015): "As youth demonstrate indicators of thriving, they are building the capacity to be problem solvers and change agents in their own lives and social networks. In the process they become happier, healthier, and more hopeful in the face of any setbacks that life brings their way" (p. 302). Put another way, indicators of thriving are evidence of positive outcomes. As I explain below, some documented indicators of thriving cited in Grace's (2015) emergent typology—such as finding shelter, leaving an abusive home, seeing choices, and seeking out resources—are realistic and important touchstones for members of the population of my study at this low moment of their lives. However, more normative indicators—mediating cultural expectations, believing in community, and gay-straight alliance (GSA) involvement, for instance—are perhaps not. Moreover, I develop the argument that some coping behaviours typically and normatively construed as risk factors could, when considering the unique minority stressors and social, familial, and cultural contexts of this population, be more productively interpreted as indicators that these young people are doing pretty well, considering (see Asakura, 2016a, 2016b; Craig et al., 2018; Ungar, 2004, 2007, 2011). Crucially, however, in the spirit of *discursive empowerment* (Ungar, 2004), this assertion must harmonize with the young person's own appraisal.

As well as a social, cultural, and typological construct, Grace (2015) argues that resilience is a dynamic, intricate process that is never quite final. Rather than something one achieves as an optimal endpoint, it is instead demonstrated or inferred over time (Hill & Gunderson, 2011). The process of *growing into resilience* is non-linear and likely to be impeded by stress and setbacks along the way (Grace, 2015); it can also have steeling effects that decrease vulnerabilities to stressors and risks in the future (Rutter, 2012). Moreover, it is not an all-or-nothing phenomenon. Vulnerable young people may thrive in certain developmental domains while struggling in others as they navigate diverse social ecologies and changing life contexts, marking resilience as a complex process of capacity-building and successful adaptation (Grace, 2015).

Coping

The above section provides evidence for the discursive, social ecological, and process-oriented nature of what we call resilience. A key associated concept, coping—how individuals deal with stress (Frydenberg, 2004), a purposeful movement toward a desired outcome (Eriksen, 2013)—has also been recognized as a phenomenon "embedded in a complex, dynamic stress process that involves the person, the environment, and the relationship between them" (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004, p. 748). Despite this ecological complexity, coping tends to be operationalized as a binary categorical construct (see Craig et al., 2018; Frydenberg, 2004; Goldbach & Gibbs, 2015; Hill & Gunderson, 2015; Saha, Huebner, Hills, Malone, & Valois, 2014). In the literature, coping strategies are generally differentiated as instrumental/problem-focused, which seek to eliminate or resolve stressful situations, and emotion-focused, which attempt to manage, alleviate, or mitigate the negative emotions precipitated by those stressful

situations (Craig et al., 2018; Hill & Gunderson, 2015; Saha et al., 2014). Frydenberg (2004) calls these emotion-focused methods tension-reduction strategies.

A third category of coping has also been put to use by some researchers. Meaning-focused or meaning-making strategies (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Hill & Gunderson, 2015; Saha et al., 2014) provide "a useful way to think about coping efforts in which the person draws on values, beliefs, and goals to modify the meaning of a stressful transaction, especially in cases of chronic stress that may not be amenable to problem-focused efforts" (Folkman & Moskowitz, p. 752). Finally, social coping or social support is a fourth category that has found some traction in the literature (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Saha et al., 2014). Depending on the context, this coping mechanism can be conceptualized as both a problem-focused strategy and/or emotion-focused strategy; consider, for example, a young person seeking out help from family to resolve an issue, or joining friends to vent and drink alcohol (Saha et al., 2014).

Additionally, coping is often dichotomized as disengagement/avoidant coping, used to minimize encounters with stress and to avoid stigma by distancing oneself from challenging situations or emotions, and engagement coping, which is actively directed at the stressor in an attempt to obtain control over it and which can include features of both emotion- and problem-focused coping (Craig et al., 2018; Goldbach & Gibbs, 2015; Hill & Gunderson, 2015; Saha et al., 2014). Goldbach and Gibbs further dissect coping into strategies—thoughts and behaviours—and resources—social and personal tools that support the coping process, which we might also call assets (Grace, 2015). Folkman and Moskowitz (2004) claim that, while the categorical nomenclature of engagement, disengagement, problem-focused, emotion-focused, meaning-focused, and social coping is useful in the synthesis of findings across studies, there is

the risk of occluding key differences within categories and masking specific effects of coping. They provide the following example:

> Distancing, which is a form of coping in which the person recognizes a problem but deliberately makes efforts to put it out of his or her mind, and escape-avoidance, which is more of an escapist flight that can include behaviors such as drinking, are both avoidant forms of coping that are usually grouped together under "emotion-focused coping." Distancing, however, is often adaptive when nothing can be done, such as when waiting for the outcome of a test, whereas escape-avoidance is usually a maladaptive way of coping with the same kind of situation. (p. 752)

These groupings are also, as I will argue, fraught with socially and culturally normative judgments that may devalue *atypical coping* mechanisms (Ungar, 2004, 2011), such as engaging in sex work.

Grace's (2015) typology connects coping with resilience, where coping—and particularly a broad repertoire of coping skills—is identified as a potential asset as well as an indicator of thriving. Moreover, his emergent typology lists assets and indicators of thriving that could themselves represent coping mechanisms, and primarily engagement coping mechanisms, such as: challenging heterosexist messages, coming out (as one is comfortable), delaying gratification, finding shelter, leaving an abusive home, and seeking out resources. Drilling this way into risk factors, examples of coping are found here, too: apathy, self-harm, hiding, hypervigilance, truancy, substance use, and running away—primarily avoidant or disengagement coping strategies. That leaving an abusive home and running away are established typologically as an indicator of thriving and a risk factor, respectively, is symptomatic of ambiguities that inhere in

the concept and construct of coping. Further on, I attempt to address these tensions by exploring coping phenomena through the complementary lenses of experiential meaning and atypicality.

Development

Leipold and Greve (2009) describe what I call the "wellness triangle" of resilience, coping, and development this way:

> Resilience may be viewed as a bridging concept between coping and development, not because it represents a missing link in any moderating or causal sense. Rather, it signifies a bewildering phenomenon that cannot be explained except by referring to and integrating seemingly highly heterogeneous concepts and models, both from a developmental and a coping theory realm. (pp. 47-48)

The authors describe coping as short-term state changes in response to adversity that cannot be easily resolved with the means and resources at hand, while development entails the longer-term changes in the individual as a response to challenges that cannot be dealt with by one's nascent emotional, cognitive, and behavioural repertoire. They assert that "successful development, put simply, always presupposes competence in coping, as, at the same time, coping is made possible through (successful) development" (p. 47).

Developmental processes, as with coping and resilience, are conducive to research at multiple levels of analysis (see Busso, 2014; Higa et al., 2014; Grace, 2015; Lev, 2004). However, the field of developmental psychology, broadly, has been criticized for its individualist—as opposed to intersectional and ecological—perspectives (Burman, 2018; Denton, 2016), its linear milestone- and stage-modelling (ALCT, 2013; Denton, 2016; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2011), and its heterosexism and Western, middle-class assumptions of normativity (ALCT, 2013; Denton, 2016; Grace, 2015; Janssen, 2008; Lev, 2004; Thorne, 2007).

My own literature search turned up numerous recent examples of well-meaning developmental studies propagating heteronormative assumptions (e.g., Fisher 2012; Mayer, Garofalo, & Makadon, 2014; Rosario et al., 2011; Stahl, Greydanus, Truba, Cates, & Pratt, 2016). Stahl and colleagues (2016) even use the obsolete and disparaging term sexual preference to describe orientation (p. 315), while the mere title of their article, "Adolescence: The Issue of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender" falls easily into problem-centred, heteronormative tropes. Nonetheless, as we see later in this chapter, despite its frenetic dance with normativity, developmental psychology does offer an array of useful data with which to contextualize this study, particularly with respect to neurocognitive processes and brain development.

Stressors, Risk, & Development

Population Stressors & Risks

The primary population in this study is street-involved and homeless SGM persons aged 18-29 years. Street-involved is a loose term that describes heavy involvement in a street lifestyle—for instance, petty theft, panhandling, drug use, selling drugs, and engaging in survival sex—while homelessness describes those who sleep outside, couch surf, and/or stay at shelters (Boyd, Fast, & Small, 2016). Although individuals navigating the particular period of development between the ages of 18-29 have been assigned various terms, such as post-adolescents and young adults (Arnett, 2006; Chief Public Health Officer [CPHO], 2011; Gaudet, 2007), *emerging adults* is my preferred term, as it captures the "new and historically unprecedented period of the life course" (Arnett, 2006, p. 4) associated with the now-common deferral of normative milestones typically associated with adulthood in industrial societies, such as marriage and parenthood, until the 30s or beyond (Arnett, 2006). It also recognizes that adulthood is an "exploratory, unstable, fluid" phenomenon (Arnett, p. 18), particularly for street-

involved and homeless SGM young people whose development into, and identification with, adulthood may be complicated by factors such as early-life homelessness, inadequate support and estrangement from family, stigmatizing experiences, and by chronic adversity in general (ALCT, 2013; Busso, 2014; Goldbach & Gibbs, 2015; Grace, 2015; Higa et al., 2014; Needham & Austin, 2010; Ryan, 2010). Emerging adulthood is a period of continued cognitive development, shifts and fluctuations in identity, and sometimes disruptive affiliative transitions with family and peers (Reynolds, Magidson, Mayes, & Lejeuz, 2010). Accordingly, the concept of emergent adulthood fits within a life-course approach that "allows for addressing this life stage as both a period of psychosocial development and a transition of social roles influenced by structuring contexts, or socioeconomic determinants" (Gaudet, 2007, p. 9). As noted above, however, to reflect the diverse vocabulary used by a variety of researchers, emergent adult will be used interchangeably with young adult.

Lucassen, Fleming, and Merry (2017) write that all youth "need the love and respect of their family, must negotiate relationships, are concerned with peer status, desire love, and wonder about their future. Sexual [and gender] minority young people therefore experience the same developmental challenges that their heterosexual [and cisgender] peers do, as well as some additional concerns" (pp. 16-17). These additional stressors pervade an SGM youth's sociocultural environment and can include social stigma, prejudice, and discrimination, including rejection by family and friends, bullying, harassment, and physical violence (CPHO, 2012; Goldbach & Gibbs, 2015; Grace, 2015; Needham & Austin, 2010; Stahl et al., 2016; Taylor & Peter, with associates, 2011). Political, ideological, and historical forces, fueled by ignorance and fear, propagate anti-SGM bias, heterosexism, and cisgenderism, which are entrenched in societal structures such as government policies and religious dogma (Dewey, Schlosser, Kinney, &

Burkard, 2014; Eichler, 2010). Routinely, “heterosexism and homophobia have spawned a public pedagogy of negation, erasure and violence that violates queer identity” (Grace & Benson, 2000, p. 90). This violation is evident throughout culture and society in Canada and can have enduring and devastating consequences, particularly for those youth who are deemed “‘unable to conform’ to the heterosexual norm” (Stonefish & Lafreniere, 2015, p. 5). Indeed, people identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual in Canada are violently victimized at a rate three times higher than that of people identifying as heterosexual (Department of Justice Canada [DOJC], 2019). Canadian statistics on violence against gender minorities are more difficult to come by, but in a study with 380 transgender Ontarians aged 16 and over, 34.9% reported experiencing verbal harassment or threats for their gender expression or identity (Bauer, Scheim, Pyne, Travers, & Hammond, 2015). Moreover, 21.2% were reportedly victims of hate crimes, having been physically or sexually assaulted simply for being transgender, and more than one in nine (11.2%) had attempted suicide in the previous year.

As Harvey (2012) asserts, these divisive queer issues publicize and politicize deeply personal issues, fragmenting and disconnecting youth from their various social ecologies and often disrupting the young person’s development through risk pathways. Indeed, compared to their peers, SGM young people report higher prevalence rates on all negative health factors, including sexually transmitted infections (STIs), depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and physical and sexual victimization (CPHO, 2011; Williams & Chapman, 2011). These risks are especially pronounced in transgender youth (Reisner, Greytak, Parsons, & Ybarra, 2014). With abuse and trauma come greater risks of substance abuse, depression, multiple sex partners, and lower rates of condom use, all of which further increase vulnerability to STIs (Miller, Reed, McNall, & Forney, 2013; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2014). Additionally, as schools often

constitute a space in which SGM youth feel unsafe and unaccommodated, they are more likely than their cisgender and heterosexual peers to avoid school or drop out (Bowleg, Huang, Brooks, Black, & Burkholder, 2003; CPHO, 2011, 2012; Grace, 2015; Grace & Wells, 2011).

Upon intentional or inadvertent disclosure or "outing" of their non-normative sexual and gender identities to family, a significant contingent of young SGM persons is driven to run away from home to escape toxic environments of physical and emotional neglect and abuse; worse yet, many have no choice, being summarily thrown out of their homes by caregivers (Abramovich, 2013; Asakura, 2016a, 2016b; Durso & Gates, 2012; Gaetz, O'Grady, Kidd, & Schwan, 2016; Lalonde, Abramovich, Baker, & Tabibi, 2018; Saewyc, Mounsey, Tourand, Brunanski, Kirk, McNeil-Seymour, et al., 2017; Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council [TASSC], 2014). In their report on youth homelessness, Lalonde and associates (2018) claim that identity-based family conflict resulting from disclosure of a sexual or gender minority identity is the most common cause of homelessness for Canadian SGM youth. Accordingly, SGM young people are 4-8 times more likely to end up homeless than their cisgender and heterosexual peers (Durso & Gates, 2012; Hunter, 2008; Lalonde et al., 2018), exacerbating the risk of sexual and mental health issues, substance abuse, and illegal or dangerous activities, and quintupling their risk of violent victimization (Abramovich, 2009, 2013; CPHO, 2011; DOJC, 2019; Walls, Hancock, & Wisneski, 2007).

In addition to these risk factors for homeless SGM young people in general, a lack of specialized social services, systemic impediments in government policies and social supports, and persistent intergenerational impacts of residential schooling have led to a vast overrepresentation of Indigenous persons—and Indigenous sexual and gender minorities in particular—in Canada's homeless youth population (Abramovich, 2009; Gaetz et al., 2016;

Ministry of Child and Family Development, 2013; Saewyc, Bingham, Brunanski, Smith, Hunt, Northcott, & the McCreary Centre Society, 2008; Saewyc et al., 2017). In Edmonton, for example, according to Homeward Trust (2014), Indigenous persons are nine times more likely than anyone else to experience homelessness. In addition, Indigenous youth who leave reserves to escape prejudice related to their SGM identities and expressions face compounding stressors, including racism, in urban areas (Abramovich, 2009; Lerat, 2004; National Aboriginal Health Organization [NAHO], 2012; TASSC, 2014). Speaking about similar experiences for Indigenous youth in their city, the words of the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (2014) highlight the dislocation and disconnection experienced by migrant Indigenous youth:

> Oftentimes shunned or kicked out of their families, Indigenous youth come to Toronto from the places they felt unsafe and marginalized, only to find themselves emotionally drained, financially tapped out, and forgotten in a big city that forgets easily. Some of these youth might be trans, some might be queer or lesbian, gay, intersex or gender queer. Some might be bisexual or asexual, and others might be a combination of all or any of these identities. What spectrum-identified, at-risk-for, or homeless Indigenous youth in Toronto have in common is the fact that society knows very little about their everyday lives. (p. 14)

Developmental Effects of Stressors & Risks

Early-life street-involvement and parental abandonment is common for those SGM youth who are experiencing homelessness, and the compounding developmental effects of such stressors deserve consideration. In a recent Canadian report on youth homelessness, Gaetz and colleagues (2016) found that 40% of participants were under the age of 16 when they first experienced homelessness. Many of these youth are SGM, as sexual and gender minorities are

more likely than their heterosexual and cisgender peers to leave home at an early age and to report parental conflict, as well as childhood abuse (physical, sexual, and/or emotional), as contributing to their street involvement (Gaetz et al., 2016; Saewyc et al., 2017). Locally, two-thirds of survey participants in the recent Edmonton-based Chew Project research report indicated they had been kicked out of their homes by parents, typically due to coming out and the potential for familial violence (Grace, with Bishop, Hankey, Pynoo, & Wyness, 2019). Abramovich (2013) offers this sobering insight:

> Due to gaps in knowledge and support, our society does not truly understand the social and emotional complexities of coming out and how often it leads to homelessness…. When youth are kicked out or forced to leave home for reasons beyond their control, they are suddenly faced with the stress of street life: finding safety, shelter, and food, often while coping with intense feelings of rejection, trauma, and fear. (p. 390)

In addition to family breakdown and violence, other common factors driving youth homelessness include mental health and addictions issues, housing instability, challenges in school, and difficult transitions from government institutions such as child protection (Gaetz et al., 2016).

The above noted risk factors can be bidirectionally linked to disruptions in brain development, with brain studies demonstrating that the frontal and prefrontal cortex—areas of the brain associated with cognition, judgment, reasoning, emotional regulation, and impulse control—continue to develop through adolescence and well into early adulthood (Busso, 2012; Caulum, 2007; Ernst & Fudge, 2010; Reynolds et al., 2010). Adolescent brains tend to rely more on the amygdala, a region associated with gut reactions, instinct, and emotionality, than the prefrontal cortex for decision-making (Caulum, 2007; Ernst & Fudge, 2010), and there is evidence amygdala volumes are larger in youth who have been maltreated (Busso, 2012). Even

under typical circumstances, risk-taking and emotion-driven behaviour tend to peak during emerging adulthood, as brain structures favouring amygdala and striatum circuits over the prefrontal cortex encourage approach behaviour over avoidance, a behavioural strategy that may have evolved to serve an adaptive function (Caulum, 2007; Ernst & Fudge, 2010). However, brain plasticity and other significant biological and environmental changes in adolescence make young people especially sensitive to stress and adversity, and vulnerable to the development of behavioural disorders (Busso, 2012; Ernst & Fudge, 2010). For instance, early childhood abuse has been found to increase the likelihood of risk-taking behaviours such as substance use and risky sex, possibly through deficits in emotion regulation and coping, insecure attachment, and disinhibition and sensation-seeking associated with neurocognitive changes like higher activity levels in the meso-limbic dopamine system (Reynolds et al., 2010). This warrants optimism, however; as Caulum (2007) submits, the brain plasticity associated with emerging adulthood makes it a period of both increased risk and heightened opportunity for development. It is this shift in perspective from at-risk to at-promise (Grace, 2015) to which we now turn.

Hidden Resilience & Atypical Coping

Shaking Up Resilience

As a biopsychosocial and cultural construct, resilience has depth of meaning only in contexts of adversity and trauma; from this perspective, my research locates SGM young people as a prime target for critical praxis designed to enhance resilience (Meyer, 2015). Grace (2015) asserts that the unique complexities of the social ecologies of SGM youth and young adults, and the ways in which stressors and assets interact across the personal, social, institutional, and cultural environments they navigate, make them particularly suited to studies of resilience as a process and outcome. While Colpitts and Gahagan's (2016) scoping review concurs that

resilience is a propitious concept for studying SGM health, Asakura (2016a) has noted a paucity of resilience research with SGM young people. My doctoral research will help to address this lacuna.

The interactions that impact the process of growing into resilience are dynamic, complex, multi-level, and can best be studied through ecological perspectives. Drawing from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecology of human development, Corcoran and Nichols-Casebolt (2004) organize risk and protective factors into micro, mezzo, and macro system levels. The nature of ecological systems is such that the variables within each system influence one another—they are interdependent (Corcoran & Nichols-Casebolt, 2004; Masten, 2015). The distinction between stressor system levels is not always clear, however. For instance, Daley and Mule (2014) make the case that when assessing gender dysphoria in a clinical setting, what constitutes "clinically significant distress or impairment" should not be taken at face value, since it can be systemically induced; thus, the assessment should "include a nuanced understanding of socially imposed repression that restricts people from being able to fully express themselves" (p. 1305). Indeed, extant controversies surrounding the pathologization of gender and sexuality in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM-5*) (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013) evince the complexities of resilience as an ecological construct and of determining what constitutes positive growth into resilience for individuals navigating systems and structures that can impede such growth.

Typological indicators that youth are thriving may include attachment to family, a sense of community, attachments with peers, helping others, and maintaining physical health (Grace, 2015). While Asakura (2016a) points out that some lived experiences of SGM youth are very much like those of any other youth, other experiences are unique to being LGBTQ. Thus,

"although… normative definitions of health might be just as important for LGBTQ youth, these pre-determined measures, normed ostensibly on cisgender heterosexual youth, might not sufficiently reflect how LGBTQ youth might view the notion of 'doing well'" (p. 3). He argues for a contextual understanding of positive adaptation—which for many SGM youth might mean just getting through one day and into the next—rather than using a lens of normative health when conceptualizing resilience in SGM youth. Accordingly, my doctoral study unsettles normative notions of indicators of thriving, channeling the mindset of Ungar (2004), who suggests that studies constructed with attention to the relativistic nature of resilience unveil a "less teleological and less arbitrary understanding of resilience phenomena" (p. 73).

The SGM youth interviewed by Asakura (2016a) in Toronto rejected normative positive outcomes such as school success and the absence of mental illness. Even those nominated for their resilience and who saw themselves as doing relatively well emphasized their continued struggles with various vulnerabilities such as school absence, relationship issues, depression and anxiety, poverty, and lack of stable housing. In a related study (Asakura, 2016b), the stories of SGM youth participants indicate that they sometimes have to seek alternative, unconventional resources to achieve or sustain wellbeing:

> When his family (i.e., an ordinary resource) was unable to continue to support him upon his coming out, one youth ultimately made the decision to leave home and engage in sex work for financial survival, while accessing safer spaces and using social media to start building a new support network of peers and adults that can fully accept him. (p. 12)

Importantly, for this youth in Asakura's (2016b) study, it was not his decisions per se (e.g., escaping a toxic environment) that promoted resilience, but rather the felt degree of ownership

he had over such decisions. As Ungar (2007) relates, “At-risk adolescents drift toward mental health in a way that is part chance, and part an expression of their own personal power” (p. 49).

It is this power to define oneself as healthy on one’s own terms that Ungar (2004) describes as discursive empowerment, a fundamental variable in the resilience quotient. In his extensive experience as a social worker doing support work and research with vulnerable youth, Ungar has found the social discourse that defines them as “high-risk” is biased by stereotypes about their mental health. The youth Ungar works with argue it is such an overgeneralized, heavy-handed public discourse that presents the greatest barrier to their experience of wellness, denying them access to health-enhancing self-definitions: “Feelings of control, combined with experiences of themselves as competent and their talents as unique expressions of their identity, secure for high-risk youth powerful self-definitions and enduring feelings of well-being…. It is this perception of choice, any choice, that underpins constructions of resilience. Decisions, good or bad, offer an opportunity to author an identity” (p. 143). Within this context of choice, agency, and self-definition, Ungar (2011) claims that over-reliance on bipolar variables (good vs. bad; adaptive vs. maladaptive) makes it more difficult to describe coping and resilience accurately. As Malindi and Theron (2010) point out, “Clearly street youth bounce back because they are not afraid to navigate unconventional paths” (p. 323). These arguments direct us into the following review of atypical coping and hidden resilience.

Atypical Coping

Research has suggested that certain forms of coping are more adaptive than others. Broadly, approach and problem-solving coping strategies have been found to relate positively to resilience, while avoidance and emotion-focused strategies inversely correlate with positive outcomes (Craig et al., 2018; Frydenberg, 2004; Saha et al., 2014). However, even outside of a

queer framework, it is not always so simple. For instance, social and problem-focused coping are sometimes associated with negative outcomes, sometimes with positive outcomes, and sometimes with neither, depending on the characteristics of the stressors (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Saha and colleagues (2014) found in their sample that social coping was positively associated with wellbeing, but that problem-focused and avoidance coping did not predict wellbeing in either direction. Leontopoulou (2006) highlights the adaptiveness of avoidance coping in the resilience process, as resilient youth in her study demonstrated more of both engagement and disengagement coping strategies than less resilient youth: "Within the resilient group, then, the distinction between the two types of coping strategy may not be as meaningful as originally thought. The critical issue seems to be the availability of strategies from which young people can draw as they see fit" (pp. 119-120). What is more, Eriksen (2013) claims, echoing Ungar, that coping strategies for her participants were not positive or negative on their own, but instead that their *experiences* were decisive.

These ambiguities seem to point toward a *meaning-focused* appraisal of coping, not as a discrete type, but as the lens through which the effectiveness of coping is evaluated, the "integration of a negative experience with one's understanding of the world and oneself" (Hill & Gunderson, 2015, p. 234). If we concur that meaning-making is a form of engagement with the world, we might claim that a young person actually *engages* in disengagement coping through the pathway of meaning-making, creating a tenuous distinction between approach and avoidance. Recall that Folkman and Moskowitz (2004) differentiate between distancing and escape-avoidance, a distinction that seems to parallel that between problem-focused and emotion-focused disengagement coping, respectively. These distinctions can be construed as hazy.

While I contend that the above literature disrupts the neat categorizations of coping strategies in general, the case for a reappraisal of coping for stigmatized populations like sexual and gender minorities is especially strong. Disengagement is not always a deficit. For example, the gay and bisexual young men in McDavitt, Iverson, Kubicek, Weiss, Wong and Kipke's (2008) study reframed avoidance as boundary-setting, as "active and calculated avoidance of selected situations and individuals that were the cause of potential distress" (p. 363). Thus, they employed a problem-focused disengagement coping behaviour that actively addressed the source of stress. In this vein, Craig and colleagues (2018) urge us to consider that, when making judgments about the utility of a specific coping strategy, it is crucial to weigh the unique minority stressors and sociocultural contexts of SGM young people. Moreover, Goldbach and Gibbs (2015) emphasize that SGM individuals are apt to rely less on typical or traditional coping resources due to the increased potential for experiencing, among other stressors, unsupportive families. Acknowledging that there are risk factors associated with homelessness, including higher rates of suicidality, risky sexual behaviour, and declining mental health (Gaetz et al., 2016; Walls et al., 2007), when the alternative is staying in an abusive home, I would argue, along with Asakura (2016a, 2016b) and Ungar (2007), that the active disengagement associated with street-involvement can be recognized as a viable strategy. Considering that homeless shelters and group homes, too, are often unsafe for SGM young people (Gaetz et al., 2016; Grace, with Hankey, 2016; Grace et al., 2019), sex work may present a safer way to find a warm place to sleep for the night.

As mentioned above, SGM youth are more likely to avoid school due to harassment and bullying. Indeed, Caine, Lessard, Steeves, and Clandinin (2013) claim that early school-leaving is a legitimate concern for educators and policymakers, as the costs to the child and society can

be complex and multiple. Nevertheless, the authors contend that moving from deficit models to theories of disengagement take into account wider social inequities and frame early school-leaving as a "non-linear, partial, and fragmented process that is often contradictory, complex, filled with subversive forces and tensions, as well as a struggle for most students" (pp. 198-199). In a real sense, then, a disengagement theory of early school-leaving maps onto the process of growing into resilience, since early school-leaving can be viewed as preserving one's integrity by escaping the stress and hurt imposed by a toxic school environment. Caine and colleagues' narrative inquiry found that many early school-leavers actively resist the label of dropouts, instead telling their stories around plotlines of "not in school for now" (p. 210). Participants describe it as "a dropout dance, a dance in which students both flex their muscles and perform, as a way to exert power over their own choices" (p. 210). This is part of the complex composition of their own lives over time. Therefore, early school-leaving may be viewed as an atypical protective process, a viable, if non-normative, coping strategy "contributing to resilience in unique social ecologies where no other reasonably good means exist to preserve a sense of personal coherence, future orientation, or self-esteem" (Ungar, 2011, p. 12).

My contention, central to this thesis, is that sex work may constitute another such atypical coping strategy. While there are significant health and safety risk factors associated with sex work (Barreto, Shannon, Taylor, Dobrer, St. Jean, Goldenberg, Duff, et al., 2017; Barker, Hadland, Dong, Shannon, Kerr, & DeBeck, 2019; Marshall, Shannon, Kerr, Zhang, & Wood, 2010; White Holman & Goldberg, 2006; Wilson, Garofalo, Harris, Herrick, Martinez, Martinez, Belzer, et al., 2009), when the only alternative is sleeping on the street and going hungry, sex work, as with early school-leaving and running away from home, takes on the character of a potentially adaptive, problem-focused coping mechanism and survival strategy. Ungar's (2011)

research demonstrates that in resource-poor environments, atypical use of developmental resources (in this case, a young person's embodiment) may be positive and adaptive:

> Researching resilience as a process requires less focus on predetermined outcomes to judge the success of growth trajectories and more emphasis on understanding the functionality of behaviour when alternative pathways to development are blocked…. We can use this principle of atypicality to argue that resilience will manifest in ways that we may not want to promote but that are necessary because of the social ecologies in which children [and youth] survive. (p. 8)

I argue below that the risks associated with sex work can be mitigated by decriminalization and that the non-normative atypicality assigned to sex work as a coping strategy is due in large part to stigma precipitated by the subversion of normative values, where stigmatized individuals tend to be demeaned, ostracized, and discriminated against (Vanwesenbeeck, 2017). This section will first close with a more thorough definition of hidden resilience.

Hidden Resilience

Hidden resilience is the manifestation of atypical coping strategies that may run counter to mainstream psychological theories and community conceptualizations of socially appropriate behaviour, but that crucially enable young people to survive in the face of hardship (Malindi & Theron, 2010; Pessoa et al., 2017; Ungar, 2004, 2007, 2010). Harvey and Stone Fish (2015) caution us that adults with a mandate to intervene in the lives of young queer people must be cognizant of the "formidable and sometimes ambiguous strategies of resilience that queer youth use to thrive. Otherwise we run the risk of over-focusing on maladaptive behavior,

underestimating queer youth and thwarting their agency and the development of their own mastery. Evidence of resilience and mastery abound" (p. 398).

Homeless SGM youth often become involved in sex work and other "survival crimes" like stealing food and toiletries (Asakura, 2016b; Grace, 2015, 2017; Grace et al., 2019; White Holman & Goldberg, 2006). This is unsurprising, as more than half of a recent sample of street-involved and homeless SGM young people in Edmonton indicated they go to bed hungry on a regular basis, only 41% had regular access to clean drinking water, and only half had a regular, safe place to stay (Grace et al., 2019). In this same sample, 34% of respondents reported that their sexual encounters were occasionally, often, or always for money, and 44% for a place to sleep. While these and other non-normative coping behaviours—such as running away from home and leaving school—are typically construed as risk behaviours associated with yielding to adversity and trauma on a path to negative outcomes (Grace, 2015), such problem-solving strategies that allow SGM young people to escape and avoid toxic environments, find a place to sleep, and earn money may be better framed in terms of agency and empowerment. Resilience is multi-faceted, nonlinear, and complex, and in resource-poor environments, atypical use of developmental resources may prove to be positive and adaptive (Grace, 2015; Ungar, 2011).

Hidden resilience is not the manifestation of positive outcomes *in spite of* atypical coping strategies, but it is at least partially *attributable to them.* Causation is difficult to ascertain in studies of human flourishing, and particularly in cross-sectional resilience studies (Masten, 2001; Masten et al., 1990; Woodier, 2011). Nonetheless, if we can say with some established rigor that an atypical coping behaviour such as engaging in sex work has contributed to positive outcomes, then those outcomes describe hidden resilience. Moreover, as argued above, adaptive coping strategies can themselves count as indicators of thriving (Grace, 2015), in which case finding the

capacity to engage with a challenging, atypical coping strategy could be interpreted as evidence that a young person is doing well. Relatedly, I use hidden resilience as a concept to capture indicators of thriving that may not fit mainstream normative perspectives, but which represent significant accomplishments for those struggling to survive from one day to the next, such as simply showing up to meet with an outreach worker or participate in a research interview (see Asakura, 2016a, 2016b; Grace et al., 2019). Pessoa and colleagues (2017) remark that this discourse of hidden resilience recognizes that mainstream conceptions of risk often disregard the contexts of marginalization that expose young persons and their communities to adverse situations. Bottrell (2009) argues that studying hidden resilience is a perspective-taking exercise that recognizes and values marginalized perspectives and challenges assumptions about standardized, normative, prosocial outcomes associated with resilience.

Resilience researchers have identified several counterintuitive sources of resilience in vulnerable youth, including drug use and trafficking, oppositional defiance, dropping out of school, vandalism, and gang involvement (Korth, 2008; Malindi & Theron, 2010; Pessoa et al., 2017; Ungar, 2004, 2007). Regarding the latter source, Ungar (2004) relates, “An extreme behaviour like gang affiliation can be experienced by youth as an indicator of social maturity, a need for achievement, an appreciation for structure, and a system of beliefs relating to honour and duty” (p. 96). “Ganging,” then, Ungar (2004, 2007) argues, is part of a long quest for support and a sense of belonging that can be interpreted by a young person as environmental mastery and that can precipitate learned hopefulness, a process of skill-development that facilitates psychological empowerment and positive expectations for the future. This study investigates sex work as another such complex, ambivalent, and contingent avenue of non-normative empowerment.

Sex Work

Sex Work, Street Capital, & Leveraging Resilience Differently

The terminology describing those who engage in sex for money or other compensation like a meal or a place to sleep has not achieved consensus among researchers (see Benoit, Jansson, Smith, & Flagg, 2018; Bruckert & Hannem, 2013; Gantz, 2014; Jeffreys, 2015; Lavoie, Thibodeau, Gagne, & Hebert, 2010; Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2010; SAFE in Collingwood [SAFE], n.d.). The most inclusive and unified, and concomitantly the least stereotyped and stigmatized, terms are "sex work" and "sex worker," which were coined by sex work activist Carol Leigh in the 1970s (Jeffreys, 2015) and which are now preferred by those in the industry (Benoit et al., 2018; Bruckert & Hannem, 2013; Canadian Public Health Association [CPHA], 2015; Gantz, 2014; Jeffreys, 2015; SAFE, n.d.). These preferred terms are used in reference to intimate labour involving physical and/or emotional closeness (D'Adamo, 2015). While "prostitute" and "prostitution" are now considered obsolete, ideologically fraught terms, they can still be found in national legislation, including Canada's Criminal Code, as well as in some media reports and public anti-sex-trade initiatives (Ferris, 2015). In this study I will use the contemporary de rigueur terms sex work and sex workers. As Ferris (2015) argues, "Implying as they do that the exchange of sexual services for money constitutes a form of labour equal to other types of employment for which one receives remuneration, these terms at least partially reject whore stigma" (p. xvii).

Sex work is prevalent among street-involved and homeless youth, with between 23% and 40% of street youth in some larger studies—and well over half of our Chew Project study sample—reporting a history of sex work (Grace et al., 2019; Lavoie et al., 2010; Marshall et al., 2010). In Chettiar, Shannon, Wood, Zhang, and Kerr's (2010) study, 11% of street-involved

youth in Vancouver reported sex work involvement in the previous six months. In addition to homelessness, other factors influencing sex work involvement include Indigenous ancestry, depressive symptoms, negative peer influence, and substance abuse (particularly crack cocaine and methamphetamine) (Chettiar et al.; Miller, Fielden, Tyndall, Zhang, Gibson, & Shannon, 2011; Patton, Cunningham, Blow, Zimmerman, Booth, & Walton, 2014). In Miller and colleagues' (2011) study of young female sex workers in Vancouver, 59% identified as Indigenous, and in Argento, Taylor, Jollimore, Taylor, Jennex, Krusi, and Shannon's (2018) study, 49% of their sample of Vancouver's male sex workers identified as Indigenous. Considering less than 3% of Vancouver's total population is Indigenous (Statistics Canada, 2017), this figure is quite poignant.

Research, then, has established risk and cultural factors associated with sex work in Canada, where street-involved sex workers deal with increased suicidality due to systematic discrimination, unaddressed trauma, and disengagement from services and supports precipitated by deeply entrenched stigma (Barker et al., 2019). The purpose of my study, from an ecological, harm-reduction perspective, is not to venerate sex work, but to investigate its potential as an asset leveraging some street-involved and homeless young people toward resilience and as a prospective indicator itself of hidden resilience. Kaye's (2007) study moves in this direction, effectively challenging dominant discourses around street involvement and sex work. For instance, Kaye's participants identified access to "sugar daddies" as one potential asset acquired through sex work; these wealthy older men may allow a young person to engage in sex work less often, or even to form stable relationships and leave street life altogether. A sugar daddy, then, may serve as a caring adult, mentor, and quality attachment, the sort of figure that plays a key role in resilience for young people (Busso, 2014; Çelik et al., 2015; Corcoran & Nichols-

Casebolt, 2004; Grace, 2015; Masten, 2001, 2015). This resource, however, may be primarily reserved for white youth from middle-class backgrounds "whose habitus is least affected by street life and drugs… leaving behind others who are more reliant upon the street" (Kaye, 2007, p. 55). Even so, Lankenau, Clatts, Welle, Goldsamt, and Gwadz (2005) observed that the troubled experiences that young men in their study had with various institutions—the family, school, foster care, healthcare, drug treatment, and jail—allowed them to build street competencies and capital, which "coalesced into street careers as sex workers that not only made sense to the youth, but also formed the basis for a pragmatic way of surviving on the streets" (p. 17). These troubled experiences may represent and enable problem-focused, engagement coping strategies, illuminating resilience that might otherwise be shrouded by the "subordinate positioning of young people's own discourses" (Bottrell, 2009, p. 326).

Wilson and co-researchers (2009) found a positive association between engagement in sex work and social support in their sample of transgender females, with sex work enabling a sense of community that affirmed participants' gender identity and provided connections with other transgender women. Moreover, their study found that transgender female youth, particularly those with a history of sex work, were getting tested for STIs at higher rates than most other populations; accordingly, the authors emphasize the need for researchers and service providers to focus their attention on resilience and protective strategies in which transgender female youth engage to reduce their risk for HIV. Finally, van der Heijden and Swartz's (2014) study of transactional sex in South Africa found that such exchanges are not only common, but even considered essential among those who engage in them: "Young [people] are not always hapless victims in sexual relationships and can make decisions to enter into transactional sex as a

creative way to assert themselves and benefit from it materially and socially, while simultaneously protecting themselves within these relationships" (p. 60).

The above accounts of asset-building and expressions of agency facilitated by sex work pave the way for innovative resilience research by unsettling dominant narratives surrounding sex work. As early as 2002, Bittle reasoned that the secure care movement and "villain-to-victim transformation" in Alberta and British Columbia in the 1990s helped reinforce and advance neoliberal strategies of control, ignoring the broader social context that feeds the youth sex work industry: "Responsibility for the youth sex trade rests with the youth who are expected to change their 'lifestyle', and the social service realm and the community, who both have questionable capacity and resources to deal with this complex issue" (p. 342). Meanwhile, Kaye (2007) problematizes racialized mass media representations of young men on the street—the (white) sex worker and victim, the (non-white) thug and predator: "The dissimilar nature of these images relates directly to the political projects of the dominant culture, which, in a very general way, seeks to 'rescue' and thereby reintegrate deviant white youth, while controlling and excluding deviant youth of color" (p. 39).

In a similar vein, Bruckert and Hannem (2013) assert that paternalistic discourses around sex work proliferate victimhood, eliding sex workers' agency and their narratives of resistance: "The deeply embedded stigmatic assumptions of sex workers as at-risk and risky, simultaneously victim and victimizer, exist in tension; discourses that have little basis in fact come to be seen as true" (p. 48). This creates a "stigma feedback loop—stigmatic assumptions and ascription of victimhood, inconsistent with sex workers' subject position, are drawn upon to de-legitimate and then reproduced in order to rationalize talking over, and for, sex workers, denying their voice and negating their agency" (p. 58). In addition to assessing findings of my study with respect to

resilience processes that transgress normative understandings of what constitutes asset-building, coping, positive outcomes, becoming resilient, and indicators of thriving, it is my intention to leverage my participants' differential portrayals of empowerment as they perceive it against mainstream discourses. These discourses render certain populations invisible, minimize questions and understandings surrounding day-to-day life on the street, and attempt to justify surveillance and control through tropes of victimization and deviance.

Moving away from victim tropes, my study is intended to heed the complementary critical calls of Baratosi and Wendt (2017), Bittle (2002), and Bruckert and Hannem (2013) by giving voice to the youth directly affected by the policies and practices in question. As Bittle (2002) puts it:

> One way to [provide viable options to youth] is to explore innovative ways of addressing youth prostitution by giving youth a meaningful voice in the process…. To do this we must be ready to allow youth to gain more control over their lives (including freedom from their families).... At the same time, there must be a commitment to addressing the social conditions that make prostitution a viable means of subsistence for some young people. (p. 743)

Here, I also take encouragement from van der Heijden and Swartz (2014), who argue that interventions should better understand the many good reasons why young people engage in sex work. This should be done in tandem with helping them to keep safe while involved in sex work and, ultimately, with helping them to locate safer alternatives, from physical and epidemiological perspectives, to engaging in sex work. As the CPHA (2015) recommends, "There are indications that a public health approach based on harm reduction and addressing the social determinants of

health may provide the tools needed to address the underlying factors that result in participation in the sex trade, and vulnerability to human trafficking and violence" (p. 4).

The Case for Sex Work Decriminalization

At present, Canada enforces a criminal-regulatory approach to sex work, which, like the Swedish (Nordic) model it follows, is an abolitionist solution that ostensibly criminalizes the consumers (clients or "johns") and third-party profiteers, but not the sellers, of sexual services (Amnesty International, 2016; Atchison, Benoit, Burnett, Jansson, Kennedy, Ouellet, & Vukmirovich, 2015; Barker et al., 2019; Bruckert & Hannem, 2013; Hayes-Smith & Shekarkhar, 2010). This asymmetrical criminalization aims to eliminate sex work by making it illegal without targeting sex workers themselves (Pivot Legal Society, 2016). Instead, the activities of all third parties in commercial sexual enterprises in Canada are criminalized, which means that agents, managers, brothel owners, security personnel, advertisers, and drivers—irrespective of their relationship to sex workers or the specific services they provide—are vulnerable to criminal conviction and can be labelled "procurers," "pimps," and even "traffickers" (Bruckert, 2018). This partially criminalized model is driven by a moralistic ideology that summarily repudiates the notion that sex work, and by extension sex workers, can have any legitimacy in public spaces (Campbell, 2015). It also "draws on contradictory discourses that portray sex workers as both passive victims of exploitation and active agents who pose a threat to the order and safety of communities" (Bruckert & Hannem, 2013, p. 61).

This end-demand criminalization tactic was the fallout of a unanimous 2013 Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) ruling in the case of *Canada v. Bedford,* which was brought forth by sex workers challenging the constitutionality of various Criminal Code provisions related to sex work (Campbell, 2015; Pivot Legal Society, 2016). These provisions made it illegal for sex

workers to communicate with clients in public, to work from fixed locations ("bawdy houses"), and to live on the avails of prostitution. The SCC ruled these provisions violated sex workers' rights to security of the person under Section 7 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Campbell, 2015; Pivot Legal Society, 2016). The SCC determined that the challenged provisions were primarily concerned with preventing public nuisance at the expense of sex workers' safety and dignity (Campbell, 2015).

In response, "rather than taking seriously the decades of empirical evidence on the harms that result from criminalization" (Sterling & van der Meulen, 2018, p. 292), in 2014 Stephen Harper's Conservative government passed Bill C-36, the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act* (PCEPA), which, following the Nordic model, made it illegal to purchase or advertise for sex without overtly criminalizing people who sell their own sexual services (Atchison et al., 2015; Pivot Legal Society, 2016; Sterling & van der Meulen, 2018). Legislators claimed the new law reflected a paradigm shift in the judicial treatment of sex work, from nuisance to "a form of sexual exploitation that disproportionately and negatively impacts on women and girls" (Pivot Legal Society, p. 2). The legislation has been copiously criticized by community advocates, researchers, and legal experts who argue it generically conflates sex workers with women victims of violence, fails to acknowledge the gender diversity of persons who sell sex, and decrees that sex work is an intrinsically exploitative venture that takes advantage of the vulnerable and cannot be ameliorated through any form of meaningful consent (Argento et al., 2018; Pivot Legal Society, 2016; Sibley, 2018). This movement from one abolitionist discourse to another—from nuisance to victimization—assumes that all sex workers experience violence in the same way and ignores the fact that some workers may possess assets and capital that enable them to navigate the sex trade more safely (Sibley, 2018). It also conflates

sex work and sex trafficking (Bruckert, 2018; Pivot Legal Society, 2016; Sibley, 2018). Accordingly, "risk becomes something both inevitable and non-negotiable; risk of violence is inextricably bound to the sex trade as a permanent and universal feature of sex work" (Sibley, p. 1463). As explicated below, PCEPA evidently aggravates the risks for sex workers, thus proliferating the very problems it aims to solve.

In their review, Hayes-Smith and Shekarkhar (2010) assert that the criminalization of sex work relies on four assumptions that have little empirical support: First, that criminalization will deter solicitation (hence the abolitionist label). Second, that sex work is a threat to public health. Third, that sex workers are intrinsically vulnerable and therefore have a higher risk of suffering violence (the victimization discourse promulgated by legislators under PCEPA). Fourth, that sex work generates social disorder in the community (the nuisance framework that formerly governed and now more insidiously underlies Canada's sex laws). As Campbell (2015) argues, this fourth assumption has the powerful symbolic effect of denying sex workers political and social citizenship, rendering them disposable. The first assumption is refuted by Mathieson, Branam, and Noble (2015) and Baratosi and Wendt (2017), who point out that the commercial sex trade continues to flourish in jurisdictions where sex work is outlawed. The second assumption, that sex work is a threat to public health, is actually reinforced by legislation like Bill C-36, which eschews harm reduction strategies in favour of prohibition (Sibley, 2018). This is true especially when police confiscate condoms present in a domicile as evidence of prostitution—a tactic that has been employed in Norway, Kenya, South Africa, Russia, the United States, and Canada (Amnesty International, 2016; Collier, 2014)—thus deterring safer sex and exacerbating the matrix of risk that is used to justify an authoritarian crackdown in the first place.

The third claim, that sex workers are inherently victims at risk of violence, is also reinforced by PCEPA and other abolitionist frameworks. Indeed, while this law can be construed as having the intended effect of making sex work safer—by reducing client demand, thereby curtailing or altogether eliminating the industry—as in Oslo, Norway (Amnesty International, 2016), it has had the opposite effect across Canada (Atchison et al., 2015; Campbell, 2015; Chu & Glass, 2013; Krüsi, Pacey, Bird, Taylor, Chettier, Allan, Bennet, et al., 2014; Machat, Shannon, Braschel, Moreheart, & Goldenberg, 2019; Omstead, 2018; Pivot Legal Society, 2016; Sterling & van der Meulen, 2018; Stewart, 2016). Concerns raised by sex workers and advocates in Canada echo those made by researchers who have criticized the Nordic model elsewhere (see Baratosi & Wendt, 2017; Hayes-Smith & Shekarkhar, 2010; Liberto, 2009; Miller et al., 2013). In Edmonton in particular, where the law has been most actively enforced (accounting for more than 40% of charges nationwide in 2017; Omstead, 2018), advocates claim the legislation has only made sex work more dangerous. One sex worker interviewed by CBC News put it this way:

> Stings have made clients increasingly skeptical of web-based advertising and sharing their identity with a sex worker. Advertising, in particular, can be an important way to set prices and boundaries…. With fewer opportunities to screen clients and set boundaries … there have been more requests for unsafe sex and requests to meet in risky locations. (Omstead, 2018, para. 21)

Similarly, a study by Krüsi and colleagues (2014) found that sex worker accounts and police statistics demonstrate high rates of police enforcement of clients. This is true even in Vancouver, where high-risk safety concerns rather than broad enforcement, particularly for those engaged in survival sex, are police priorities with respect to sex work (Haak, 2018; Vancouver Police Department, 2013). This level of enforcement has propagated sex workers' mistrust of

police, forced them to rush screening clients, and displaced them to outlying areas where the risks of violence and coerced unprotected sex are increased (Krüsi et al., 2014). Indeed, Machat and colleagues' (2019) study, also in Vancouver, found 72% of sex workers reported no improvement in their working conditions under PCEPA, while 26% reported negative changes—most notably the reduced ability to screen and negotiate with clients, and reduced access to safe workspaces and clientele.

Internationally, evidence points to even partial criminalization as a driving factor in human rights abuses and violence against sex workers. These labourers are forced to work away from witnesses in dark and isolated areas or clients' homes, their client base of good customers can be eroded by fear of arrest, their means to properly assess and negotiate with potential clients may be compromised, and they may be targeted and punished by police anyway, ostensibly for other, lesser offenses (Amnesty International, 2016; Baratosi & Wendt, 2017). End-demand criminalization continues to foster stigma and discrimination, undermining health-promotion efforts and restricting access to health services, contributing to poor working conditions, perpetuating violence, and encouraging police harassment and surveillance (Amnesty International, 2016; Baratosi & Wendt, 2017). In fact, in Oslo, Norway, there is substantive evidence that police services contribute directly to the homelessness of sex workers by pressuring landlords to evict them (Amnesty International, 2016).

An abolitionist approach to sex work has been spearheaded not only by conservative legislators, but also by a particular striation of radical feminism whose proponents argue that there is no room for power or agency for women in sex work and that it is an intrinsically violent abuse of human rights, and of women's rights in particular (Davis, 2015; Hayes-Smith & Shekarkhar, 2010; Liberto, 2009). Such a claim confines its focus to cisgender female sex

workers, ignoring cisgender male, transgender, and gender-diverse sex workers in their anti-sex work discourse. The words of one such abolitionist camp speak to the narrowed focus: “There is sufficient data to conclude that prostitution is not an expression of a woman’s sexual freedom, but rather the plight of prostitutes is associated to [sic] physical and sexual assault, alienation, economic hardship, and the degradation of a sexist and patriarchal culture that has dominated women since time immemorial” (Valor-Segura, Expósito, & Moya, 2011, p. 170). This statement is arguably specious, overgeneralized to the point of gender absences, and paternalistic. It ignores that sex work cuts across gender and sexual identities and orientations. By contrast, a standard, liberal position on sex work, while also needing to attend to gender diversity, denies that degradation and exploitation are intrinsic features of the profession and instead pushes for decriminalization and light regulation, affording sex workers more safety, more power to negotiate with clients, and more control of their own careers (Liberto, 2009).

A useful counterpoint to the central argument of Valor-Segura and associates (2011) comes from Hayes-Smith and Shekarkhar (2010), who assert the subjugation of women in our society is a truism: “Exploitation and harassment continue to occur in many occupations and will most likely continue in prostitution if it is legalized. However, with women being the most poverty-stricken class in [the U.S.], to criminalize an occupation which may be a sole source of income for this population destroys a chance for independence” (p. 54). I contend this statement is applicable to other vulnerable populations engaged in sex work, including the street-involved and homeless Canadian SGM young people participating in my study. Furthermore, Liberto (2009) concludes that if the law were to treat sex work as it does any other legitimate trade, the stigma associated with sex work would eventually wear thin, in turn making it easier to regulate and thus to protect its workforce from exploitation and harm. It is worth reiterating that the

criminalization of sex work relegates sex workers to public spaces and industrial settings, where the risks of coercive unprotected sex and physical violence are tripled compared to indoor settings like saunas and hotels; this has a disproportionate effect on vulnerable young people (Miller et al., 2013). Plus, as Pivot Legal Society (2016) points out, "A principle tenet of Canadian sexual assault law is the importance of voluntary and affirmative consent to any sexual act. Because of broad restrictions on communicating, it is impossible to engage in discussions to establish the acts that sex workers are willing to perform—and those they are not—without breaking the law" (p. 3). PCEPA, then, has inadvertently but effectively enforced that sexual activities occurring in the sex trade cannot happen with the consent of both parties, again buttressing in practice the ideological position that sex work is a crime of exploitation and bodily violation.

The fourth claim presented by Hayes-Smith and Shekarkhar (2010) as a common justification for the criminalization of sex work—that it generates social disorder in the community—is arguably ideological rather than pragmatic in nature and, as with the inherent-victimization assumption, significantly compromises sex workers' "physical and psychological integrity and security" (Campbell, 2015, p. 28). Campbell writes that the invocation of nuisance to rationalize the criminalization of sex work casts the practice as immoral and offensive, injuring sex workers' psychological and emotional health and pushing them into zones of invisibility, isolation, and neglect where violence can be perpetrated against them with impunity:

> Sex work [under PCEPA] imposes significant stress triggered by the constant vigilance required to avert violence and the transmission of infection, and by the burdens and constraints imposed by agents and managers. Sex work's stigma also causes emotional disquiet, shame and degradation, and leads many to refrain from disclosing their work,

> even within family circles…. The law has a hand in deepening these psychological burdens and presents a formidable barrier for those who might seek out resources for coping with them. (p. 41)

Campbell adds that the calamitous effects of this moralistic, nuisance framework are encapsulated by the negligence of police and other public figures in preventing, investigating, and prosecuting the serial disappearance and murder of dozens of women, many of them Indigenous and connected to the sex trade in Vancouver. This failure, she concludes, proliferates "social perceptions of these women as transient 'nobodies' living high-risk lifestyles, explaining the sluggishness, indifference and negligence that characterized state responses to these women's disappearances and murders" (p. 42). There is much evidence to suggest, then, that victimization and nuisance discourses work in concert with legislation like PCEPA to demoralize, degrade, and even dispose of sex workers.

The criminalization framework wrought by PCEPA has negatively affected clients of the sex trade as well. In their study, which analyzed a major Canadian online sex work review forum, Sterling and van der Meulen (2018) found individuals who avail themselves of sexual services do not see themselves as criminals but as "ordinary citizens"—"your neighbours, friends, family members, professionals, lawyers, teachers," many of whom are seeking companionship and conversation (p. 298). Most clients feel the "real criminals" are pimps, traffickers, and so-called bad clients. Additionally, under the current law, many clients are afraid of being blackmailed by sex workers. The authors claim this creates an adversarial mentality between clients and workers, making mutually respectful encounters more difficult to achieve, and reinforcing stereotypical ideas about the immorality and criminality of sex workers. However, the criminalization of purchasing sex deters few potential clients, who instead engage

in risk-knowledge practices to identify and avoid sex workers like “Asian” labourers operating out of brothels and massage parlours, because they are perceived as most likely to draw the focus of police attention and intervention (Sterling & van der Meulen, 2018). This notion is consistent with findings that those sex workers most negatively affected by PCEPA are immigrants and those working indoors (Machat et al., 2019), as well as sex workers’ concerns about workplace inspections by authorities in Vancouver (McBride, Shannon, Duff, Mo, Braschel, & Goldenberg, 2019). McBride and colleagues found workplace inspections are most worrisome for recent immigrants and are associated with barriers to health access. In jurisdictions like London, Ontario, where police policy is to publicly name (and shame) those who are arrested for solicitation, sex worker rights groups have expressed concerns that this puts workers at further risk and exacerbates their mistrust of police (Brady, 2019; Lebel, 2019).

In 2003, New Zealand became the first nation in the world to decriminalize sex work entirely (Armstrong, 2017; Bruckert & Hannem, 2013). The point of decriminalization is not to remove the sex industry from the arena of law, but simply to decriminalize the commercial transaction itself (Baratosi & Wendt, 2017). This starts with an acknowledgment that sex work is work, “provided it is consensual, worker controlled, non-abusive, and no more exploitative than other jobs would ideally be” (Vanwesenbeeck, 2017, p. 1632). Decriminalization, Baratosi and Wendt (2017) claim, prioritizes human rights rather than aiming to abolish the sex industry. They also demonstrate a growing evidence base for decriminalization, as it facilitates and encourages sexual health programming and has a positive effect on the course of STI transmissions, including HIV, for sex workers compared to other regulatory models. In addition, decriminalization has been shown to reduce the structural stigma and risks faced by sex workers, improve sex worker-police relations, and empower sex workers to report victimization to

authorities (Armstrong, 2017; Bruckert & Hannem, 2013). However, interviews with sex workers in New Zealand in the years following decriminalization revealed the drastic policy shift had not significantly reduced the social and symbolic stigma encountered in their communities, as there remained a moralizing discourse perpetuating stereotypical assumptions and the rhetoric of risk. Nevertheless, the authors stress that "the experiences of other marginalized groups suggest that the removal of regulation imbued with the structural stigma of risk may be a first step in breaking down symbolic and moral stigma" (Bruckert & Hannem, p. 61). Broadly speaking, I think the decriminalization of homosexuality half a century ago, and the gradual but forceful movement toward public tolerance and acceptance since, speaks to this claim.

It seems clear that the criminalization of sex work is embedded in antiquated, authoritarian religious and cultural mores (Cao, Lu, & Mei, 2017), assumptions that sex work pollutes communities, literally and figuratively (Bruckert & Hannem, 2013), and constitutes a practice "so debased, devoid of meaningful human value, so inherently intolerable that … no rational person could freely choose it for themselves (Vanwesenbeeck, 2017, p. 1635). Likewise, abolitionist partial criminalization as seen under the Nordic model, including PCEPA, erases the agency of women and other vulnerable groups and is self-defeating in its proliferation of stigma, marginalization, and risk, with no concomitant reduction in demand (Baratosi & Wendt, 2017). Compared to legalization, which can reproduce stigma through overregulation (Armstrong, 2017; Baratosi & Wendt, 2017), a decriminalization framework—if not a panacea—is supported by sex worker rights groups like the Scarlet Alliance, public health scholars and institutes like the Kirby Institute, and human rights organizations and institutes around the world, including Pivot Legal Society, The World Health Organization, Amnesty International, and The Joint UN Program on HIV/AIDS (Amnesty International, 2016; Baratosi & Wendt, 2017; Pivot Legal, 2016).

Following this contemporary perspective, my study approaches the issue of sex work from a standpoint of harm reduction and the need for decriminalization. The prohibition of some marginalized persons' only means of income inhibits their self-sufficiency in meeting basic nutritional and housing needs. I argue, with Barreto and colleagues (2017), that policymakers and legislators should approach sex work from a human rights standpoint, treating it as a public health issue, employing empirical evidence in support of decriminalization, and acting to ensure positive social determinants of health, including nutritional requirements and safe housing. As Bruckert (2018) ponders,

> What happens when we recognize that the decision to sell sexual services, like all decisions, is inevitably constrained by social and structural factors but also respects the agency and the competence of sex workers? When we embrace an epistemological position that recognizes individuals as experts in their own lives? When we take seriously sex workers' assertion that sex work—whether done independently or in a managed context—is an income-generating activity? (p. 7)

I am hopeful that Canadian legislators will soon follow in the footsteps of New Zealand, recognizing the expertise and legitimacy of sex workers, as beseeched by advocates like Chris Bruckert. With the re-election of Justin Trudeau's Liberal government in October 2019, sex workers and their supporters are hopeful, too, as this government has committed to reviewing PCEPA (Lum, 2018; Watson, 2019). However, at the time of writing, aside from a resolution brought forth by the Young Liberals of Canada at the 2018 Liberal convention calling for decriminalization, little publicly visible progress has been made toward amending or repealing the current law (Lum, 2018; Watson, 2019). Scholars and legal advocacy groups have argued emphatically that PCEPA is ill-informed and poorly conceived (Sterling & van der Meulen,

2018), incoherent (Stewart, 2016), and, as with the legislation it replaced, unconstitutional (Chu & Glass, 2013; Pivot Legal Society, 2016; Stewart, 2016). Pivot Legal Society has indicated their support for a new constitutional challenge to PCEPA by sex workers, but such a challenge could take many years (Lum, 2018).

Instead, Canadian lawmakers must be persuaded to see that a timely legislative move toward decriminalization would not only uphold the *Charter* rights of sex workers and bring policy into alignment with overwhelming practical evidence against abolitionism, but also orientate the law with a progressive shift in public opinion among Canadians, who are becoming more accepting of sex work: "Social control of sexual expression, including [sex work], is standing on shifting sand and has been slowly eroding…. New legislation regulating [sex work] must focus on reconciling morality, the principle of harm, and state intervention of our private lives, and it must better reflect the public mood" (Cao et al., 2017, pp. 1184-1185). For now, sex workers, educators, activists, and caring professionals must be vocal about the dangers of PCEPA while adopting a solutions-based approach to mitigate harm and promote the dignity of sex workers under an authoritarian, paternalistic legislative framework that continues to put some of our most vulnerable citizens at risk. One such contingent who ought to act as caring professionals—police officers—are the topic of the following section.

Police Bias, Discretionary Policing, & Officers as Human Assets

As frontline agents of the criminal justice system, police officers can play critical roles in addressing misconduct and promoting wellbeing while enabling restorative justice, the goal of which is to balance an ethic of justice with an ethic of care (Brunson & Pegram, 2018; Chatterjee & Elliott, 2003). Police are also largely responsible for determining young people's entry—or not—into the criminal justice system (Brunson & Pegram, 2018; Endres, 2004). However,

significant racial and SGM disparities exist in the overall police treatment of members of the public (Boyd et al., 2016; Brunson & Pegram, 2018; Campbell, 2015; Ferris, 2015; Fitzgerald & Carrington, 2011; Grant, Mottet, Tanis, Harrison, Herman, & Keisling, 2011; Janoff, 2005; Johnson, 2019; Jones & Jansen, 2019; Mallory, Hasenbush, & Sears, 2015). The following section outlines the disparities commonly experienced by vulnerable youth and young adults in their encounters with police in Canada.

Differential Policing & the Indigenous Incarceration Contagion

Police in Canada are encouraged to exercise their discretion when enforcing the law, particularly with young offenders (Oudshoorn, 2015); however, with enhanced discretion comes the increased potential for differential treatment of those suspected or accused of an offense (Fitzgerald & Carrington, 2011). While there is evidence that the concept of reduced culpability for young offenders resonates with most police, "leading them to intuitively embrace age as a mitigating factor when considering how best to address youths' misdeeds" (Brunson & Pegram, 2018, p. 84), factors like attire, demeanor, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and race can make young people police targets. In their study with a nationally representative sample of Canadian youth aged 12-17 years, Fitzgerald and Carrington (2011) found racial minority youth (specifically those who identified as Black, Indigenous, or West Asian) were approximately three times more likely than other youth to have contact with the police, and their analyses found this disproportionate minority contact was not due to a higher likelihood of offending but to racially discriminatory policing: "There are racial differences in the extent to which 'good behaviour' protects youth from police attention" (p. 456).

As Oudshoorn (2015) relates, the overall number of young people in police custody is on the decline, but the proportion of Indigenous youth involved with the justice system is rising

significantly. In 2017/2018, 8% of the Canadian youth population was Indigenous, yet they comprised a staggering 49% of youth custody admissions, up from 28% of admissions ten years earlier (DOJC, 2019). Similarly, the overall adult incarceration rate, which peaked in Canada in 2013, has been on a slow decline, indicating a decreased police charge rate (Brosnahan, 2013; Statistics Canada, 2018). This is encouraging. However, among Indigenous persons, who comprise only 4.1% of the Canadian population, admissions to adult custody have been steadily increasing over the last ten years, accounting for approximately 20% of admissions to correctional services in 2006/2007 and 28% in 2016/2017 (Statistics Canada, 2018). This worrisome trend, embedded as it is in a legacy of colonialism and ongoing systemic racism (Singh, Prowse, & Anderson, 2019), has compelled some criminologists to refer quietly to Canada's prison system as the "new residential schools" (Macdonald, 2016).

In his impassioned op-ed for the CBC, Harold Johnson, an Indigenous Elder and former Crown prosecutor in Saskatchewan, underscores the ways in which the criminal justice system is failing Indigenous persons: "Incarceration does not deter crime. The best predictor of whether someone will commit an offence is whether they have ever been incarcerated" (Johnson, 2019, para. 10). Incarceration, Johnson continues, is contagious and perpetuates a cycle of trauma: "We then bring this traumatized person to court and traumatize them more with a preliminary hearing, then add more trauma with a trial, then sentence them to jail where we know they are likely to be severely traumatized. Then we release them back into the community and ask them if they learned their lesson" (para. 18). Incarceration also has immediate and compounding long-term health effects, including risk of death by overdose or suicide shortly after release (Singh et al., 2019). Johnson implores Canadians to consider new solutions, including a change in the

Criminal Code to replace the concept of deterrence with redemption, allowing those disenfranchised by our system to earn their way back into society.

In addition to Indigenous persons, police have historically targeted sexual and gender minorities as well. Janoff (2005) describes the longstanding tense and difficult relationship between police and Canada's queer community, including the RCMP's legacy of homophobia. He speaks to homophobia among police toward their fellow officers, stereotypes and assumptions police attribute to queer victims, and the ways in which SGM individuals have been targeted by police. While there have been improvements in police culture, policy, and practice since Janoff's book was published, including formal public apologies by chiefs of police in Calgary and Edmonton (CBC News, 2019; Gibson, 2018), tensions endure between police and the SGM community, particularly queer and trans people of colour (QTPOC). For instance, in the summer of 2019, the Hamilton chief of police was forced to apologize after a radio interview in which he propagated damaging stereotypes about public sex involving gay men (Rankin, 2019). Symptomatically, in recent years uniformed officers have been disinvited from Pride celebrations across the country so that SGM attendees can feel safe and listened to (Casey, 2019; Cummings, 2018; Grossman, 2019; Pride Fredericton, 2019). In the United States, where more population-based research is available, discrimination and harassment by law enforcement officers based on sexual orientation and gender identity remains a pervasive issue (Mallory et al., 2015). Incarceration rates among transgender and gender-nonconforming American adults, particularly those of colour, are several times higher than among the general population (Grant et al., 2011), and SGM youth are overrepresented by a 100-200% margin in the U.S. juvenile justice system (Movement Advancement Project, 2016).

Setting aside racial and SGM disparities for the moment, other structural indicators of perceived "diminished moral character," including homelessness, addiction, and sex work involvement (Ti, Wood, Shannon, Feng, & Kerr, 2013), as well as more immediate dispositional factors like attitude and remorsefulness (Adorjan & Ricciardelli, 2018; Marinos & Innocente, 2008), differentially impact the treatment of young people in encounters with police. While most police in Marinos and Innocente's (2008) study cited the seriousness of the alleged offense as the primary factor influencing whether to file a formal charge or apply extrajudicial measures (EMs)—the latter, under the Youth Criminal Justice Act, allow police to take no further action, issue a warning, issue a formal caution, and/or make a referral to a community program (Oudshoorn, 2015)—the youth's attitude was frequently factor number two:

> Police pointed in particular to a youth's display of responsibility and remorse as a proxy for the ability of extrajudicial measures to hold the youth accountable. If the youth could not express remorse and responsibility for his or her actions, then extrajudicial measures were viewed as inadequate to reinforce these characteristics. *Admission of guilt, however, is not a requirement for consideration of extrajudicial measures … under the YCJA*. (p. 486, emphasis added)

It is troubling that a young person may have to confess to an offense they did not commit in order to avoid being charged for that offense. Brunson and Pegram (2018) argue that when a suspect's demeanor is a primary factor for determining arrest, this reveals that "officers routinely make rash judgments about youths worth saving and those they consider irredeemable" (p. 86). Boyd and colleagues (2016) have written that mainstream media and law enforcement align those struggling with mental health issues, addictions, and street life in Canada with stigmatizing discourses of violence and risk that serve to criminalize and legitimize the policing of vulnerable

persons. It ought not surprise us, then, that already-marginalized young people such as those served by the Chew Project—most of whom embody several characteristics that are shown to draw police surveillance and interference—frequently report a lack of trust in police and in the justice system more broadly (Grace et al., 2019; Ti et al., 2013).

This perception among members of the community that police are corrupt, unjust, or unresponsive is called legal cynicism, which is an erosion of the perception of police ethics and conduct as legitimately rooted in fairness and justice (Jones et al., 2019). Legal cynicism is rampant among those accessing Chew Project supports—a frequently victimized population—with 25% of respondents disagreeing and 38% strongly disagreeing that they could turn to the police for help if they needed it (Grace et al., 2019). Quite so, as the project's lead outreach and intervention worker relates, street-involved and homeless SGM youth and young adults rarely, if ever, report victimization or assaults to police, as many have experienced homophobia and/or transphobia at the hands of police, believe officers view them as comprising nothing more than a high-risk deviant population, and fear they will be arrested themselves: "This speaks to the need to engage police officers in training about SGM young people, appropriate use of language and pronouns, and appropriate treatment and accommodation, especially when SGM young people are in police custody and confined with the general population" (Grace et al., 2019, p. 20).

Police Officers as Potential Human Assets

We have now reviewed a few of the social ecological facets of the criminal justice system that shape the experiences of members of vulnerable populations in Canada, including police attitudes toward enforcement and the insidious and enduring effects of systems and structures rooted in colonialism and White supremacy. This section focuses on the role of police officers as social actors who can, albeit with significant time and effort, cultivate trust and rapport with the

"troublemakers" they encounter on the job. As first responders and frontline agents, police officers regularly see and care for those in pain; trauma is part and parcel of law enforcement and, over time, compassion fatigue (the "cost-of-caring") and cynicism can set in, contributing to burnout and stress (Grant, Lavery, & Decarlo, 2019). Furthermore, compassion satisfaction, which is rooted in empathy and serves as a buffer against the effects of compassion fatigue, can be diminished by encounters with belligerent and antagonistic community members (Grant et al., 2019). Oppositional defiance exhibited by youth in difficulty can be interpreted as a defense mechanism and atypical coping strategy—an outlet for expressing their anger and dealing with the disconnection they feel—rather than belligerence for its own sake (Ungar, 2004, 2007). Nevertheless, impertinence not only makes officers less likely to exercise leniency with a suspect, but over time these encounters can affect the officer's mental health and ability to respond with compassion.

As with a bad attitude, multiple encounters with police can work against a suspect, making an officer less likely to resort to extrajudicial measures rather than formal charges (Marinos & Innocente, 2008). Still, rapport between individual officers and community members takes time to build and involves repeated exposures (Ahern, Sadler, Lamb, & Gariglietti, 2017; Boudreau et al., 2012). This creates something of a catch-22 for young people like those accessing the Chew Project who are frequently on police radar. However, rapport can be facilitated by a significant adult acting as liaison. In the Chew Project, the lead intervention and outreach worker plays this role, functioning as a consistent point of contact with various units of Edmonton Police Services (EPS), including the Hate Crimes Unit, Drug and Gangs Unit, Human Trafficking and Exploitation Unit, School Resource Officer (SRO) Program, Victim Services, and Beats (Grace et al., 2019). Accordingly, Chew Project staff collaborate with police services

and other caring professional agencies to develop rapport with Chew clientele and provide wraparound services. This includes police officers using EMs to refer young people to the Chew Project rather than placing them in custody when they are picked up for a minor offense (Grace et al., 2019).

Police officers, like the community members they are sworn to serve and protect, are human beings, and yet in their encounters with police, many vulnerable citizens see only a uniform and its authoritarian symbolism. Boudreau, Davis, Boucher, Chatel, Elizabeth, Janni, and colleagues (2012) conducted interviews with officers in a borough of Montreal where youth gangs and associated violence are endemic. Their research revealed that a young marginalized person may, over time, come to respect and trust an individual officer, but cultivating respect for the "blue shirt" is another matter entirely: "[One] police patroller told us how he can sometimes eat with youths at McDonald's and they confide to him about violent acts they plan to do, without remembering that 'I am wearing my shirt!', as if they don't see the uniform anymore when they trust the police officer" (p. 55). The lead Chew Project worker likewise relates that there are some "great officers" with EPS who will drop by the downtown Chew space to visit with youth, or reach out, for instance, to help a young person fulfill their promise to appear in court (Grace et al., 2019). Individual officers such as these, who work to transcend the trauma and fear associated with their status as police and build relationships with marginalized communities, can serve as significant adults in a vulnerable young person's life. Even one such adult can be a substantive asset promoting resilience in young people (Grace, 2015).

Police officers and other authority figures can build rapport with the vulnerable and the resentful by being empathetic—softening their tone and body language, adopting a nonjudgmental stance, disclosing some personal information about themselves in an effort at

humanization, and cultivating their ability to speak naturally with young people in a relatable way (Ahern et al., 2017; Greeson, Campbell, & Fehler-Cabral, 2014). As discussed above, empathy is a protective factor against officer stress and burnout, but it can also be eroded by compassion fatigue over many years of exposure to trauma and impudence (Grant et al., 2019). The authors contend that compassion fatigue can be mitigated by a shift in culture among senior law enforcement managers to recognize and respond to the phases that many officers pass through in their careers, from the bright-eyed, idealistic new recruit, to the increasingly cynical experienced officer showing the first signs of compassion fatigue, to the seasoned officer in the "zombie phase" where compassion for the community residents they are policing is all but depleted. Additionally, Grant and colleagues note that officers are often compelled by police culture to curb their emotions in the field and in interactions with other officers. They assert that agencies should provide a more cathartic space for officers in order to guard against compassion fatigue, burnout, and other mental health concerns.

Wood and Marks (2007) remind us, however, that any significant change in police culture, as a negotiated outcome, will not happen overnight but will instead manifest as a series of little shifts in behaviour and perception; thus, change will reveal itself "not as a process sweeping across the whole spectrum of an organisation, but as one that resides in the tiny pockets of activity that constitute its social operations" (p. 277). While the authors argue that police culture is often perceived as monolithic and immovable—"the culprit for failures in reform" (p. 292)—they take a more optimistic view. They emphasize the potential for each individual officer to act as a significant change agent, arguing that police organizations, in collaboration with community partners like the Chew Project and academic partners like me, can

build the capacity of officers to reflect on their beliefs and practices, to strive for innovative solutions, to be “knowledge workers” (p. 292).

This literature review was fashioned to contextualize and situate my doctoral study with respect to established research in the fields of resilience, developmental psychology, sex work, and youth and young adult justice. There are notable, demonstrable gaps in these areas of scholarship, with extant research in the health and social sciences inadequately attending to the specificities affecting sexual and gender minorities as they grow into adulthood and cope with minority stress. Studies with sex workers in particular have focused primarily on cisgender heterosexual women, to the exclusion of the considerable population of male and SGM sex workers who comprise a distinct community of labourers in terms of the stressors and challenges they experience on a daily basis. In one of the only recent studies conducted with this under-researched population in Canada, Argento and associates (2018) point to the critical need to include the voices of male and transgender sex workers in policy discussions. The following chapter describes how this doctoral study was designed and oriented to undertake this important task.

Chapter 2: Study Design

Introduction & Context

This chapter outlines the design of my doctoral research and is composed of the following sections: 1) research design and recruitment, 2) data collection and storage, 3) data analysis, 4) limitations, and 5) reporting and utilization in a transformative model synchronizing research to advocacy and action. To review, my research question is as follows: How does the non-normative subsistence strategy of sex work among homeless and street-involved SGM young people in Edmonton reflect the following:

- Risk factors associated with sex work internationally and in the context of current Canadian law (Bill C-36);
- Coping, and in particular atypical coping, mechanisms found in the literature;
- Assets that have been shown to support resilience; and
- Indicators that young people are doing well, considering evidence that positive outcomes may be hidden by normative assumptions in marginalized populations?

Since my research participants are recruited through the Chew Project developed and implemented by Dr. André P. Grace, this introductory section begins with a description of the project and its target population. The Chew Project is a community-based educational, health, and social intervention and outreach initiative launched in Edmonton in 2014. The project's primary target demographic is inner-city sexual and gender minority (SGM) adolescents and young adults aged 14-29 who face adversity and trauma associated with prejudice and discrimination, estrangement from family, street-involvement, homelessness, and survival crime (Grace, 2018a). Framed using critical politics and pedagogy, it is grounded in concerns with democracy, equity, freedom, and social justice. In working to serve and accommodate SGM

young people, the project focuses on their "individual development, socialization, comprehensive—physical, mental, sexual, and social—health, safety, and wellbeing in street and community contexts as well as in-care, family, school, healthcare, and other institutional contexts" (Grace, 2018b, p. 251). Accordingly, the Chew Project provides mental and sexual health education, intervention and outreach in health and social contexts, peer and adult mentoring, and arts-based learning, as well as free access to counselling, STI testing, medical referrals, and social services and supports. Grace (2018a) developed the project using his innovative *C3 model*, integrating "*comprehensive* health education and outreach, *community* education and support services, and *compassionate* policing in solutions-based interventions" (p. 2). To this end, the Chew Project leverages Grace's (2015) emergent resilience typology whereby growing into resilience is viewed as a dynamic and intricate biopsychosocial and cultural process through which SGM youth and young adults navigate adversity and trauma and deal with setbacks. The project's clientele is transient and migratory, with a core of around 60 clients accessing services on a regular basis (Grace, 2018a). For my doctoral research, participants were recruited from this core group.

The Chew Project, with its government, university, and community support, is positioned to provide graduate students like me opportunities to work with the Chew team of researchers and frontline workers, which helps me grow as a researcher-advocate linking critical and queer theorizing and research to activism, policy work, and strategic everyday practices (Grace, 2016). In 2017, the Ministry of Children's Services contracted Dr. Grace to initiate a collaborative research project to investigate the Chew Project. This research venture (Study ID: Pro00058917; approved by University of Alberta Research Ethics Board 1, with ethics approval currently renewed until July 10, 2020) provided an opportunity to evaluate and improve the project, while

also granting me an opportunity to work as a research assistant as part of Dr. Grace's team. As a research assistant, I led or co-facilitated several interviews with SGM young people who were street-involved, homeless, and/or who had dealt with Children's Services.

Three participants in those interviews discussed their involvement in sex work, which raised questions for me about what resilience means for young people who employ sex work as a coping or survival strategy and how we might understand their personal processes of growing into resilience. Dr. Grace provided me permission to use verbatim transcripts of those particular interviews, as well as an interview with the Chew lead intervention and outreach worker, as raw data in my dissertation. Adding to this data, and using my research questions and objectives, I conducted three more interviews with Chew Project clients engaged in sex work and one follow-up interview with the lead Chew worker (Study ID: Pro00092803; approved by University of Alberta Research Ethics Board 1). Findings from the collaborative research project, which utilized a survey, interviews, and photovoice, are contained in the commissioned report provided to the Alberta Ministry of Children's Services (Grace et al., 2019). My involvement as a research assistant motivated me to do further research with street-involved and homeless SGM youth and emerging adults so I can build further knowledge and understanding of the resilience processes of young people involved in sex work. The collaborative research also provided me with methodological insights for conducting research with vulnerable individuals, which helped me hone the interview process in collecting more interview data for my doctoral research.

Project Outline

Research Design & Recruitment

For this study, I used a qualitative design with semi-structured research interviews based on a natural conversation model so young people who are engaged in sex work and access

Chew's inner city supports and resources could be comfortable, contributing as they chose to and were able. Qualitative research describes a scholarly, practical, and creative pursuit, an umbrella term for philosophically and methodologically diverse approaches that are often transdisciplinary in nature, explore and describe social phenomena, unpack meanings, build depth of understanding, and explore new or under-researched areas (Levy, 2014). In qualitative research, the researcher is not objectively outside of the project, but located, enmeshed, and shifting within it, co-constructing partial and contextualized truths in collaboration with research participants (Levy, 2014). Emphasizing text over numbers, qualitative research is an embodied experience "that emerges out of concerned engagement and develops in the process of negotiating the relational tensions and ambiguities that are inherent in research relationships" (Kouritzin, Piquemal, & Norman, 2009, p. 5).

The qualitative methodology—i.e., broad research strategy or system of methods (Kahlke, 2014)—used in this study could be described as *generic,* or simply *interpretive,* as it does not adhere to any one established methodology such as phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, or narrative inquiry (Kahlke, 2014; Percy et al., 2015). Instead, it espouses a fluidity of methodological boundaries and prescriptions, using a queer critical posthuman framework to interpret findings (see Chapter 3). For instance, while this study does investigate the lived experiences of resilience phenomena and sex work among a particular population, it has an outward focus on the actual content of participants' *experiences* rather than the inner organization and structure of *experiencing* these events—accordingly, it is not a categorically phenomenological study (Percy et al., 2015). Additionally, while the culture of street life and the social groupings, customs, and practices that comprise it are important to this study, the biopsychosocial elements of homelessness, street-involvement, and sex work are also crucial to

my analysis, thus precluding an expressly ethnographic form of inquiry (Perry et al., 2015). The methodological process and merits of "queering the research" and resisting rigid categorization and denotation are described at length in Chapter 3.

Tracy (2013) describes three core concepts that inhere in qualitative research. The first is *self-reflexivity*—henceforth I use reflexivity as the self is implied—which Nolas (2011) describes as the "practice of situating oneself in the research context and analyzing the implications of one's subjectivity both in the context of and in relation to the research being carried out" (p. 123). Reflexivity is vital to the fabric of this study and is discussed at length in Chapters 3 and 6. Tracy's second core concept is *context:* "Qualitative researchers believe that the empirical and theoretical resources needed to comprehend a particular idea, or to predict its future trajectory, are themselves interwoven with, and throughout, the context" (p. 3). Indeed, a social ecological theory of resilience is deeply contextualized, suggesting qualitative methodologies present a suitable approach to resilience research, and my interviews with Chew's lead intervention and outreach worker contribute to this context-building exercise. Third is the idea of a *thick description*, which requires cultural immersion and a thorough investigation and elucidation of the particularities of a context of interest prior to moving toward possible generalizing statements and theories: "*A priori* theory takes a back seat" (Tracy, p. 4). Accordingly, I have facilitated and co-constructed through natural conversations thick, heavily contextualized depictions of street-involved and homeless SGM young adults' lived experiences in sex work, as interpreted through Grace's (2015) resilience framework.

Qualitative methods—or the particular text-driven procedures and techniques used to collect and analyze data in a qualitative study (Kahlke, 2014)—align with a social ecological approach to wellbeing for SGM young people, providing a vivid and bountiful understanding of

the contexts and experiences of these young people from their perspectives, in their own words, and fomenting visibility and empowerment (Higa et al., 2014; Schelbe, Chanmugam, Moses, Saltzburg, Williams, & Letendre, 2015). Put another way, qualitative methods allow young people who have been silenced and relegated to the fringes of society to "talk back" and to resist tropes of deviance, criminalization, and contamination that are often assigned to their bodies (Cruz, 2011). In addition, qualitative methods can illuminate salient issues for subsequent study using more structured and fundable methods (e.g., surveys), and are particularly well-suited for interrogating tacit, taken-for-granted, commonsense understandings of a cultural context (Tracy, 2013). Qualitative methods, then, are especially conducive to critical inquiry, the central mandate of which is to question the veracity of apparently obvious claims (Noonan, 2016).

Common qualitative methods with human participants include interviews, focus groups, participant observation, case studies, and arts-based methods such as photovoice and ethnodrama (Levy, 2014; Tracy, 2013). I have chosen interviews—what Cyprus (2018) describes as conversations with a purpose—as they allow the respondent to traverse time to reconstruct the past while interpreting the present and predicting the future: "Interviews are likely to provide a more complete and in-depth picture than other forms of inquiry" (Cyprus, p. 304). Moreover, I have extensive experience and comfort with interview methods, having facilitated interviews during my co-operative placement at Evaluation and Research Services, Faculty of Extension, in 2010-2011, during my position as a graduate researcher assisting Dr. Grace with his SSHRC-funded resilience research from 2014 to the present, and interviewing incoming patients, many of whom carry trauma and myriad mental health burdens, as a psychiatric coordinator at the Chokka Center for Integrative Health since 2015. Much of this work has been with vulnerable populations at risk of distress discussing sensitive topics, and over many years I have built a

valuable skillset that enables me to listen, empathize, comfort, and use humour to redirect when necessary.

Following Dr. Grace's lead in his own extensive experience conducting qualitative research with vulnerable populations, I chose to employ interviews rather than focus groups, as the former are more practical, particularly when doing research with hard-to-reach populations on sensitive topics where personal safety and confidentiality are chief concerns (Lucassen et al., 2017). Additionally, compared to focus groups, individual interviews are thought to glean more "socially sensitive data" (Lucassen et al., 2017, p. 20), due to issues with confidentiality and the potential for groupthink and social desirability bias in a focus group. Overall, confidentiality and practicality were paramount in my decision, made in careful consultation with Chew Project colleagues, to select individual rather than group interviews.

The target population, or community of interest (Nolas, 2011), of this study is Chew Project clientele who have had issues in terms of access and accommodation with respect to system supports and who may be currently or intermittently street-involved, homeless, and/or in-care. For my dissertation, research participants drawn from this population were young adults aged 18-29, as anecdotally, frontline workers with the Chew Project indicate that most clients active in sex work are in this age range. These young people are primarily SGM, and in particular YMSM (young males who have sex with males), as well as trans-spectrum and gender-diverse individuals. While I agree with McDonald (2013), who argues that to impose exclusion criteria for what constitutes "queer" is somewhat antithetical to what the term stands for, in order to maintain the clear SGM nucleus of this study, selected research participants were to identify as non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender, with the following exception: since a number of YMSM who engage in sex work are straight-identified (Grace, 2017; Grace et al.,

2019), and since there is fluidity and flux among identity, behaviour, and desire (Igartua, Thombs, Burgos, & Montoro, 2009), straight-identified YMSM who access SGM-targeted Chew Project services and who engage in sex work with men were also invited to participate.

As with many studies conducted in complex educational or social contexts with fringe populations, and as is typical with qualitative research more generally, it was necessary in this study to employ convenience/opportunistic and snowball sampling, relying on word-of-mouth and peer-nomination strategies (Mertens, 2010; Tracy, 2013). These strategies were encouraged and enabled by the Chew Project's lead intervention and outreach worker. Chew Project clientele and other SGM young people represent a historically disenfranchised population that is underserved and increasingly over-researched (Grace, 2015); accordingly, they were given the opportunity to participate in this entirely optional research while visiting the project's downtown outreach office, the OUTpost, a space that provides shelter, snacks, condoms, and other amenities in addition to free frontline support and resources such as counselling, mentorship, and STI testing. Of course, Chew Project clients may not wish to engage in research during their time of need. It was thus emphasized to them that the research was optional and their decision not to participate would in no way affect their access to the Chew Project or other services offered. Moreover, I concur with Mooney (2014), who argues that study refusal is a critical expression of self-agency, and this was affirmed in recruitment conversations. Nonetheless, our full-time intervention and outreach worker—who serves as a *gatekeeper* between the research and outreach components of the project in order to grant researchers selective access to Chew Project clientele while facilitating trust and rapport (Swan, 2016)—was confident that the safety and comfort of the OUTpost or his office at the University of Alberta campus would be conducive to recruiting willing participants. Further incentive included $15 Tim Hortons gift cards for all

participants, since similar honoraria have been shown to increase response rates (Lucassen et al., 2017; Mertens, 2010), and since I felt this was reasonable monetary compensation for up to an hour of their time.

In addition to small monetary incentives, it was my hope and intention going into this study that interviewees would find participation empowering and gratifying on its own, given the transformative gravity of the research to which they are contributing, its potential implications for policy and practice affecting their daily lives, and the potential for narrative-building and catharsis. Indeed, as Welle and Clatts (2007) submit, many underserved young persons lack reliable adults who actively support them in meeting basic survival needs, let alone building a coherent narrative, and participation in research interviews can be a significant resource in the participants' interpersonal construction of a biographical story.

Data Collection

In qualitative research, the researcher is the data collection instrument (Mertens, 2009, 2010), which included me assisted by an intervention and outreach worker as gatekeeper and co-facilitator so research participants felt comfortable and supported. As an SGM educator, I am situated in a complex nexus of both privilege and disentitlement, but nonetheless must acknowledge my surplus power as a researcher when engaging with these vulnerable young people, thus embodying and exercising the reflexivity piece of qualitative research (Mertens, 2010; Tracy, 2013). "Through this the researcher emerges first and foremost as a social person and secondly as a professional with a distinctive and genuine purpose" (Mertens, 2010, p. 252). Recognizing I could not discount my own researcher role as both a privileged social figure and institutionally sanctioned professional, I instead maintained a critically reflexive stance in my position with respect to my participants, with particular attention to voice, community, and

reciprocity—key critical, transformative criteria for quality in qualitative research (Mertens, 2010). Reflexivity as an embodied, embedded process integral to qualitative inquiry is discussed at length in Chapters 3 and 6.

The purpose of the research interview is to give an individual voice, a platform from which to make their views heard: "In this sense an interview empowers people—the interviewer should not play the leading role" (Wellington, 2015, p. 139). As Tracy (2013) puts it, "Interviews elucidate subjectively lived experiences and viewpoints from the respondents' perspective" (p. 132). In keeping with these mandates, the interview dialogues emerged from what we in the Chew Project have conceptualized as a natural conversation model, where the focus is on open-ended sharing and exchange rather than a formal Q&A. Such positioning of interviews as open conversations encourages an organic and comfortable co-production of meaning between researcher and participant (Nolas, 2011). This technique resembles a "free-narrative approach" such as that used by Powell and Snow (2007), whose four principles for open-ended interview methods with young people were useful for my research: use simple language, avoid coercive techniques, allow the interviewee to choose what details to discuss, and encourage an elaborate response.

This natural conversation or free-narrative approach fits most closely with the unstructured interview model, which is flexible, organic, and stimulates rather than dictates conversation; it is guided predominantly by the interviewee (Tracy, 2013; Wellington, 2015). "The advantages of unstructured interviews," Tracy (2013) writes, "are that they allow for more emic, emergent understandings to blossom, and for the interviewees' complex viewpoints to be heard without the strict constraints of scripted questions. Furthermore, less structured interviews are likely to tap both content and emotional levels" (p. 139). Dunbar, Rodriguez, and Parker

(2001) encourage qualitative researchers to embrace such models that eschew the formality of "the interview" and let conversation and dialogue emerge into "the story of a rich, nuanced, and important life" (p. 21). This way, participants were the driving force in the interview process, with me as researcher guiding the conversation toward topics of interest gently and organically while employing a positive and affirmational manner consistent with a queer critical posthumanist approach that is open to possibility. The interviews for my study were as unstructured as possible; however, as participants had a preliminary discussion during recruitment with the gatekeeper to establish their comfort discussing potentially difficult topics like homelessness, substance use, and sex work, and since they were informed, even primed, by the gatekeeper and me prior to the interview about the various directions the conversation might take, I concede that these interviews were "semi-structured" around my research question and objectives. As Cyprus (2018) suggests, "Being unstructured does not mean that the interview is unfocused. Keeping in mind the phenomenon of interest, the research questions, and the overall purpose of the inquiry informs the interview process, but the interviewer is free to go where the data and respondents lead" (p. 304).

Interviews began by establishing rapport and providing assurances of confidentiality; rapport "can be facilitated by accommodating yourself to the routines of the informants, establishing what you have in common, helping people out, displaying an interest in them, and acting like a person who belongs (and *being yourself*)" (Mertens, p. 251, her emphasis). When and if it felt appropriate in the moment, establishing commonality with participants and being myself involved disclosure of my own identity as a gay man and introducing myself with my preferred pronouns (he/him/his) (Sheldon, 2010). During this pre-interview phase, preliminaries with participants included making small talk, clarifying essential information about the study

itself, getting permission to audio record, and asking participants to sign the informed consent form (Mertens, 2009; Wellington, 2015). Following a conversation with the lead intervention and outreach worker prior to the study, in order to maximize participant comfort, I used my cell phone to record interviews, rather than a formal digital recording device. The sight of a phone sitting on a tabletop was thought to be more innocuous, and to elicit less of a sense of surveillance, than a high-tech, tailor-made recording device.

In addition to an oral explanation, the consent form, of which they were given a copy, described the aims and goals of the project and reiterated their right to withdraw at any time without penalty (see Appendix A). To facilitate a comfortable and meaningful interview, I encouraged rapport by being knowledgeable about the topic and the person, approaching data collection in the least disruptive manner possible, and by being gentle, kind, sensitive, open-minded, probing, attentive, and interpretive (Mertens, 2010; Tracy, 2013; Wellington, 2015). Concomitantly, I developed trust and rapport by immersing myself in the culture and sociality of the Chew Project, spending several hours over many weeks at the OUTpost and establishing myself as a companionable figure among staff and clientele.

During the interview process, I was mindful of Tracy's (2013) guidance about appropriate demeanor: "Facial expressions and body language should communicate warmth, acceptance, and neutrality…. Showing shock or judgment will likely limit the interviewee's trust and level of disclosure" (Tracy, 2013, p. 162). In addition, as a researcher I used terms familiar to the respondent (e.g., using "T" for testosterone) (Mertens, 2010). Perhaps most importantly, I was acutely mindful that there are no innocent questions in this kind of research: "Tapping into participants' senses could unleash emotions for which participants are unprepared" (Harris & Guillemin, 2012, p. 696), the effects of which were mitigated by manifesting a reflexive,

ethically rigorous approach, which included having a gatekeeper present and on-site supports available.

As Finlay (2012) argues, emotionally charged research may invoke distress, but it can also be therapeutic and validating. Similarly, Mertens (2009) writes that interview participants can benefit from the interview process by having their worth and experiences validated and by making sense of their lives by talking things through. Supporting this notion, the vulnerable youth whom Biddle, Cooper, Owen-Smith, Klineberg, Bennewith, Hawton, and associates (2013) interviewed about suicidal ideation reported that the interviews stimulated self-reflection, self-disclosure, and catharsis, increasing their wellbeing through the beneficial effects of talking at length and being listened to; even those who did experience distress during the interview process reported after that they did not regret taking part. Dr. Grace and I were confident our lead intervention and outreach worker, who was the primary gatekeeper for this study and who was present for the interviews for the commissioned study of the Chew Project described above, would assist in ensuring my doctoral research interviews occurred in such a way that benefits outweighed the risks for the young people involved and appropriate safeguards were in place. Were a participant to become upset during an interview, the gatekeeper and I were ready support them by offering encouragement and assurance and, as appropriate, lightening the mood with small talk (Mertens, 2009). Moreover,

> good interviewers will not end an interview with participants in distress. They will wait for individuals to regain composure and then inquire whether they want to take a break or end the interview and perhaps schedule another time to talk more. It may be necessary to stop or postpone discussion on a particularly painful topic or even to end the interview altogether. (Mertens, 2009, p. 246)

Depending on the perceived comfort level of interviewees and their willingness to share, I was prepared to allow research interviews to last up to one hour (Cyprus, 2018). In my experience with Chew Project research to date, the most useful interview data is typically collected from conversations lasting 30-45 minutes. If a participant had experienced distress, Chew Project outreach workers specializing in counselling were ready to offer immediate on-site supports as well as referrals to free outside counselling and psychological services, as needed. Fortunately, this was not necessary; our natural conversation model placed participants in control of the sharing, which helped to create a comfortable climate. The interviews ranged in length from approximately 15 to 50 minutes, after which the lead intervention and outreach worker followed up with each participant to ensure their immediate emotional wellbeing.

Due to recruitment challenges noted above, data collection did not reach a saturation point (i.e., a situation of diminishing returns from new data collection) (Wellington, 2015). However, this was not a particular concern; as Wellington points out, in qualitative research in general, the inevitable tendency is to over-collect and under-analyze. Tracy (2013) warns that too few interviews will produce "shallow and stale contributions," while too many will result in a paralyzing amount of data, discouraging "penetrating interpretations" (p. 138). Suggesting that five to eight interviews generally represents a valuable number for a research project like mine, she provides this caveat: "The answer to 'how many' depends on the richness of data gathered from other sources, on budget, and on timeline, as well as on your access to software or research help in transcribing and analyzing the data" (p. 138). Similarly, it has been suggested that around six participants is appropriate for qualitative research that emphasizes the individual's subjective experience, how they interpret the world around them, and how they create and understand their own life spaces (Mertens, 2010). Accordingly, the target number of individual Chew client

interviewees in my study was six to eight, including raw data derived from the three from the commissioned study.

Data Analysis & Storage

Qualitative analysis is an ongoing, formative process that occurs throughout the research cycle (Mertens, 2010; Stake, 2014; Wellington, 2015). It is exploratory, the data are often rich, descriptive, and extensive, and the design can be expected to emerge and evolve throughout the process, with the focus blurring and sharpening at different times (Wellington, 2015). I transcribed my research interviews myself, as this is an integral component of data analysis: "Researchers bring their own point of view to the process, including noting multiple meanings that lie in what might appear to be simple utterances" (Mertens, 2010, p. 424). This is part of the data immersion phase, during which I conferred with my supervisor about my data and emerging findings (Tracy, 2013; Wellington, 2015). Immersion in, and reflection upon, my data led to the data exploration and reduction phase, at which time I selected data for coding, i.e., assigned a label to data excerpts that conceptually "hang together" (Mertens, 2010).

Coding is the heart of qualitative analysis (Cyprus, 2018). Scharp and Sanders' (2019) positioning of thematic analysis in qualitative research as "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within a data corpus" (p. 117), which they adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006), structured my coding process. A theme captures a salient, patterned aspect of the data; researchers engaged in thematic analysis, then, inquire whether a dataset meaningfully answers the research question (Scharp & Sanders, 2019). Viewed as an iterative process, thematic analysis includes six steps: (1) familiarizing oneself with the data through transcription and re-reading; (2) generating coding categories, which entails marking interesting data features in a systemic way and collating data; (3) generating themes, which requires the researcher to collate

initial codes into potential themes and gather all data relevant to a particular theme; (4) reviewing themes, which is the process of exploring whether the themes work in relation to the coded extracts as well as the full data set; (5) defining and naming themes, or determining the heart of what each theme conveys; and (6) locating compelling exemplars that provide evidence of a theme and relate to the research question (Scharp & Sanders, 2019). While I have used NVivo software for thematic coding in the past, I prefer the simplicity of using variously coloured highlighting and fonts with verbatim transcripts in Microsoft Word in order to conduct iterative thematic analysis, a technique I developed as a research assistant at Evaluation and Research Services, Faculty of Extension.

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Audio files and transcripts are kept in password-protected files on my password-protected personal computer. Signed consent forms and printed transcripts are kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office at the University of Alberta. While member-checking (i.e., providing participants with transcripts prior to analysis in order to add, edit, or delete data as they see fit) is a preferred iterative method for maximizing rigour and ethical accountability in qualitative research (Mertens, 2009), this was not feasible in my study, as Chew Project clientele are transient and difficult to reach (Grace et al., 2019). Nonetheless, participants were provided with contact information to reach me, Dr. Grace, and the lead intervention and outreach worker, and they were permitted to withdraw or edit their transcripts up to four weeks after completion of their interview, allowing them ample time to make changes while also ensuring that my doctoral study could move forward in a timely fashion. None of my participants elected to alter his interview transcript. In addition, to further enhance the rigour of this qualitative study, I kept a research journal and engaged in an ongoing, iterative process of reflexivity (see Chapters 3 and 6). Furthermore, the two interviews with the

lead intervention and outreach worker, with his intimate knowledge of the daily lived experiences of Chew Project clients, served as a form of member checking in lieu of credibility checks with Chew Project participants (Elliot & Timulak, 2005).

Limitations

"It is not possible to design and conduct the 'perfect' research study in education or psychology. Therefore, it is incumbent on the researcher to recognize and discuss the limitations of a study" (Mertens, 2010, p. 420). For instance, external validity—often considered the benchmark measure of empirical studies (Mertens, 2010)—may be limited due to the infeasibility of randomized sampling, the basic necessity of convenience/snowball sampling, a small sample size, and most notably by the narrative, intersubjective, and retrospective nature of qualitative inquiry (Kong, Mahoney, & Plummer 2001; Mertens, 2010). Instead, Mertens contends that *transferability* may be more appropriate, where the burden of proof for generalizability lies with the audience and where my task is to provide a thick description that allows readers to make their own judgments about the applicability of my research to other settings (Mertens, 2010).

Kong and colleagues (2001) refer to this notion of validity in qualitative research as legitimation, contending that attempts to solve the problem of authenticity risk falling into the trap of positivism and universal truth. Tracy (2013) similarly argues that qualitative research is not designed to generate universal laws, but instead to generate explanations for contextualized activity, and McDonald (2013) reminds us that queer reflexivity disabuses us of the notion that some accounts are inherently more authoritative and accurate than others. Foley's (2002) words are fitting here:

> No matter how epistemologically reflexive and systematic our fieldwork is, we must still speak as mere mortals from various historical, culture-bound standpoints; we must still make limited, historically situated knowledge claims. By claiming to be less rather than more, perhaps we can tell stories that ordinary people will actually find more believable and useful. (p. 487)

On a very practical level, this study—with its transient, troubled, and thus difficult to access target population—was limited by challenges pertaining to recruitment and building a researcher-research participant relationship. Following formal ethics approval, I had several no-shows for interviews, and I had to deal with the challenges of the Chew Project moving to new premises. Thus, it took two months to successfully complete three new interviews. I was also unable to recruit any participants under the age of 25, even though teenagers and young adults compose the project's predominant and decidedly fragile population. I reflect on these challenges more fully using an intersectional lens in Chapter 5. In addition, my doctoral research questions had not been formulated at the time of the commissioned study interviews, and as a result I did not have the prescience to explicitly explore certain areas of inquiry (e.g., the individual's personal meaning of resilience) in those interviews. However, the natural conversations that emerged from the commissioned study organically touched upon aspects of risk, resilience, and sex work that were relevant, useful, and thus apropos as raw data for my doctoral study.

Reporting & Utilization of Results

"Research knowledge authorizes views and perceptions about the researched" (Mertens, 2009, p. 67). This study is situated in a transformative paradigm, the purpose of which is to transform societal systems and structures based on research results (Mertens, 2009). This requires research knowledge to be continuously and transparently disseminated to and employed

by appropriate stakeholders in order to facilitate social action and justice. When action is stimulated by inquiry, catalytic authenticity is achieved, a key criterion for quality in qualitative research (Mertens, 2009). I argue in this dissertation, with Grace (2015), that the transition from a stigmatizing, problems approach toward a capacity-building, solutions approach to engendering SGM resilience requires greater synchronicity among research, practice, and policy. My contribution to this triad of catalytic authenticity is, for now, primarily in the realm of research, with the central audience of my doctoral dissertation being social science researchers with an interest in resilience psychology, queer methods, and the ethical challenges that permeate research with marginalized groups.

In the year or two after graduation, I will endeavour to publish my findings in an approachable book format that would appeal also to those in caring professional practice, such as social workers, healthcare providers, and police officers, as well as policymakers. Following Mertens (2009), one way I can share my knowledge and be influential as an academic researcher is to continue networking with other academics, youth-serving agencies, and policymakers, in order to relate the lived experiences of the vulnerable SGM young people who participated in my research. Dissemination and utilization of my research findings—the voices of the research participants themselves—to as wide an audience as possible constitutes a vital piece of my endeavour to support SGM youth and young adults as they grow into resilience. This proactive stance is influenced by Ungar's (2011) perspective: "Culturally distinct strategies to promote resilience will only be seen as successful when a cultural minority is able to negotiate with cultural elites for recognition of their solutions to problems. Empirical research is one critical element to these negotiations *but is seldom available to bolster the arguments made by those who are marginalized*" (p. 10, emphasis mine).

This chapter has laid out the design and orientation of this empirical doctoral study as it explores and promulgates the culturally distinct resilience strategies employed by a sample of young male sex workers in Edmonton. The following chapter details the queer critical posthuman theoretical and methodological architecture that I have developed to frame notions of hidden resilience and reflexivity in ways that are ethical, meaningful, and authentic. This philosophically driven meta-framework has at its nucleus the ecological principle of decentrality, a socialist equity prism that refracts the beam of individual responsibility into a rainbow of collective accountability that inheres across sociopolitical strata. This principle, which sets up my reflexive theory and methodology, is described next.

Chapter 3: A Reflexive Theory & Methodology

Theoretical Framework

> If resilience is to add to the psychological sciences and inform interventions, our focus needs to shift from changing individuals to making social and physical ecologies facilitative.
> (Michael Ungar, 2011, p. 6)

The Principle of Decentrality

As mentioned in the first chapter, Ungar's (2011) notion of decentrality is a key principle informing my research. By decentring the individual, I seek to avoid the error of attribution that is common in resilience studies that have circumscribed personal agency as the linchpin of resilience processes while ignoring broader economic, sociopolitical, and cultural factors that shape paths of development (Ungar, 2012). As Grace (2013) points out, it is this contextual focus on systems and structures that is often ignored in the neoliberal rush to blame vulnerable individuals when the real problems are ecological in nature.

This angle of decentrality facilitates capacity-building strategies that are multi-faceted, synchronized, and synergistic, providing resources that are "sufficiently intense, culturally appropriate, and meaningful enough to result in the greatest number of [young people] growing up well" (Ungar, 2011, p. 13). By shifting the focus from individuals to sociocultural ecologies and broader mechanisms of power and privilege, we can better support street-involved and homeless SGM young people instead of blaming them for their vulnerability and for setbacks and negative outcomes often beyond their control. Thus, our work needs to be conscious of their locations in the world beyond stereotyping or bending them to fit some conception of what the

mainstream deems acceptable. Moreover, we need to transgress and transform the systems and structures that serve to diminish and disempower them.

I contend that the principle of decentrality in resilience theory aligns neatly with a queer critical posthuman ontology, an eco-philosophy that embeds and extends the subject in an expansive, historical, relational matrix and reconstitutes agency as a nebulous, elusive dynamic that defies the traditional boundaries of the sovereign, self-contained individual. As Ungar (2012) maintains, embracing agency this way within a social ecological theory of resilience "is like turning a pair of binoculars around and looking at the world differently" (p. 28). Moreover, his argument for decentrality "runs counter to popular culture, which still promotes the notion that individuals alone can 'pull themselves up by their own bootstraps' and that structural disadvantage is no excuse for poor development" (2011, p. 5). A queer critical posthuman eco-philosophy, as I develop it below, espouses an ecological approach to resilience that problematizes systems and structures and moves away from unconstructive strategies that stereotype and stigmatize vulnerable individuals as sources of social disorder (Grace, 2015; Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009; Marshall & Leadbeater, 2008). This eco-philosophy aligns with Harvey's (2012) assertion that "cultural blind spots" (p. 326) hamper our best efforts to maximize the flourishing of queer young people. As I argue in the following section, the most hazardous blind spot may be an uncritical Western obsession with the unified, agential, and all-culpable subject.

Decentrality is an integral strand of my interpretation of reflexive practice as well. Specifically, as an embodied posthuman ethos of advocacy, reflexivity decentres me, the researcher, encouraging instead self-questioning and an ecological, intersectional, egalitarian, and epistemologically humble approach to inquiry. Reflexivity engaged this way gives research a

critical edge, and such engagement has to be deliberate: "If the goodness of reflexivity is due to its mere practice, then reflexivity becomes a humanistic celebration of the researcher's centrality. The same outcome would of course result from the absence of reflexivity. Between these two extremes one can conceptualize a view of reflexivity that underscores the critical function of opening possibilities by engaging in ongoing questioning and doubting" (Gemignani, 2017, p. 193). As I develop it below, a relational, queer critical posthuman reflexivity works fastidiously to keep me grounded and ecologically minded, reminding me that this project, while geared toward my own personal and professional development as a scholar, is ultimately about peripheralized young people who navigate complex social ecologies and who have valuable lived expertise in their own lives.

Posthumanism & a New Subject

> The Greeks had no single term to express what we mean by the word 'life'. They used two terms that, although traceable to a common etymological root, are semantically and morphologically distinct: *zoe*, which expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods) and *bios,* which indicated the form or way of living proper to an individual or group.
> (Giorgio Agamben, 1998, p. 674)

Rosi Braidotti (2013) imagines a melding, an alliance, of the various branches of philosophy, the sciences, and the arts to provoke encounters "that shatter the flat repetition of the protocols of institutional reason" (p. 169). Drawn to her affirmative, creative posthuman sensibility, I have found Braidotti's reflexive—that is to say painstakingly introspective and yet fervently ecological—work harnesses concepts, traceable to Spinoza, Deleuze, and others, that penetrate the ontological heart of my axiological convictions. With the conceptual repertoire of radical immanence, vitalist materialism, and *zoe,* I have found pathways to a more cogent and

productive understanding of the epiphany I had lying in bed one night that shook me to my core in early adulthood, when my faith in the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent Creator was shattered. At that moment, metaphysics collapsed into the purely material, and I was forced to accept the new reality that we exist in this universe as thrown stardust, ultimately inculpable and yet infinitely responsible for ourselves and one another.

Conceptually, radical immanence describes a monistic ontological approach that borrows from the thought of the 17th-century philosopher, Baruch Spinoza (Braidotti, 2013). Spinoza's monistic universe of oneness, the division of which into "things" is seen to be artificial and arbitrary, contradicts the binarism of Descartes' mind-body dualism (i.e., the non-physical nature of mental phenomena) and Hegel's dialectic (i.e., the opposition of a thesis and antithesis as constitutive of all progress). The Spinozist legacy that informs posthumanism, then, is a vitalist materialism that is less divisive, defining all living matter as intelligent and self-organizing and emphasizing the "non-human, vital force of Life" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 60). This *zoe,* I now realize, is that force which, in the absence of God or any other phantasm of transcendence, binds and indebts us to one another. It is a call to action to recognize and give voice to the marginalized, vulnerable, and disenfranchised, such as the participants in my study.

Since that postfoundational rupture in early adulthood that came with the personal death of God and the disintegration of free will, I have come to find existentialist avenues for reconciling the absurdity of a meaningless universe with my desire to live with purpose. The 20th-century existential philosopher, Albert Camus (1942/1955), put it this way:

> What is absurd is the confrontation of the irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man [*sic*] as on the world. For the moment it is all that links them together. It binds them one to the other

> as only hatred can weld two creatures together. This is all I can discern clearly in this measureless universe where my adventure takes place. (p. 20)

While secular society has had decades, even centuries, to adjust to the "death of God" at the hands of the Enlightenment—a vacuum made more vehement than ever late in Camus' short life with the onslaught of yet another global war—for quite some time I was perplexed and disillusioned. It followed that my only coherent philosophical position was to live in what Camus (1942/1955) calls *revolt*, "a constant confrontation between man [*sic*] and his own obscurity... an insistence upon an impossible transparency" (p. 52). That is to say, rather than attempting to accept or ignore the absurdity of human existence, I have actively harnessed its power to foster compassion, for myself and others. After all, without recourse to absolute freedom of the will via an extra-ontological soul, our thoughts and behaviours, character and personality, our very sense of self, are bound by material preconditions over which we have no ultimate control. Empathy, not culpability, becomes the name of the game, and while agency remains a crucial piece in the maximization of human flourishing, an authentic subject position requires a remapping and reconstitution of agency, as circumscribed by conditions of (im)possibility.

Since entering graduate school in 2013, I have channeled my "revolt" into scholarly and personal alliances and advocacy, engaged in thoughtful deconstructions, and have at times pushed the envelope with the sorts of so-called "deviants" and "evildoers" for whom I rally compassion and empathy (see Hankey, 2017). The recent posthuman turn (Braidotti, 2018) has revealed to me a school of thought devoted to giving voice to the stereotyped and misunderstood, to the "missing people … and actualizing minority-driven knowledges through transversal alliances" (Braidotti, 2017, p. 92). This emancipatory endeavour has given me a transgressive and transformative sense of purpose and conviction. It also underscores a litany of ethical and

epistemological dilemmas to be grappled with, if not disarmed, through reflexive contemplation and action, as discussed below.

In this study, and in my daily life, I draw from my understanding of Braidotti's (2013) eco-philosophy of critical posthumanism, as it overcomes the humanist, unitary vision of the subject and enhances the sense of interconnection between self and others by dismantling the obstacle of self-centred individualism. As Jones and Calafell (2012) put it, when we treat identity as a fixed, stable entity that emanates from within an individual, we find it easy to blame that person for their problems. As Oudshoorn (2015) admonishes while arguing for a harm reduction strategy for youth justice, we have become addicted to punishment:

> It gives us a high, a feeling of superiority. The "bad" people get what they deserve. The "good" people continue to feel good because they aren't one of "them." But when we look at who is "bad"—who our young offenders are—we discover that they're people with childhood traumas, with mental health challenges, and with addictions. We discover that they're Indigenous peoples, and people struggling in poverty—essentially, people who are acting out because others have already punished them. Whether it was a dad who beat his son, or colonialism that beat down Indigenous peoples, there is pain. (p. 249)

To avoid this pitfall of self-centred individualism and retribution, I turn to Braidotti's vitalist materialism, which rejects transcendence and instead embraces a radically immanent monism "based on the centrality of the relation to multiple others" (2013, p. 56) as well as *zoe,* or the generative vitality of life in its non-human aspects. From such a social ecological perspective, each of us is put in the precarious position of being consummately responsible to and for one another and the rest of the living, breathing planet (Hankey, 2017; St. Pierre, Jackson, & Mazzei, 2016).

The radical deconstruction of the humanist subject illuminates and resists the "unacknowledged hierarchy within this humanity, which, as a consequence, has led to the oppression of … individuals and groups within the human species" (Herbrechter, 2013, p. 199), individuals and groups such as those who comprise my population of study. As Snaza (2015) argues, "The human is not something we 'are'; it is an error superimposed on complex and mobile relations among a wide variety of bodies, life-forms, objects, and material singularities" (p. 27). Instead, the relational, embedded posthuman subject reveals a nature-culture continuum situated in the material structure of the extended self (Braidotti, 2013), undoing hierarchies between human beings (Conley, 2016), and fomenting a novel mode of human self-understanding as an embodied interpenetration of mental and physical processes constituting a dynamic identity (Herbrechter, 2013). This posthuman subject springs from a nonhierarchical ontological web (Morris, 2015) of copresence and proximity (Kim, 2015) which, as I have stated elsewhere, "vivifies a dignified life worthy of infinite compassion, regardless of past or future transgressions" (Hankey, 2017, p. 76).

This leveling of the ontological playing field does not discount the privilege I enjoy as a white, middle-class academic juxtaposed with my research participants, but it does combat the moral hygienics that marginalize these young people on a daily basis. It shakes us free of the myth of meritocracy and the underlying assumption that those who do not succeed are lazy or bad (Jones & Calafell, 2012). *If I were them, I would have done differently* becomes an incoherent, paradoxical hypothetical. Posthumanism as I see it, then, consummates empathy and extirpates negative judgment and blame, creating a space for transformative research that locates and elevates the "missing people."

Such a decentring of the individual as *causa sui,* or self-caused, aligns, I argue, with Ungar's (2011) principle of decentrality in ecological resilience theory, which contends that young people's positive outcomes are primarily the result of facilitative environments containing accessible, culturally relevant resources that potentiate the development of resilience: "This ecological perspective situates resilience as a theory that emphasizes the nature of the child's social and physical ecology first, interactional processes between the environment and the individual child second, and child-specific propensities toward positive development third" (p. 6). In other words, the universe deals each of us a hand from a discrete deck and the cards we are given cannot simply be replaced through the magic of sheer will. Instead, for some street-involved and homeless young people, one of the few plays that remains available in order to keep from folding altogether is sex work. This study—a co-construction of what constitutes meaningful expressions of resilience—is meant to reflect the relative power of my participants to argue for the legitimacy of their own experiences (Ungar, 2012) and needs to account for "competing truth claims of the intersecting cultures in which [their] lives are lived" (Ungar, 2011, p. 9). As I argue in the following section, a posthuman ontological positioning that seeks to enable the empowerment and legitimization of vulnerable groups is further galvanized using a queer, critical lens.

Queer Critical Posthumanism

Queer slips and slides
between the meanings and the decision…
It is tricky. It is the jester at the ball.
It is less concerned with staying put
and more interested in moving collectively
toward that which has not been,
but might be somewhere
there or here, most likely over the rainbow.
(Adam Greteman, 2014, p. 420)

Braidotti (2017) sees the best parts of contemporary feminist theories as productively posthuman: “Never quite certain as to the human rights assigned to their sex, [sexual and gender diverse people] seize the opportunity of exiting the binary gender system and taking the posthuman leap” (p. 85). Posthuman feminists, she claims, subvert through the perversion of naturalized patterns of sexualized and racialized interaction, enabling the pure dislocation of identities rather than merely spawning counter-identities. While arbitrary closure around identities is sometimes necessary to facilitate political action (Hall, 1992; Eichler, 2010; Grace, 2015; Warner, 2004), Weinstein (2015) calls on us to “destabilize our life comfort zone, remain impure and contaminated, and direct our efforts toward … [a] queer futurity foreclosed by humanisms ... and identity politics of all stripes. Only then may we hope to furnish an aperture into new and queer futures and the prospects for living that constitute them” (p. 238). Grace and Hill (2009) similarly assert that “queer does not mean gaining a seat at the table in a performance that merely exchanges privileges, but instead it demands an altogether new table arrangement” (p. 36). This critical refiguration of life, and the pure dislocation of identities, “outside the orbit and primacy of the human and vigilant to its inheritances and organic forms” (Weinstein, 2015, p. 238), fosters a queer critical theoretical engagement that is more expansive and less fractured than one situated around the traditional unitary subject.

Joy (2015) sees this refiguration as an affirmation of pluralism, a queer, political manoeuvre that is both human and beyond the human. For Joy, the posthuman and queer are intertwined, even equivalent: “The homosexual, the gay, the queer, and the posthuman have been dancing with each other for a long while, in different ways, and this is probably because historically ... so many marginalized groups have always been ‘less than human’” (p. 222). Joy posits two countermeasures to combat this dehumanization. One path is activism and the fight

for more rights as a fully-fledged human; the other is more radical, whereby we dissolve our markers of less-than-human, our Star of David and pink triangle badges, in order to bid the human adieu. In this sense, Joy claims that "queer is always pushing against the limits of not just the 'merely' but also the 'overdetermined' human" (p. 223).

This overdetermined human to whom she refers, I expect, is the soul-saturated Cartesian subject who can, with the wizardry of sheer will (or, purportedly, with strength from the divine), always find a magical ace up their sleeve—and, crucially, expects everyone else can as well. From a critical posthuman perspective, finding that ace and pulling oneself up by their bootstraps is not only a metaphysically flawed directive, it is also inundated with disparity. Instead, posthumanism circumscribes human agency and freedom in a frame of intelligibility, an epiphenomenon bounded by material conditions and without recourse to an extra-ontological soul—bounded, in other words, by a sociocultural ecology. Noonan (2016) argues that contemporary critical theory's central mandate is to question the veracity of apparently obvious claims, such as, I would suggest, the sanctity of the atomistic, unitary subject. Accordingly, Noonan claims critical theory must labour to uncover the social interests served by commonsense answers to complex questions. Upon illumination of those social interests, he suggests, it becomes clear that immediately obvious answers serve to protect the established powers.

I posit that what have been taken as immediately obvious notions—that we are all "born equal," or that we have a free will and agency that supersedes our material preconditions—are challenged by critical posthuman knowledges: "The dwellers of this planet at this point in time," Braidotti (2017) explains, and as members of the street-involved and homeless population central to my study know all too well, "are interconnected but also internally fractured by the classical

axes of negative differentiation: class, race, gender and sexual orientations, and age and ablebodiedness continue to index access to normal humanity" (p. 93). Posthuman knowledges do not seek to engender a consensus about a new humanity, but instead work to enable the actualization of whom she calls the missing people, "whose 'minor' or nomadic knowledge is the breeding ground for possible futures" (p. 93). This is because missing people are experts in their own lives located within social ecological perspectives. Herbrechter (2013) similarly argues that a critical posthumanism is necessary given humanism's failed "ideological belief in an essential humanity that might stand outside historical change and might exist in political and social relationships that are universal and always available" (p. 47). Conley (2016), meanwhile, warns that any novel model of collective action requires new narratives that resist categories of the epic and heroic, of salvation and universal truth, a reflexive caveat addressed later in this manuscript.

Deconstruction of the universal and the human in the context of "universal" human rights does not necessitate paralysis or the hypocrisy of armchair discourse, however (Hankey, 2018; Snaza, 2015). Instead, a critical engagement with human rights acknowledges the inextricability of politics and ethics—though not without acknowledging the local particularity of these terms as well—and challenges the effectiveness of human rights agendas, embracing contestation and eschewing the blind faith imposed by governments (Zembylas & Bozalek, 2014): "Those who occupy positions of difference, who have been devalued or othered, should be the ones telling their stories and be involved in deliberations about rights. Difference, fluidity and otherness need to be taken seriously so as not to predicate human rights on the assumptions of a normative liberal humanist subject" (p. 40). This claim is fundamental to my research, and to my understandings of agency and resilience with regard to the young people in my study, who find

themselves situated in a chaotic social ecology that devalues, condemns, and others them, turns their difference and fluidity against them, and drowns out their distinctive voices.

Zembylas and Bozalek (2014) contest human rights using an agonistic, oppositional stance, which has its time and place to be sure (a government legislature, for instance). For the purpose of my study, however, I am drawn again to Braidotti (2013), for whom political action is premised on an "affirmative bond that locates the subject in the flow of relations with multiple others" (p. 50), echoing a social ecological resilience discourse. Indeed, in contrast to poststructural feminist Judith Butler's (2009) ontology—which is grounded in universal precariousness or corporeal vulnerability, a precariousness that is differentially distributed in and as *precarity*—Braidotti (2013) resists the reactivity of a framework of vulnerability: "Moving beyond the paralyzing effects of suspicion and pain, working across them is the key to ethics. Posthuman critical thought does not aim at mastery, but at the transformation of negative into positive passions" (p. 134). This affirmative outlook corresponds with the notion of queerness, which entails "an expectation of the unexpected, and the use of time to search for paths to return and respond with more knowledge and empathy" (Pendleton Jiménez, 2009, p. 174), an openness to excess and possibility "in any and all durations and textures" (Airton, 2013, p. 548).

The posthumanist project of dislocating identities and decentring, if not altogether reconfiguring—what I have elsewhere described as *unframing* (Hankey, 2017)—the human, coincides also with a queer politics of anti-normalization. Warner (2004) calls for the queer movement to stop adding letters to LGBTQ research and instead mobilize anyone who does not fit in—that is, Braidotti's missing people, such as homeless and street-involved queer youth and young adults—to argue against normalization altogether: "Everyone can be/is queer. To be straight takes effort: it takes learning your role, performing on cue and denying whatever part of

yourself lies outside of the law" (p. 325). Braidotti (2011) similarly implores us to take up queer as a process and verb, not a brand of identity politics. Perhaps most vitally, queer theory is inherently critical, allowing a reconceptualization of identity in the context of power and resistance, a fundamentally political endeavour (de Jong, 2014).

Thwarting demarcation and closure, queer theory is not simply contained within sterile discourses of gender and sexuality; it is intersectional, colliding with ability, race, ethnicity, age, location, and class, and tending toward broader appraisals of oppression and privilege. Moreover, queer is always in flux, "a continuously changing assemblage of ideas that can mutate, renew, and be replaced" (Rasmussen & Allen, 2014, p. 433), saturated with a sense of excitement, boldness, boundary-breaking, and new perspectives (Rasmussen, Gowlett, & Connell, 2014). Queer, writes Greteman (2014), "is a promiscuous and loose project that seeks to give life to those whose life has often been taken as unlivable, unintelligible, or uninhabitable. Queer and its 'theory' is a matter of 'aspiration'—drawing breath, giving breath—that inspires survival and thrival" (p. 421).

While both queer and critical constitute a "de-centering philosophy," each with its own emancipatory premises (Jones & Calafell, 2012, p. 962), this is not to say the concepts are equivalent or interchangeable. As I see it, queerness can permeate critical theory and could be perhaps understood as metatheory, as the mode in which critical mobilization is embedded, with posthumanism providing an even broader ontological framework in which to situate a queer critical praxis. Accordingly, to my mind, posthumanism, critical theory, and queer theory make for extraordinary axiological bedfellows in a master suite of transformative research.

Methodology

> Qualitative inquiries require a queering—a freeing—
> that enables and appreciates polymorphous
> possibilities and kinetic subjectivities.
> (Joshua Ferguson, 2013, p. 12)

> Researchers are often too afraid to inquire into the outer limits.
> But this is in fact the most important place to explore—
> to think about the unthinkable,
> to speak the unspeakable.
> (James Sheldon, 2010, p. 14)

Queering the Research

This study employs qualitative interviewing with a basic interpretive methodology soaked in queer critical posthumanist perspectives. Since the heart of my research is queer, fluidity and openness pervade my methodological approach and relationships with research participants. This incorporates a willingness to draw from a range of disciplinary methods while committing to research in sites like the Chew Project that have not previously found legitimation, and in contexts that are not constrained by traditionally fixed categories, labels, and rules (Dadas, 2016; Mizzi & Stebbins, 2010). Ferguson (2013) suggests that the heart of qualitative inquiry is inherently queer since it engenders no essence or logical prescription, given the uniqueness of each research project's goals. Queer resists denotation and categorization, instead reflecting "a continuously changing assemblage of ideas that can mutate, renew, and be replaced" (Rasmussen & Allen, 2014, p. 433). Thus, queer encourages being open to possibility in engaging differences. Sherlock (2016), meanwhile, describes queer as a set of principles that remains aware of, and seeks to expose and unsettle, power and privilege. She sees this queer bedrock as the coalescence of intersectionality and inclusion. Rankin and Garvey (2015) argue that "intersectionality encourages scholars to understand how systems of oppression intersect to

create structures, political systems, and cultural contexts that shape the experiences of individuals with oppressed identities…. Intersectionality offers researchers new ways to operationalize complex social identities" (p. 81). This lifts out and lifts up differences, including those historically peripheralized.

Mizzi and Stebbins (2010) highlight that identities are complicated and mediated by race, that sexual identifications are possible sites of resistance, and that queer researchers therefore have a mandate to interrogate the tendencies of our own research practices, particularly in making sense of our own and our participants' queerness. Sheldon (2010), too, reminds us that queer research is "about material bodies, not just intellectual ideas…. Queer research is not just about what researchers do when they publish their research; it is also about their practices in the field" (p. 8). Accordingly, throughout this study I bear in mind Levy and Johnson's (2011) best practices for queer research, which can be condensed as follows: 1. Be comfortable with fluidity; 2. Be attentive to identity; 3. Be prepared for the unknown; 4. Be ready for questions; 5. Be sensitive; and 6. Be an advocate.

Employing a methodology with a queer core comes with its share of inherent challenges. For one, queer is intrinsically indefinite, making queer research always relational and open to ambiguity (Levy & Johnson, 2011). Concomitantly, there is uncertainty and flux when doing research with any individual whose identity is so fluid; since queer defies a fixed definition, researchers must be prepared for anything (Levy & Johnson, 2011). Mizzi and Stebbins (2010) speak to this from their perspective as queer researchers:

> Our "insider" queer subjectivities might advance access to a particular type of queer knowledge; however, what we wish to question is that given the spectrum of queerness that remains pervasive in queer circles, how can we hope to make culturally intelligible

> connections with our queer participants?... Queer understandings of sexuality have many layers, identities, communities and practices. (p. 23)

In order to address this challenge as a queer researcher, I adopt a reflexive strategy, described below, whereby I actively attend to racial, ethnic, age-related, socioeconomic, geographical, and other intersections of identities. Furthermore, trust and rapport are developed with participants through full disclosure and transparency, as well as an emphasis on confidentiality, anonymity, harm reduction, and non-judgmental alliances.

A queer methodology can enable critically transformative research, which emphasizes social justice and human rights and places "high priority on developing relationships with members of the community, building trust, and recognizing the expertise that community members have" (Mertens, 2010, pp. 226-227). With respect to studying resilience, Ungar (2004) adds that research must "elicit and add power to minority 'voices' that provide unique localized definitions of positive outcomes while accounting for the researcher's own bias" (p. 18). This suggests that ethical resilience research naturally assumes a critical bent. Arguably, a queer perspective amplifies this criticality by challenging normativity, shaking up binaries, expecting the unexpected, and pushing back against arbitrary boundaries and constraints. Accordingly, situating my doctoral research in a queer critical framework should advance conceptions of resilience in policy and practice that account for the lived experiences, self-appraisals, and agency of the young people themselves. The final section of this chapter describes the reflexive process that accentuates this discursively empowering methodology.

A Queer Critical Posthuman Reflexivity

> Reflexivity is the means
> —the action, the movement, the performance—
> by which we engage a personal and queer scholarship.
> (Tony Adams & Stacy Jones, 2011, p. 108)

> We must disrupt the idea that the human/self
> exists prior to the act of research.
> (Stephanie Springgay, 2015, p. 77)

A synthesis of queer critical posthuman sensibilities and a reflexive ethos serves to underscore the conditional nature of the research interview, from conception to design, recruitment, data collection, analysis, and dissemination. It reminds us that the knowledge gleaned from these conversations is co-constructed and emerges from the socially nomadic and transversal positioning of researcher, participant, and non-human actors like recording devices in a particular space at a local moment in time. Attempts to account for this contingency will always themselves be partial; moreover, data analysis, too, is fraught with unconscious bias and erosive assumptions.

A queer critical posthuman reflexivity embodies an ethic of the everyday that encourages us to learn and grow from our reflexive shortcomings, to overcome complacency no matter how exhausting, to deconstruct instead of reifying easy binaries and discursive bondage, and to be accountable for our privilege rather than merely inclusive of difference. A queer critical posthuman reflexivity decentres the researcher, the participant, the agentic, and the normative, reconstellating these elements in a vitalist, materialist sociocultural ecology of research and advocacy that empowers the missing people and illuminates the structural impediments to their flourishing, all the while reminding us to be cautious of the idea that some accounts are inherently more accurate and authoritative than others.

Reflexivity has been described as the process of "inquiry in itself" in relation to advocacy and acting in the world (Gemignani, 2017, p. 196). Above I have described queer theory as something of a toolkit with which a scholar can, among other tasks, tease apart the socially constructed and intricate latticework of sexuality and gender. I have depicted posthumanism as the decentring and exonerating lens through which research with persons may be perceived and interpreted. But, as I hope will become clear below, I use my grasp of queer theory and posthuman existentialism to help me understand what it means to be reflexive and to act as a researcher-advocate able to work well with a vulnerable population whom I feel an ethical and social responsibility to support. It encapsulates my worldview and unconscious assumptions, my critical ethos.

To reach my goal, I have drawn on an array of scholars in the social sciences and humanities to conceptualize reflexivity, imbue it with queer critical posthuman sensibilities, and posit a few insights that hopefully will continue to improve my capacity and authority to conduct research as ethically and meaningfully as possible.

Reflexive is as Reflexive Does

Finlay (2012) thinks of reflexivity as a sort of critical lens that works to illuminate relational and ethical dilemmas that permeate the research process. She maintains that reflexivity can take the form of anything from a systematic methodological audit to something more spontaneous, artful, and creative in considering the complex intersubjective relationships among interviewers and interviewees. Using the language of pragmatism, McIntosh and Hobson (2013) see reflexivity as an embodied ethic of the everyday, and one that continually grows out of its own failings, provided we are willing to learn from our mistakes: "Embracing failure does not mean we accept it without change. Failure alone is hurtful and unreflexive. Reflexive failure

presses us to recognize that we will fail. At some point, [we] will overlook the politics of race [or other relational differences] and when we do so, we fail; but to stop there continues the separation" (pp. 19-20). May and Perry (2017) interpret reflexivity in a postfoundational, metacognitive mode, where the goal is to take nothing for granted and to be in a constant state of flux, humility, and skepticism in order to operate within the parameters of a realistic assessment of the limits of knowledge. They see reflexivity as iterative, continuous, and never self-satisfied. In a similar vein, Gemignani (2017) asserts that reflexivity is not a one-time or daily confessional that absolves us of our privilege, but an ongoing and embedded process of recognizing and embracing qualitative research's temporal, spatial, and relational dimensions in the pursuit of inquiry that is innovative, fluid, and even revolutionary.

What, then, does reflexivity *do?* Whom and what is it *for?* Dunbar, Rodriguez, and Parker (2001) suggest that qualitative researchers must work to justify asking our interviewees to "psychologically disrobe in front of strangers" (p. 17). Reflexivity, as they see it, is meant to guide us in our tenuous justifications for this exposure and to ensure that the interview process minimizes harm. McIntosh and Hobson (2013) suggest reflexivity can facilitate unconventional and unlikely alliances, engendering empathy and compassion, illuminating common ground, and enabling social transformation. Braidotti (2011), Finlay (2012), and McDonald (2013) see reflexivity as that which enables us to work through the murkiness of divergent social locations between researcher and participant, ushering us toward a co-construction of knowledge that is aware of its own contingency. Finlay (2012) contends that

> the lens of relational reflexivity allows us to put the intersubjective and relational dimensions between interviewer and interviewee under the microscope. Researchers have the possibility of focusing on the overt relational dimension between researcher and

> participant as well as the tacit, implicit intersubjective realm, where less conscious dynamics flourish. The (inevitably) emergent, situated, and negotiated nature of the interviewer-participant relationship demands reflexive attention, whatever the focal point. (p. 324)

Braidotti's (2011) posthuman notion of the social nomad is salient here, reminding us that, while a single interview is a tangible, visceral event among living, feeling, willful, individual persons, it is also a snapshot in time of a non-unitary, multilayered, affective assemblage of intersecting subjectivities embedded in a vibrant, dynamic social ecology. We and the person we have with us today may co-construct a very different subjective cross-section and concomitant narrative tomorrow or next month, particularly with Chew Project clientele whose lives are more transient and chaotic compared to a typical young person's. Reflexivity, as Dunbar and colleagues (2001) relate, implores us to consider, "What subject will be activated by interview questions? Whose voice might be heard or silenced?" (p. 9). What this indeterminacy creates is a co-construction of knowledge that is openly partial and indeterminate, an emergent phenomenon. At the same time, it is rich and meaningful, as reflexive contemplation and action potentiate discursive empowerment, emboldening the marginalized and disenfranchised to come to voice as experts in their own lives that are ultimately marked by both vulnerabilities and possibilities (Grace, 2015; Ungar, 2004).

Queer Reflexivity, the Flux Capacitor

Reflexivity and queerness operate in concert, perhaps even espousing one another, with their shared ethical and epistemological commitments to fluidity, flux, becoming, and intersectionality (Adams & Jones, 2011; Jones & Calafell, 2012). These can be seen as synergistic tools with which "those of us marked as Other can begin to intervene in our own

complicity of the perpetuation of the status quo by unpacking the politics inherent in our lived experience" (Jones & Calafell, p. 963). This is a basis for productive agency constituted as a vital social ecological project. While Foley (2002) and Lennon (2017) harness queer reflexivity as a useful postfoundational processual apparatus for capturing and working within the tensions of antithetical and yet mutually valid constructs like insider and outsider, agentic and deterministic, coherent and disjunctive, my research to advocacy and action project requires queer reflexivity to be something more. As I interpret it, queer reflexivity requires a departure from the exclusive principles of either/or, with moves into the more comprehensive and inclusive realm of both/and as well as the aporia of always-not-yet (Hankey, 2018; Todd, 2009). These moves would amount to queer reflexivity tentatively grasping at itself in a sustained process of improvised reference and reflection.

In addition to its aporetic grasp of binaries and its attentiveness to fluidity and flux over time, queer reflexivity unsettles categorical displacements. McDonald (2013) contends that with its deconstruction of identity categories, queer reflexivity renders certain questions unproductive, such as whether White people can do research with people of colour, or whether straight people can do research with SGM populations. McIntosh and Hobson (2013) likewise relate that "when we build coalitions between people of contested identities, we actively deconstruct normative cultural politics of hierarchy and begin the generative process of rebuilding a more just social order" (p. 4). Still, while these categorical checkboxes may be contingent and assailable, the sociocultural realities surrounding them are tangible and real. Accordingly, Sarah Hunt, who is Indigenous, and Cindy Holmes, who is White—both of whom identify as queer—co-construct a decolonizing queer politics, imploring non-Indigenous queers like Holmes and me to work within a politics of accountability rather than mere inclusion: "There remains a disturbing lack of

commitment by White settlers to challenging racism and colonialism in queer and trans communities (including within friendships and intimate relationships) and practicing a politics of accountability to Indigenous people and people of color" (Hunt & Holmes, 2015, p. 162).

From a queer reflexive perspective, then, my spacious apartment, pale freckled skin, and the seamless alignment of my assigned sex with my internal sense of gender do not preclude me from doing research with those who are street-involved and homeless, trans and genderqueer, Indigenous and people of colour, as long as I actively resist the inertia of complacency, comfortability, unreflective inclusion, and self-congratulation. This assertion is bolstered, but in no way entirely justified, by my historicity as a gay boy growing up in what is known as southern Alberta's bible belt, which did imbue me with a visceral sense for how muzzling and lonely this world can be for those who are marked as Other. In this way, I am superpositioned as insider and outsider and resist the categorical displacement of fixed labels (Lennon, 2017; McDonald, 2013). As May and Perry (2017) write: "Where one is positioned has consequences. These positions are not, however, fully determining. As such, we can open up a space in which to reflect on alternative ends and thus the means for their achievement" (p. 189).

Posthuman Reflexivity, the Pressure Chamber

Classical liberal humanism has come under intense critique of late. Some have claimed that the Enlightenment-era framework advances an infinitely agentic normative ontology that ignores, obscures, and disavows the material, relational ontology that preconditions and inextricably connects the beings and objects that make up the world, and is thus complicit with modernity's oppressions and exclusions (Burman, 2018; Hankey, 2017; Snaza & Weaver, 2015). Some have argued that humanist discourse limits politics to the logic of rights, taming us into a moralistic, reactive system of claims and compensations rather than an affirming, generative,

visionary work that imagines radically alternative possible scenarios (Braidotti, 2011; Weaver, 2015). It has been suggested that a fixed and closed model of the subject that laments the exclusion of certain Others from the category of the human lends intelligibility to this delimitation and proliferates the taken-for-granted determination of who counts as a proper subject of politics (Hankey, 2017; Joy, 2015; Snaza, 2015): "As long as that determination is merely altered (however progressive and universalist its motivations), the structural possibility of dehumanization is always already present" (Snaza, 2015, p. 26).

Enter posthumanism, which has emerged as a coherent transdiscipline only in the last few decades, but which actively resists the gravity of the progressivist narrative and does not presume itself to be the historical supersession of humanism; it encapsulates instead a political model of affirmation that experiments with radically alternative and disruptive modes of thought (Braidotti, 2011; Burman, 2018; Springgay, 2015). The posthuman inquirer upends the subject-object research relationship, working to minimize the methodocentrism inherent to humanist conceptions of subjectivity, which happens when "the methodology of a researcher and their faithfulness to a method is the primary concern of [the] research. Methodocentrism relegates most humans … and non-sentient objects to a subordinate position in which the role of these beings in their own reality and other realities is removed from the researchers' work" (Snaza & Weaver, 2015, p. 9). Methodocentrism, then, is discursively disempowering. Conversely, a cornerstone of posthuman analyses is that they "pressurise the human/non-human relation to attend to entanglements and complexities of human, animal, nature and environment" (Burman, 2018, p. 1605), an organic process that Lennon (2017) suggests is a melding of "the personal and the political, the material and the discursive and the epistemological and ontological" (p. 544). What emerges from this pressure chamber is a dynamic sociocultural ecology, a turbulent and

shifting but normatively manicured topography. A queer critical posthuman meta-framework illuminates and exposes the contingent and ecologically diffuse nature of resilience, blowing holes in the neat subject-object teleology that inevitably brings the marble of responsibility swirling back to the *causa sui* vortex of the individual unit, to the ubiquitous rhetoric of whether this unfortunate situation could have been avoided if the subject in question had just been *more human*.

The well-intentioned inadequacy of reflexivity in the conventional humanist mode is described well by Gemignani (2017) as "a process of reflecting on the mirror's mirroring and, especially, on the person who holds the mirror, all of which are seen as separate moments and agents" (p. 190). He goes on to posit that a relational ontology engendered by posthuman perspectives deflects our analysis of each term or party as an atomistic unit to instead conceive them more thoughtfully in their relation to one other and to the discursive contexts that enabled their "phenomenological presence" (p. 193). Springgay (2015) also wants to untether our research from humanist orientations, opening it up to "consider technicities that are immanent to its own research design. We must disrupt the idea that the human/self exists prior to the act of research" (p. 77). This freeing of reflexivity from humanist constrictions contributes to nonreductive and transformative knowledge activation, exposing patterns of difference, divergence, and multiplicity that emerge from self-organizing—but not self-caused—human and non-human agents (Gemignani, 2017; Lennon, 2017)—from the embodiment of *zoe*.

With this chapter I have unfolded my ontological, epistemological, methodological, and axiological roadmap, which has guided the conception and implementation of this study, and which actuates my personal journey as a reflexive researcher-advocate and queer critical change agent more broadly. The following chapter presents the results of my doctoral research

interviews, conveying participants' experiential accounts of how they construct resilience—phenomena that stand out as stressors and risks, characteristics and resources they count as assets, and signs they have come to recognize to indicate that they are doing well. Moving into Chapter 5, I discuss research participants' atypical coping strategies and the ways in which they leverage resilience differently.

Chapter 4: Interview Data

Data for this study are comprised of eight interviews: five interviews with four Chew Project clients ages 25 to 29; one interview with an older adult (Jeremy, age 38) who engaged in sex work as a younger adult, who availed himself of Chew Project supports while engaged in the sex trade, and who is now employed as a part-time Chew Project peer support worker; and two interviews with Darcy, the Chew Project's full-time lead intervention and outreach worker. As survivors exemplifying successful development in their present roles as Chew Project workers supporting and mentoring vulnerable young people, Jeremy and Darcy offer a contextual and relational richness to the narratives conveyed by the young adult sex workers in this study. However, for the purposes of data analysis, I lift out Darcy as a unique participant apart from the others; while his interviews did touch briefly on his personal history as a young adult sex worker, the primary focus of these conversations was the Chew Project and his role there, as well as the lived experiences of the project clients he cares for. Conversely, my conversation with Jeremy zeroed in on his own personal experiences as a sex worker and previous client of the Chew Project, while his current employment as a support worker emerged as a secondary component of our interview; accordingly, where appropriate, I have grouped him in my analysis with the young adult participants.

This study began in 2018 when I co-facilitated three interviews with young adults who spoke of their experiences in sex work and one interview with the lead Chew Project worker as part of the Children's Services commissioned study (Grace et al., 2019). I conducted four additional interviews (two follow-ups and two with new participants) in Fall 2019 and Winter 2020 with my own University of Alberta Research Ethics Board approval (Study ID: Pro00092803). Interviews ranged in length from 15 to 50 minutes. In all, five primary themes

emerged from the data: *Stressors and Risks; Harm Reduction; Building and Recognizing Assets; Atypical Coping and Problem-Solving Strategies; and Hopefulness and (Hidden) Signs of Thriving*. I begin this chapter by introducing these themes, as reflected by and filtered through the perceptions and experiences of the lead intervention and outreach worker. Next, I present each additional research participant individually, as a whole person, elucidating how these themes emerged from their accounts of their own unique lived experiences. Pseudonyms are used to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, and line spacing has been adjusted for research participant block quotes for ease of reading and to clearly differentiate interviewee dialogue from quotes derived from research literature.

Lead Intervention & Worker: Building Trust & Nurturing Hope

Darcy is 49 years old and is a trained counsellor with more than two decades of experience working with vulnerable populations. He has been the Chew Project's lead intervention and outreach worker since the project was launched in 2014, working a tremendous amount of unpaid overtime and relying on tenuous government grants, both to make a living and to sustain the Chew Project and the young people who access it. Both a research conduit and willing participant, he is frank and open about his history as a sex worker, having engaged in the sex trade for twelve years to put himself through school and supplement his income. In my interviews with him about the Chew Project's clientele, data reflected the five primary themes listed above.

Stressors and Risks: "Their lives are in chaos and they're trying to survive every hour of every day, so that takes its toll after a while."

Darcy uses the term "youth facing barriers" to describe the population that the Chew Project's services and resources target:

> What that means is these youth are facing, on an everyday scale, barriers like not having a place to sleep, not having something to eat, having to do things most normal young people wouldn't do just to survive. That includes sex work, drugs, things like that. The core group also uses substances and drugs, alcohol, to cope and survive…. And then depression, anxiety, paranoia are also big in those populations as well.

He describes how these pervasive stressors and risks—among them lack of food and shelter, mistreatment by police, violence as a daily threat, substance use, and mental health issues—are often precipitated and exacerbated by family rejection and neglect. Following estrangement from family, these young people also deal with a lack of safe shelters and group homes:

> I hear those things a lot, where it's dangerous to come out and because of that they usually run away or get kicked out. A lot of my trans kids who were in-care—so in a group home setting—said the same thing. The staff kept misgendering them, didn't understand, called them by their dead name [the name they had before transitioning], all those sorts of things. So the mental stress with that is huge. And then a lot reported, too, in those group home settings or shelters, the violence. They get picked on—pushed, bullied, beat up, raped. And that was a common thread again with a lot of the youth that I talk with.

Darcy emphasizes that there are presently no shelters in Edmonton in which SGM young people can feel safe:

> YESS [Youth Empowerment and Support Services] and Nova [House] are the safer bets. But there's still a lot of homophobia and transphobia, even with the staff. And again they're limited with the number of beds and stuff like that, so it makes it really difficult. But the main shelters, none of the youth go there.

Substance use—particularly cigarettes, alcohol, methamphetamine, and gamma hydroxybutyrate **(**GHB)—is a common coping mechanism among Chew Project clientele. According to Darcy, "Crystal meth is still the most used. Again, 'cause it's easier to get than food. And booze they can steal. That's easy. At liquor stores, they steal." Plus, he has been

dealing with a spike in drug-induced mental health issues like anxiety and paranoia in the last year, as he has seen a trend toward young people injecting methamphetamine rather than smoking it:

> And that changed things a lot, because it was way more intense, so I started dealing with way more meth psychosis, way more paranoia, way more increased violence and theft, stuff like that, 'cause they needed that fix. And then it's nothing to see the arms of those kids full of holes and bruises. It looks like someone had beat them, but it's from shooting up and not finding [a vein].

Darcy conveys the bleak reality that intensified substance use, along with environmental stressors like a sudden cold snap or a major drug bust curtailing supply, are among the factors that make suicidal ideation, attempts, and tragic completions so common among the young people he works with: "And then you throw in factors like they're not sleeping at night, they're not eating properly, that takes its toll as well."

Darcy's account of interactions between Chew Project clientele and the police is consistent with the Canadian and international literature reviewed in Chapter 1, as well as survey results from the Chew Project report for the Ministry of Children's Services, Government of Alberta (Grace et al., 2019):

> They just don't trust the police. A lot of them have had a bad experience where there's homophobia, or transphobia especially, and now they have generalized it where every police officer is like that. And so that's become kind of the mentality within those youth, and they have a really negative image of the police. Even though some of them come to [the Chew Project office], and there's great officers. But it's hard to build that trust with them.

When they are assaulted or robbed, as is common, the young people Darcy works with simply do not report the crimes to police. Some have warrants out for their arrest and "the last place they

want to go is jail." For most others, they simply see no point or advantage in reaching out to an institution they feel has victimized and traumatized them as well:

> Sometimes it's comments the police will make…. Or when they're being held at the station, just the general sense, like if they're trans, they're not using the right pronoun, they're not even asking [about] the right pronoun. They're putting them where they can be in danger, like in a cell with people who obviously are homophobic as well. They're not asking the right questions to gain that trust from the youth, and so there's a lot of resistance. And then they get into more trouble because they start getting mouthy and angry.

Darcy describes how, for most Chew clientele who engage in the sex trade, sex work and substance use are inextricable. Sex work pays for their substance use, and substances—particularly methamphetamine—are readily available and often consumed during sex work, which makes unsafe sex more likely:

> A lot of times for these youth, they're not necessarily having sex for pleasure. And so they don't put that much thought and energy into it, or there's a lot of the party and play where they use crystal meth especially and have sex. So if you're high, a lot of times you don't really think about it. [They] just do it, get it done, and get high.

The going rate for sex work is $180 per hour: "The ones that have got it together, that's what they charge. But most just need fast cash. Fifty bucks, sixty bucks, forty bucks." Moreover, Darcy relates that sex trafficking is not an issue among the young people he sees, but sexual exploitation (e.g., failure to pay) and abuse at the hands of clients are common phenomena:

> I'm hearing more and more weapons being involved, things like knives. Last week two of the guys had guns pulled on them, which is never really heard of, but kind of scary. Most times, though, it's just physically they get hit or pushed.

Darcy conveys also how common it is for young persons involved in sex work to struggle with body image: “So they’ll starve themselves ‘cause they want to look good. They see inadequacies in their bodies and that becomes a big deal for them and bothers them. They see more self-harm that way.” While a number of these young people are agonizing over their appearance, a lack of relevant sex education and pervasive client demands for unprotected sex puts them at high risk for contracting STIs, which are often left undetected and untreated:

> If they’re not using condoms, not practicing safer sex, not getting tested, they’re at risk for more things. And the problem is, it’s not just once. I see this with the youth that I get regularly tested. They’ve had gonorrhea two times, they’ve had syphilis three or four times. And I definitely see a correlation, too … when they have syphilis, it affects their mental state right away. ‘Cause it does affect the brain very fast. And so I see when they’re infected, having infectious syphilis, they’re mental state is lower.

Here, with his extensive experience as an intervention and outreach worker, Darcy paints a fairly dark picture of street life and sex work that, for most of the young people he mentors, is riddled with risk. However, the remaining themes that emerged from my interviews with Darcy and young adults involved in sex work splash shades of grey, and even vibrant, hopeful hues, on this portrait of sex work and substance use. Harm reduction is a key mandate of the Chew Project, and in the following section I outline some of the strategies Darcy and the Chew Project use to minimize risk for those engaging in sex work and substance use.

Harm Reduction: “If we didn’t do that, the chance of them not surviving that day would be bigger.”

The Chew Project provides clean syringes and carries Naloxone (opioid overdose) kits to minimize the risk of overdose and/or infection, including HIV, among clientele who use substances. Darcy also supervises and facilitates safe injection:

> I do a lot of wound care, so making sure they're not using the same site all the time. It's nothing for me to take a marker and draw where they should be shooting, but that's harm reduction and if we didn't do that, the chance of them not surviving that day would be bigger.

Chew also provides items promoting safer sex, such as condoms and dental dams, and offers free and confidential STI testing and education at the outreach office. Additionally, Darcy gives his cell phone number to young people accessing Chew Project services, and those youth and young adults who work in the sex trade will often engage with Darcy in "safety plans," checking in with him before and after seeing a new client. Concomitantly, Darcy describes how he and Edmonton Police Service (EPS) have conducted "reverse stings" with sex workers, where they pose online as clients in order to offer immediate supports:

> We used to do reverse stings, where we would go into the hotel room of the person selling, the [EPS members and support workers] would come there, and we'd be like, "Hey, do you need any resources? You're not under arrest. We just want to check in. Are you doing ok?" We're hoping to start that again, but it was me, an officer, and another couple of the workers, just to say, "Hey we're just checking in with you. Do you need to get tested?"

The theme of harm reduction is developed more extensively below in my interviews with young adults, who describe how they access Darcy and the Chew Project to solve problems and minimize harm as they engage in coping and survival behaviours that may put themselves at risk. The next section describes Darcy's impression of how Chew Project clients construct and recognize protective factors leveraging them toward resilience.

Building and Recognizing Assets: "Most of them are collected in what's called a street family."

For the young people who access the Chew Project, Darcy and the other resources and supports offered are among their most prominent building blocks for success. Darcy describes how he and the project are perceived by these young people to exist outside of "the system" (social services, justice, formal education, etc.), which facilitates trust- and rapport-building, enabling clientele to cope and solve problems:

> I'm kind of outside that realm a little bit and so it's easier for me to build that trust, and so I have to make sure all the time that I have followed through with what I do and am really careful not to promise anything. And then housing—no one really wants to be on the street, so I have a conversation about what would not being on the street look like, and using that as kind of my roadmap to maybe seek out group homes or foster care or some other supported living.

He also supports young people with medication adherence and getting to medical appointments, and he helps them navigate the justice system, for instance by encouraging and reminding them to see their probation officers and by liaising with police: "I'm the line between the police and them, so it feels safer, and then I also advocate where they may not be able to advocate for themselves."

Darcy and the Chew Project compose a crucial support system, but they are not the only assets available to many of the young people served by the project. For some of the sex workers Darcy reaches, "johns" or clients can also be a source of strength:

> There's some positive [to sex work], because for some of them, the regulars they see, it's almost like having a relationship or father figure—the youth get to be taken care of for a little bit. So that has a positive impact.

Darcy also describes how street-involved and homeless young people become part of a "street family" who look after one another, though it is often through some form or another of vigilante justice: "Within those family units, it's quite common that if another youth bullied them and they

know who it is, they'll actually go and find that youth and kick the crap out of them." Typically, this sort of "street justice" is precipitated by a lack of trust in, and cooperation from, police.

Conversely, Darcy relates how members of EPS, too, can serve as assets and supports for the young people he works with. Some officers, including two who are openly queer, make an effort to drop by the Chew Project office and visit with clientele, working to cultivate trust and rapport. This is part of a gradual progressive trend Darcy is seeing in police-community relations:

> Today, the gentleman who was just here is a police officer, and the other one, Dan, stops in quite a bit. They're never in uniform, but they stop in. The youth know that they're police officers, and know that they're queer or trans. And that's how we're starting to build some of those relationships. Some of my more positive interactions have been, the police, instead of arresting the youth, say for shoplifting because they were stealing from Mac's [convenience store] or whatever, they will bring them here, and say, "Can we get some resources for this person?" and "Hey, this is Darcy, he can help you out" in the hopes that we can find ways so they don't have to commit survival crimes anymore. And I'm hearing more and more—I've met with a lot of staff sergeants now—about doing that diversion, about getting some training for their staff. So there's some really positive stuff happening within EPS [Edmonton Police Service], and that's partly due to the new chief as well. He's very supportive. But it's starting to change. It's a slow process. So there's been a lot of progress. It's coming. I think there's a lot more education we can do, too, especially with new recruits. And they're not even aware, in our case, that a lot of the guys are engaged in survival crime or survival sex. So it's really educating them.

Darcy recalls one instance of kindness by officers that was particularly salient:

> Once I was out at night with a bunch of youth in a gazebo, and the police went and got hot chocolate for all of them and brought it, instead of kicking us out of the gazebo 'cause we weren't supposed to be there.

Darcy builds these relationships with police and other caring professionals through education and advocacy work, including presentations and interpersonal liaisons, forging partnerships that allow Chew Project staff to work together with other caring professionals to provide holistic intervention and outreach, assisting young people when they need it most. The following section describes the often inventive and unconventional means by which Chew Project clients forge their own unique pathways as they grow into resilience.

Atypical Coping and Problem-Solving Strategies: "Make racism work for you!"

Darcy describes how the young people he works with use transgressive strategies to solve problems and overcome obstacles. For instance, sometimes a client will rip off a sex worker following service delivery by refusing to pay, paying less than the agreed upon amount, or otherwise violating their verbal agreement for compensation (e.g., a place to stay for the night). In these cases, vigilante justice once again prevails:

> That happens quite a bit where they don't get paid. In which case, a lot of the youth then rip off the john for something. And that violence can work the other way as well. Like, if they don't get paid, the john is probably gonna get beat up sometimes, too.

The troubling use of violence and theft to enact street justice in a presently unregulated and underground industry is not the only atypical problem-solving strategy employed by street-involved young people. Ingenuity abounds, as evidenced by this anecdote describing how young street families work together to steal from grocery and liquor stores: "They'll send the poor Indigenous boys in first, and then the white kid goes in and steals, 'cause [the staff] are too busy watching the Indigenous kid. They have a whole system." To which one of the members of our research team quipped, "Make racism work for you!" To my mind, it is unfortunate that young people for whom the system has failed are forced so often to resort to assault and theft in order to survive, and yet arguably their subsistence strategies, however atypical, speak to their

resourcefulness as they build tangible assets and develop "street smarts" while navigating visceral dilemmas that most of us can hardly imagine. Next, I describe the outcomes Darcy has come to recognize indicating that a young person is doing well in spite of the setbacks and obstacles they face.

Hope and (Hidden) Signs of Thriving: "They have more clarity."

As my interviews with research participants make clear, hopefulness is a crucial asset and indicator of thriving for these young people. It is also a guiding philosophy at the Chew Project, as Darcy conveys:

> Hope can be as small as the chocolate bar in the candy bowl by the couch, a clean pair of socks, making sure their basic needs are met because a lot of times they don't have proper clothes, especially in winter. And so that's really how we start things, just making sure those needs are met at that time and that goes a long way to build trust with them.

I ask Darcy how he knows when a young person is doing relatively well. Confoundingly, seeing an individual more or less often at the Chew Project outreach space can be an indicator of floundering or thriving:

> It's a funny question, a good question. It's kind of a mixture of both. I see them when they're really bad, but also when they're really good they tend to come in like today. When you see everyone's doing pretty good, they're just dropping in. So we've had several youth today just drop in, not for a crisis, but to hang out and to eat or get gear or whatever they need. So, the indicators of things doing good are I can tell their mental health is a little better, they have more clarity, they're not necessarily all over the place with their emotions and talking to themselves. They're a bit more clear and able to have conversation. If they're talking about positive things in their life, that's a good thing, instead of the negative things. One client that was here today getting groceries and stuff was like, "This place makes my world." He goes, "I wouldn't be happy right now if I didn't have this place to come to." That means things are doing good. Their lives are still chaos, but it's good.

Darcy is clear that most sex workers he encounters as project clients use sex work as a basic survival mechanism, concomitant with navigating heavy substance use, a lack of safer sex strategies, and potentially dangerous clients. He describes these workers as "freestyle escorts ... because they're not part of an agency, they're lucky if they're housed, they're usually couch-surfing as well, or staying in hotels, stuff like that." However, the experiences of more seasoned, vocational sex workers seem to point to thriving and moving beyond mere survival: "There's more condom use [among] guys who have been doing sex work on a regular basis for a while. They kind of get it. They get tested." Indeed, Darcy indicates that while many sex workers will accept just about any client at a heavily discounted rate in their desperation to get a fix, others are able to exercise their agency to screen clients, engage in safer sex and regular testing, and generate an income of nearly $200 per hour with no overhead. Darcy himself thrived for over a decade as a sex worker:

> But I also was going to school. I had a home. I was using it as a source of income. I have a lot of friends right now, most of them are women, working in escort agencies, it's the same thing—they're paying the mortgage this way, they're putting themselves through school, they're supporting their families by doing this, without the drugs, without the other stuff that goes around with that.

While sex work was largely a positive force in Darcy's life, he is careful not to glamourize it. Still, the negative encounters Darcy experienced as a sex worker arguably could have been mitigated by decriminalization and regulation:

> I've told others that [I did sex work] when I've done presentations and some of the other sex workers that were trying to exit were like, "You're just glamorizing it." I'm like, "No, there's nothing glamorous about it—I still got beat up, assaulted, raped, all those things. But I wasn't tied in with the chaos of drugs and other stuff. I kept things going."

Young Adult Research Participants: The Potential Role of Sex Work on the Path to Resilience

The following profiles of young adult interviewees further demonstrate the spectrum of survival/thriving described by Darcy, leading into a discussion of the potential role sex work can have on the path to resilience for a disenfranchised and pertinacious young person struggling to cope with, and adapt to, a frigid physical, social, and cultural climate.

Sam: Making Choices, Owning Up, & Giving Back

Sam is 29 years old and was born in Oshawa, Ontario. He knew he was gay from a very young age and came out at 14. After high school he was nomadic, moving around Ontario before relocating to Edmonton in an attempt at a fresh start. At the time of the interview, he is homeless, but he is training to work part-time at the Chew Project as an activity coordinator. He has just recently discovered his talent and love for art, and painting in particular. As with all of the Chew Project clients interviewed, Sam struggles with addiction. Themes touched upon in my interview with Sam include Stressors and Risk, Building and Recognizing Assets, Atypical Coping and Problem-Solving Strategies, and Hope and (Hidden) Signs of Thriving.

Stressors and Risk: "I wanted to get out of addiction and depression. Stagnant—that's what brought me to Edmonton." Sam describes a chaotic childhood, including an opiate addiction from the age of 12. He was a self-described "functional addict" until he fell into alcoholism while trying to overcome his opiate dependency:

> My whole life it was just trying to put off withdrawal pretty much. And I was a functioning addict, even though all that time period there was a meth addiction, there was a coke addition. I was always functioning. I was never hitting rock bottom. People were never like, "We're concerned about you." I was always functioning until I got [to Edmonton]. Then I was trying to kick opiates and I was drinking while doing it and then

> the alcoholism really kicked my ass. Like, you can't fake not being drunk like you can fake not being high.

At the age of 18, Sam was struggling to save money for his first move to Toronto and made his initial entry into sex work when he discovered a live-in pornography company:

> I wanted to move to Toronto when I was 18 and I couldn't save up money. An addict can't save money usually. I didn't know how I was going to do it so I found this porn company that you lived in the residence. It wasn't a house and it fooled people 'cause it looked very nice on this camera but it was horrible in real life. It was like the Big Brother of porn sites. So you just lived there and there was cameras everywhere. And you were filmed 24 hours a day. Then a couple of times a week you went and did private shows.

Sam was jaded by his experience there, rattled and demoralized by the constant objectification and surveillance. After abandoning pornography, he began working with a party-promoting company. It paid well and allowed him to set his own hours but was replete with substance use and tumultuous interpersonal dynamics:

> So when I got there, I was this good looking young twink [slim and boyish gay man] and everybody liked me and it was so cool. It felt so good to be the popular one. But then as soon as you stop earning as much money they're cold to you and then that was a horrible feeling. But they're broken people and I'm most comfortable being around broken people, 'cause I'm broken.

After relocating to Alberta, Sam again turned briefly to sex work when he ran out of options for shelter and basic income. His experience with sex work was mixed, impeded by his own conscience and his reluctance to take advantage of others. Sam used Grindr, a popular networking app for men who have sex with men (MSM), to occasionally find those who would provide drugs, alcohol, and/or a place to sleep in exchange for sex. According to Sam, there is exploitation in both directions occurring on Grindr:

> A lot of [Grindr users] are preying off people that are homeless and on drugs and everything like that. But there's just as many people homeless and on drugs preying off the other people on Grindr. They're just trying to hookup, you know! So Grindr is good for getting what you need, but I try not to use people 'cause that makes me feel like an asshole.

Building and Recognizing Assets: "You're a good man, Charlie Brown."

Astonishingly, Sam had no awareness for his creative talent until eight months before our interview:

> December was the first time I drew a picture. I was depressed. I was down. I was in the program and my buddy Aaron had relapsed and it was Christmas and there's my birthday and Christmas and New Year's and my grandma's birthday all in the same week. And then I was sitting there in this homeless area. It's like the homeless hub of Edmonton, I guess. And then I tried drawing and it just started coming out. And then it's just hours and hours and hours and days have been spent drawing and writing and painting and it's just crazy to be able to get everything out that's in your head.

The Chew Project outreach office is now adorned with several of Sam's paintings, an agentic expression of empowerment and control that Darcy describes as "a beautiful expressive way to look into the world through Sam's eyes." Notably, Sam's was the only one of my interviews in which tears were shed. These were happy tears, when Sam became emotional describing the therapeutic power of his newly discovered passion—a poignant and memorable moment for me. It is this embryonic talent, as well as his extensive experience with depression, addiction, and the nuances of street life, that Sam hopes to bring to the table as a coordinator with the Chew Project.

In addition to his artistic talent and substantive lived experience, one of Sam's greatest assets is his generous spirit. In our interview with Sam, Darcy speaks up to provide some praise:

> A good reflection of Sam is that we were getting leftovers from meetings—cookies, doughnuts and all that stuff, sandwiches. And Sam decided to take that stuff and distribute it. So at night he goes around and takes the food to homeless youth or the library or downtown where people are and shares it with them. And so, I think that speaks a lot about who you are.

Invoking the animated musical of the same name, Darcy follows up with a heartfelt compliment: "You're a good man, Charlie Brown." Sam replies with a dismissive shrug and a shy smile, "I'm alright."

Atypical Coping and Problem-Solving Strategies: "You get food anywhere you can. You steal. But I don't feel bad." Despite chronic homelessness over the last year, Sam no longer engages in transactional sex. He feels johns are too often being taken advantage of, and this makes him uncomfortable. Conversely, he does pilfer food from grocery stores as a basic survival strategy, a skill he has honed over many years. When he lived in Toronto with a roof over his head, stealing food was more of a hobby than a necessity. Since then, it has taken on a whole new character as a survival strategy: "I was always terrified before, though [re: stealing in Toronto]. Now I'm not terrified and I think it's 'cause there's a necessity to it. It's not just for fun."

Since completing the alcohol recovery program he was recently enrolled in, Sam no longer qualifies for social assistance. Due to an unknown procedural error, at the time of the interview he is still receiving rent money in his bank account, which he feels is justified since otherwise he would be getting no assistance whatsoever:

> That's the stupidest thing in the world. You think homeless people would need a couple more extra dollars, but if you don't have an address, you don't get money. That doesn't make sense to me. So this is my second month receiving it, but I won't need it after this 'cause I work. But yeah. That's my money, whatever.

Sam has developed his own unique code of survival ethics allowing him to transgress certain resilient systems (e.g., grocery store chains and government social assistance programs) while avoiding the exploitation of potentially vulnerable individuals, such as men seeking companionship on Grindr. He also describes how he and his friend Aaron would break the rules by sneaking out of their residential recovery program at night to deliver goods to people in need:

> Aaron and I used to do that in the winter. We'd get tons of donations at the program we were in and get tons of socks and everything leftover. So Aaron and I would go at night and bring out blankets and warmers and stuff for the people. We'd get into a lot of trouble if we were found doing that though 'cause we were breaking curfew, but it was pretty fun. It's cool and you get to know the people on the streets and you never have to feel in danger as long as you treat them like people.

When seeking treatment for his alcohol use, Sam was forced to hide his sexuality for the first time in fifteen years. He exercised this atypical coping strategy in order to get the help he needed, as he portrays here with levity:

> I went into a recovery program last year—a Christian-based recovery program, so that was interesting. First time since I was 14 that I went back in the closet. 'Cause I've never been to a shelter and then there's this treatment with all these angry old Christian men and I wasn't going to sashay into the room, you know what I mean. So I went back in the closet.

This indignity to Sam's identity served him well, however, as at the time of his interview he is living predominantly sober.

Hope and (Hidden) Signs of Thriving: "I'm owning the pieces and putting my life together." When asked about his current living situation, Sam replies with a chuckle, "Happy." He is presently homeless, but he claims this is an outcome of his own choosing. He has sisters in

Alberta but does not want to burden them, nor does he wish to return home to Ontario in defeat. Instead, he asserts his agency and independence on the winding road to recovery:

> I became homeless because I was living with somebody and they weren't paying rent, even though I knew that. So again, that's a choice to stay there. I got kicked out by choice 'cause I knew she wasn't paying rent, but we got evicted and then I was dropped off at a shelter in Edmonton last year. So then I kind of fought my way out of that type of thing, just to land back in it, but I don't mind it now, 'cause I made the right choices I think.

After a year of full sobriety, at the time of the interview Sam is occasionally using substances, but without cravings or dependency: "I could have money in my pocket for a couple of days and not go buy alcohol or drugs with it. So I use but I don't live to use."

Sam takes ownership of his decisions and sees no point in blaming anyone or anything else, including "the system," for his addictions and homelessness. Instead, with his newfound creative outlet, relative sobriety, and opportunity to work with the Chew Project, Sam is happy, hopeful, and ready to deal with life's inevitable setbacks:

> I'm owning the pieces and putting my life together and I'm going to make it as good for me and the people around me as I can. I'm not going to adhere to any social norm for what I should be doing right now. I'm happy with what I'm doing right now. I have a best friend. I have an opportunity I'm going to pursue. And if it doesn't work, that's life, you know. Bad shit comes, it will pass and all you can do is grow from it.

Chris: Striving for Stability, Structure, & Sobriety

Chris is a 25-year-old Indigenous man who has been acquainted with Darcy and the Chew Project for about three years. He has experienced homelessness, but at the time of the interview he spends most of his time living with his biological parents in Fort Saskatchewan. Though he struggles with addiction and severe mental health issues, Chris has his high school diploma and is interested in pursuing business, travel, and media studies. My conversation with

Chris elucidates the themes of Stressors and Risk, Harm Reduction, Building and Recognizing Assets, and Hope and (Hidden) Signs of Thriving.

Stressors and Risk: "Structure is what I need right now because my mind is everywhere and I'm extremely impulsive right now." Chris met Darcy in 2016 while experiencing severe drug-induced psychosis from chronic methamphetamine use and withdrawal. He believes he has developed multiple personalities and deals with chronic anxiety, paranoia, and impulsiveness, as well as suicidal ideation. At times during the interview he becomes disoriented, confused, and loses his train of thought, though he never seems overwhelmed or distressed, and he does his best to process and convey his thoughts. His self-perceived multiple personalities, perhaps the manifestation of an undiagnosed schizoaffective disorder, not only make it difficult to interact with the world around him—they also amplify his suicidal thoughts:

> Usually when something like that [suicidal thoughts] comes up, the multiple personalities are very clear to me. And so I'm talking to myself and there's a lot of things that don't make sense to other people that I'll talk about. Because I also have some hallucinations, audio hallucinations, visual hallucinations, and that really comes up when I start talking to myself. And… I forgot what I was saying.

Chris's fragmented thoughts and difficulty communicating have made it more difficult for him to access mainstream resources and services, which led to him to the Chew Project. He is also highly impulsive and often engages in self-destructive behaviours that he later regrets. When asked how he finds himself on the street from time to time, he attributes much of his impulsiveness to alcohol use:

> That's me being impulsive right now. I'll get a bunch of money and I'll gamble, and I'll win some money, and then I'll take a taxi to Edmonton and just be acting completely ridiculous. And I'll spend all my money, then I'm walking the streets of Edmonton with

> no money, no way to get home. And it's like, I have a home to go to, but it's in Fort Saskatchewan and I have no money. I don't know why I'm acting this way, but it keeps happening whenever I get drunk.

In the recent past, with no other viable methods of earning money, Chris has engaged in sex work to survive. When he moved into a group home two years prior, curfews and the impracticality of hosting clients steered him instead toward selling drugs for a time:

> Before I was in the group home is when I started to do sex work. It kind of made it harder to do that 'cause I couldn't bring people to my place. But then I started to have a negative influence on other people in the group home, 'cause I was still doing drugs. But the group home, it got me off the streets and hotels, and for a short time I wasn't doing sex work. I was more into learning how to sell drugs and stuff.

When he turned 25, Chris aged out of the system and could no longer stay at Nova House, the supported living environment. As is common among street-involved and homeless SGM young people, Chris does not feel safe at shelters in Edmonton. Instead, he describes how he and others have used the MSM networking app, Grindr, to find a place to stay:

> A lot of people will complain about the shelters here. They'd rather be out in the cold than in a shelter…. A lot of people, especially in the gay community, will use Grindr and stuff to couch surf, which of course is dangerous.

Chris has frequently engaged in sex work to earn a basic living, and he provides a detailed account of how tumultuous that lifestyle can be as he deals with abusive clients and third parties:

> Well I think I was pretty good at [sex work], but there were some people who got too attached, and I would lash out at them. And then they would turn out to be these important people and they would threaten me, saying they could pay the police to arrest me. I went through three or four different people in the last two or three months, hiring them for security, and they were stealing from me. They were taking pictures of my clients' credit cards. I only stopped in the last year because there was a lot of slander that happened because I refused to keep working with a certain individual selling drugs. And

> they had people trying to set up fake calls with me. People were offering me $8000 to go and see them but it was really shady. They were going to drive me somewhere and I couldn't go to the location myself. People were sending me pictures of guns. People were sending me pictures of gang members. And that was all from my escorting number. You can post reviews about escorts and it's connected to the phone number and the pictures that they use. And people will post incorrect reviews about you. I met a group of people that branch off of the Hells Angels and they were training me to work for them. That was very unsuccessful because I wasn't completely on board with it. But they wanted 30% or something of everything and they would take all the calls and they would tell me when there's a call. We did photo shoots and stuff. A lady brought me to her home and she was testing me to see if I trusted her. That was a pretty hardcore time in my life.

Compared with the sex work experiences recalled by the other Chew clients in this study, Chris's are the most risk-laden and troublesome. Even when the money was good, the stress of dealing with his own substance use and mental health issues, as well as the politics and dangers of sex work in the social circles he occupied, would take a toll on Chris's health:

> I would literally be working until I just dropped. When I was really at the peak of my performance, I was probably using only about half a gram of meth a day. I was shooting it, but I was always on my phone, I was always planning things, I was always counting how much money I had. It's a political game, too. It's really ridiculous, the games that they play. It's like, this person is getting taken out. Let's take their place. It's ridiculous.

Fortunately, Chris has had access to Darcy and the Chew Project, empowering him to cope with trauma, minimize the risk of harm associated with drug use and sex work, and find some sense of hope and structure.

Harm Reduction, and Building and Recognizing Assets: "Darcy kept me from doing some pretty bad things." Chris conveys what crucial assets Darcy and the Chew Project have been in recent years:

> Well [Darcy's] very resourceful. When I'm having a meltdown, panicking, freaking out, I can call him or text him and he reassures me that I can handle the situation. There's been times when there's been dangerous people and I felt safer when he knew about who they were. There's been a few times I brought people to him just so that he knew who they were…. He once referred me to a housing place. Right now I need help to get a real job and education. Education's a really big thing—it's really difficult with education. I get really confused easily.

As an injection drug user, Chris has received harm reduction supplies and services from Darcy: "Whenever I would see him, he would look at my arms to see if I was doing it too much. He warned me about where not to shoot up and stuff. He gave me resources with that." In addition, Darcy has provided one-on-one mental health supports to Chris in times of need, helping him feel valued and cared for when he has no one else he can turn to. We did not dwell for long on trauma, as the topic seemed to further distract and disorient Chris: "Something that Darcy has been very helpful with is stuff related to trauma. Something happened in August/September, for example, and… I lost my train of thought again. Probably because of what I'm talking about."

Darcy and Chris have also engaged in safety plans to minimize the risk associated with sex work. Darcy relates: "So if Chris is going out working, going out on a call, or going to someplace that might not be safe, he will text or call and let me know the details a little bit. And then when he leaves, he'll call again so I know he's ok." Chris recounts how this has made him feel safer going on calls. "It has also prevented me from hurting other people a few times," he adds. Chris avails himself of the Chew Project's sexual health services, which is how he and Darcy first met:

> I get the STI testing every three months. There was an incident when I had first met Darcy where I possibly was exposed to HIV, and this person didn't tell me. So that was

> the first thing that we worked on when we met. And I took the medication and as far as I know I'm HIV-free right now.

Hope and (Hidden) Signs of Thriving: "I was doing really, really good for a while. But then I said no to a drug deal and it all came crashing down." There has been no shortage of risk and stress associated with sex work for Chris. However, he recalls periods of time during which he was not merely surviving, but even succeeding, as he juggled various client demands and managed himself accordingly:

> I was working under three different names, because there was the male escort I was for the Hells Angels, then there was me working behind them, and then I was working as a crossdresser. So I had all these aliases that I was using and I was doing really, really good for a while. I was making *a lot* of money. Some nights I would make $1000. I kind of miss those times. But then I said no to a drug deal and it all came crashing down!

When he was engaged in sex work, Chris had money in his pockets and was off the street and living in hotels. Due to the frequent stressors and the present risk that he may be recognized and targeted by gangs, however, at the time of our interview Chris tries his best, with limited success, to avoid sex work. On the day of our conversation, Chris is looking forward to moving in a few days from his parents' home, where he typically just hides in the basement, into Harmony House, a recovery residence for men with a supportive sober living program that will help him organize and take control over his life:

> They kind of force structure, so I can't, well it would be a lot of work to do things [like drugs and sex work] behind their back. Structure is what I need right now because my mind is *everywhere* and I'm extremely impulsive right now. But if I go to this sober house, they'll make me go to meetings, they'll make me get a job, they'll make me do things, and it has to be a safe thing.

Despite persistent struggles with his mental health and substance use, Chris is not languishing in the present just trying to survive. He has hopes and goals for the future, with sober, structured living to serve as a springboard for him to find steady work, perhaps go back to school, travel, and pursue a career in business or media.

Brennan: Empath, Artist, & Supportive Peer

I had the privilege of conducting two interviews with Brennan, the first in summer 2018 and a follow-up interview 15 months later. At the time of our second conversation, he is 26. Born in Saskatoon to young parents, Brennan's aunt cared for him for the first year of his life. At the age of five, he moved to Edmonton with his mother and father. Presently, he has a strong relationship with his parents and enjoys seeing his grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins from time to time.

Brennan has never been homeless or had any experience with Children's Services. He first accessed the Chew Project because he was a sex worker and addict in severe withdrawal seeking STI testing. Brennan identifies as pansexual (is attracted to persons of all gender identities and expressions), and he loves art, psychology, and movies. Loquacious and candid, Brennan was generous with his time, providing the two longest recorded conversations with young adults in this study at nearly 50 minutes each. Our interviews feature all five themes captured in this study.

Stressors and Risk: "I just want that connection with people. I feel lonely." Brennan has struggled with substance use since he was 15. At that time he began to rely on ecstasy and MDMA to overcome his shyness and loneliness, which eventually led to an opiate and cocaine dependency:

> The main thing was growing up, I could never talk to anybody in my family about anything. So I can see how when I was 15, why it was such a good feeling to chase after with the ecstasy and MDMA, because I felt I could be close to people and open up about things that I normally wouldn't have been able to. So that made me feel like I could actually connect with people, almost like I was at home with myself, which is exactly why I started using opiates and coke. Because, with coke especially, it ends up being a social thing. It doesn't necessarily have that effect on me, where I'm kind of a hyperactive person in general, so the coke kind of calms me down in a way, but other people, for the most part, it makes them talk a lot, so it's nice to be around other people who are talking a lot, or spending a night talking, just together in general. And then having the opiates as a sort of way to calm some of the edginess, or help sleep after, that type of thing. It just went hand-in-hand for me. But yeah, it's definitely the people and the connection I was seeking from it.

Brennan recounts how he struggled from a young age with feelings of diminished self-worth and shame, further catalyzing his use of substances as a coping mechanism:

> Even as a kid, I struggled immensely with caring about myself, and it prevented me from experiencing the world. I thought that those difficult things, because of the way they felt, because of how powerful they were, I blamed myself for a lot of what happened—to my family, to my parents, I would blame myself. As a kid I held that shame for all these things that happened that had *nothing* to do with me, but I blamed myself, and now had built up these walls. Those walls prevented me from experiencing the positive and the good things in my life, and also seeing that those negative things were a part of it.

Like many Chew Project clients who associate sex work with substance use, Brennan discovered sex work a few years ago as a way to fund his addiction:

> I just remember thinking, oh, it could be possible to make money, and at the time, I was using, too, so that was kind of the biggest draw. I need a way to make money to be able to use. And once I made fast money at that time, it was kind of like, ok, yeah, I could do this. I could see what this could become.

Speaking in our first interview in 2018, Brennan describes how sex work and addiction had, over time, become inextricable:

> That kind of money on top of having addiction, it doesn't last very long, unfortunately. And the other side, too, is, what if I could spend that on things—like, that *is* rent for a month! You know what I mean? But to have that sort of control, it's very difficult the way addiction is, and it's so tied together now that it's very hard to escape that cycle.

Brennan has felt the effects of the criminalization of sex work, which he says makes the trade more difficult and dangerous. When I ask him if his clients are concerned they might be arrested, he replies:

> Yes, exactly. They won't say it for the most part, but it comes out as less information being shared. More secretive. And I think *that's* dangerous. They tell me fake names and all this type of stuff. Overall it's seen as this super high-risk thing, and that keeps it further in the shadows, which makes it less safe, I think. When really, if it was out there, we'd have specific places that we can go and do this, where I can be an individual, independent provider of this, and I don't have to worry about anything.

In three years of regular sex work, Brennan has had only two negative experiences with clients. When one john sexually assaulted him, he considered pressing charges but ultimately declined to do so, fearing it would damage his work by undermining client trust. He was also concerned about the compounded consequences for his client. I ask, "When you were assaulted and thought about pressing charges, did you have to stop and think, well, it's gonna get me into trouble?" He replies,

> Yeah! And also him into trouble for trusting me in that business side, too, 'cause he would get in more trouble about that. I mean I think that he needs to [be charged], and in a way I still do, but I also just don't want to.

Brennan asserts that, in his experience, the greatest risk associated with sex work is actually STI exposure, which he mitigates through frequent testing. At the time of our second

interview, Brennan is transitioning away from sex work, not due to physical risk but logistical challenges. Too often, prospective clients cancel at the last minute:

> People will say what they want to pay, originally—they're excited, like, "I could do this, I could pay this!" And I'll accept that offer, but then they'll just cancel. I've seen this happen before. So if I'm expecting that I'm going to get $300 or $200 or something and I don't have money for food anymore because I've spent it all on using, for example, then I put that pressure on myself to then get that money. And if he cancels or it falls through, it can be stressful. Because there's no real pressure for them to make it for me. There's no consequences for them to cancel on me. And I was almost like, maybe we should put down a deposit on that. That's how they do with pretty much any hourly situations.

Moreover, without access to a vehicle, Brennan finds travelling to meet clients stressful and exhausting:

> It's always worked out with [my clients] that they've had a place or a hotel, so that's always been the positive of the regulars that I've had. They've always been people I could go to their place. But I don't have a car, so then I'm expecting them to help me, pick me up or grab a cab, so it's things that I don't want to be stressed about. I don't want to worry about it so much, so I've really put less pressure on myself to make it happen.

If sex work were decriminalized and regulated like other professions, perhaps Brennan could work from a secure, centralized indoor location, where clients come to him and are required to put down a deposit upon booking. Instead, at this point he feels it is typically not worth the uncertainty and stress.

Harm Reduction: "If I'm going to use, I go to the safe injection site, that way I know that people are watching over me." Brennan employs harm reduction strategies to minimize the risk associated with injection drug use and sex work. He keeps Naloxone kits with him whenever he is using or when he is around others who are using. He never injects with a used needle, even his own, as syringes dull quickly and can cause bruising and sores. Whenever

possible he injects at a safe consumption site. When this is not an option, he injects at the Chew Project office under Darcy's supervision, or he calls a friend to engage in a safety plan:

> If I'm worried about something or if I get something new, usually talking to someone, like, "Hey, I'm about to do this. Just want to make sure I'm safe. If you don't hear back from me in a couple minutes, give a call, you know my address," stuff like that. So I have some people that I can do that with.

Brennan has witnessed and intervened in several overdoses. He recalls somberly how three of his closest friends suffered severe overdoses after going to treatment and then using street drugs again with diminished post-treatment tolerance. Accordingly, he is hesitant to become entirely "clean" and uses maintenance doses to keep his tolerance up and withdrawal symptoms at bay. In our first conversation, before he is enrolled in the advanced treatment program he is in presently, he states:

> I've seen it happen so many times. I can name at least three, some of the closest friends I've ever had, who've gone to treatment, gotten totally clean, and really passionate about being totally clean, use once or twice. One of my best friends is in a wheelchair because he's paralyzed from the waist down. And then the other friends are literally dead because their tolerance was so low after not using for so long, and with the state of affairs in Edmonton with the drugs, it's instantly poison to your body because it's so strong. It's not like you're getting actual heroine anymore, it's 50 times stronger, so it's really scary. So I wouldn't be getting off of everything just yet, I would still be on Kadian [an extended release opiate] while I'm going to treatment, thankfully. It's still not perfectly easy to get off of it all, whether you're on Kadian or completely sober. But at least it does prevent me from having that super low tolerance and then being in that position, hopefully.

To mitigate the risks associated with sex work, Brennan advertises on the internet and screens clients by chatting online for a time before their first rendezvous. Additionally, he meets new clients in a public place before moving to somewhere private:

> The people I talk to, I get a general good idea of what they're like and where we meet is always a public place, so I'm not worried about things. Either it's a public place or it's their house, but I ask to meet them outside the house first so I can see what they're like. We also talk first and kind of get more comfortable. Two days ago, I was talking with someone. Actually, through the whole weekend we were talking back and forth a little bit, here and there.

Brennan also gets tested regularly for STIs:

> I'm kind of a nervous person so sometimes I even get tested like twice a month. But typically once a month if I'm in sex work I think is ideal. But in general, if I'm not in sex work at that time or I'm just sexually active in general, then I'd say like once every three months is probably good. It's usually test for everything and then I'm usually really open about IV drug use.

Recognizing and Building Assets: "I have this sense of wonder that has so much power over the world." As with each of the other young adults I interviewed, Brennan benefits significantly from the Chew Project. He regularly gets STI testing done at the Chew outreach office, has access to clean needles and other harm reduction resources, and thrives on the interpersonal support he receives from Darcy and other staff members and volunteers:

> I didn't even know anyone like [Darcy] existed in Edmonton. Someone that is helping people with addictions, with sex work, with mental health and stuff like that, so it was really good. I think it was right time, right person, right place. And I think he just offered me a lot of support that was uniquely relevant, because of his experiences. So to have that freedom without those constraints of being in a really specific program where you have to follow these protocols, that's a big important thing for me, to feel that I could fit in with someone who really understood what it's like in my own situation without those same constraints on my identity.

Unlike many of the young people who access Chew, Brennan also has supportive family he can rely on for emotional and practical guidance and support. His parents are aware of his sex

work and substance use, and while they may struggle to understand the complexities of it all, they withhold judgment. Brennan conveys how his mother is one of his greatest role models:

> I think I look to a lot of my mentors or people who are supports in my life for some of that guidance on being resilient. Especially my mom and my dad. My family in general, a lot of the things that they've been through themselves are pretty mind-blowing, and to see the way my mom acts around others, always wanting to make sure others are ok, despite what she might be going through. I think she has a ton of resilience, so I really look up to that.

Brennan receives financial support from Alberta Works, and his mother helps him manage the funds he receives:

> I'm on what's called the Barriers to Full Employment, through Alberta Works, and they help set me up so I can have a place to live. It also gives me a little bit of money every month to help pay for food. So I get my basic needs met. I have a pretty good system set up, so the money that I get I send to my mom, so I get to pay all of my stuff without worrying that I'm going to accidently spend too much on whatever. So I know I'll always have that money for food, if I need clothes, if I need necessities in my life. That makes me feel less stressed out.

As well as significant interpersonal assets granted by the Chew Project and his family, Brennan has developed numerous individual characteristics that have contributed to his success in achieving various substantive goals in the 15 months between our first and second interviews, goals that include moving out of his parents' house and finding part-time work outside of the sex trade. Brennan is full of wonder and curiosity, compassion and empathy, and he perceives his experiential knowledge of addiction as an asset enabling him to effect positive change in the lives of others struggling with substance use. All of these qualities empower Brennan, providing him with a keen sense of agency as he endeavours to help others:

> I think I have this sense of wonder that has so much power over the world. And I don't want to use it for anything but good. I *swear* that when I start to think of things that I want to happen, in reality, they're possible. So I have this sense of wonder that all these things are possible, and I never want to use that for the creation of things that aren't gonna help people…. It's kind of funny to me that I grew up not caring about myself that much, because I think it's offered the perfect formula for thinking about other people first. So I think that's a valuable asset. A team-player sort of thing. I'm collaborative with people. My thoughts aren't the most important things. I want to hear what other people have to say. But to do that people have to feel like they're comfortable enough, and that's where a lot of my experiences in life helped make that happen for people. Just with what I've gone through and the lengths I've gone to make changes, I really truly want to see this world better for *everybody.* So I think that is an asset. It's a very emotional thing as well. Empathy. Empathetic. I usually say that because people don't even usually have to say anything for me to understand how they feel.

Brennan's empathetic qualities and interpersonal skills allowed him to flourish as a sex worker, making clients feel at ease while also attenuating his persistent loneliness:

> They [his clients] ask me, "Are you nervous?" because they'll be nervous usually—most people that I meet are nervous the first time. And I always answer "yes" because I'm able to have that confidence that it's like, "Yeah, I'm a little nervous, but that's just how it is meeting people, and that's ok, and we can hang out." You get close, getting able to sit next to them or something like that, and it just makes people feel more calm. And it makes me feel calmer, too. But to have that confidence lets me be open about that…. And the people I was meeting [in sex work] were really fucking nice. I ended up meeting some really lovely people and it worked out for both of us where I'm able to give them something and we're able to spend that time together…. I just want that connection with people. I feel lonely. So it kind of takes that and also lets me make money from it as well, so I think that was sort of what got me interested in it. I'm around people, it kind of satisfied that loneliness, to feel wanted like that—validating, just in my own sense.

The specific goals and successes Brennan has achieved since our first interview are outlined further below. First, we look more closely at the unconventional ways in which he uses substances to maintain and promote his sense of health and wellbeing.

Atypical Coping and Problem-Solving Strategies: "I think it's very human to do things that are imperfectly helping us, and in the name of comfort." Since high school Brennan has used substances to cope with his shyness, loneliness, and self-esteem. Despite the health risks and financial costs associated with using street drugs, for Brennan, the goal is not necessarily to rid himself of opiate and stimulant use altogether. In our first interview, he reveals how comfortable he is with his substance use:

> I'd love to be in a position where I'm able to have access to pure drugs, 'cause there are reasons I use them, and it's self-medication, really. But I'm ok with that, I'm ok with the self-medication part. And I would be ok with having that for a period of time until I'm done with that. Or maybe I never finish that, but to not have the freedom or the safety kind of sucks, honestly, and I'm always forced to try and get clean. My addiction is like, ok, I use and then I go about my day. I just used before I came here, so take the money side out of it, I don't feel like it's destroying everything about me, but it needs to be done in a way that I have clean drugs, and I know exactly the amount I'm doing.

At the time of our second interview, Brennan is enrolled in a cutting-edge injectable opioid-agonist treatment (iOAT) program, to which he provided input as a member of the developmental working group. He goes into the clinic twice a day to receive hydromorphone injections and is using street drugs less often:

> It's not exactly a specific solution to using, because it doesn't replace those drugs. But it's definitely a reduced harm way of approaching things, and it can help me not have to go through my days sick if I don't have money. Personally, I use specific drugs to have the effects that they do in my life, and in a way I use them to try to take care of myself, even if it seems like a backward way of doing that. I think it's very human to do things

> that are imperfectly helping us, and in the name of comfort. I think there's something about it that helps me in a way, so I'm not fully willing to completely give it up. But at the same time, being able to have that balance between, ok, well, if I'm gonna use, then maybe I want to make sure that most days I'm not needing to, so I'll go to my treatment, so it keeps me more steady and I know exactly what I'm getting. Whereas if I do use, I have to kind of plan for, ok that's gonna cost this much, it's expensive, you don't have the exact purity so it could be more dangerous, physically, even emotionally, mentally, you don't know exactly what every little piece of it is. That's the downfall of prohibited drugs.

I ask him if he and his doctor are "on the same page" regarding his treatment plan, where the ultimate goal is not necessarily total abstinence, and he answers without hesitation:

> Yep, for sure. Change [my use] how I want to, and figure out what that is. I think over time, as my life changes, I want to use less. I'm not using daily at all anymore. So it's something that's lessened, and I look at the things that have changed—housing situation, financial situation, having a substance that's safe and pure for me most times—is really helpful changes that I think naturally lead to people getting healthier, and just making changes on their own time. I see it a lot with the people as well in the program itself.

Harm reduction and finding a safe and comfortable trajectory for his overall health are primary objectives for Brennan, and he has a supportive doctor who seems to understand the complexities and intricacies of his substance use. As part of his advocacy work, Brennan is passionate about drug decriminalization as an essential avenue of harm reduction:

> We need to decriminalize drugs, like, yesterday [laughs]. That's a *big deal.* Hopefully one day we'll see that happen, but until then, it's really good we have the safe consumption site and stuff like that. But it would be *awesome* if we could decriminalize—not just certain ones—I think all drugs, and that we can start to take a look at how people can use them safely.

Brennan's insider knowledge and passion for safer substance use have enabled him to contribute directly to program and policy development in the province, "behind-the-scenes work" that he is so very excited to tell me about.

Hope and (Hidden) Signs of Thriving: "Am I happy? No. Healthy? Getting there. Hopeful? Extremely." When we sit down for our second interview, Brennan tells me how he had recently been living in Calgary for a few months as one of the first people in the province to participate in the iOAT program:

> I've heard about injectable treatment for a long time in parts of Europe, so I thought that was really awesome that I could maybe have the chance to go to Calgary and actually be one of the first people to start in it in Alberta. So I did that, and it worked out. I've been on that program ever since. When I moved [back] to Edmonton, I was waiting for the Edmonton one to open up. Because Edmonton is my home. It's where I want to be, and my family's here, so it's a really good situation for me here. So that's kind of been my main focus.

In addition to hydromorphone injections, the program provides him with direct access to caring professionals and peer support, and his experiential knowledge on the topic of opioid addiction leveraged him into a position of influence within the program:

> There's such good support there as well, so I have a lot of access to doctors, the nurses, peer support staff there, everything. And on top of that I'm actually part of the working group of it, that helps figure out what's necessary in it and important, the policies that we need to work on and look at. I feel like they really value what I have to say, as somebody with that experience of what it's like, and I think it's so important to have that experience.

Brennan uses his privilege to promote his vision for a more inclusive and intersectional approach within the iOAT working group:

> I've really tried to advocate for other people to become a part of that as well. Having someone who's maybe a woman, or not specifically male or female, having those perspectives would be really good to have, especially for how treatment can benefit or be changed to benefit people better. Same with age group as well. I mean, I'm quite young, a lot of the people there are in their forties, fifties, even some a little bit older than that. So I'm hoping we can have a group meeting that can include some of those other perspectives. I feel very good about the fact that they're listening to what I have to say. It makes me feel very valued and like we can effect real change, and that's really important for me personally.

Brennan is using street drugs less frequently and has greatly reduced his reliance on sex work for income; in addition to the funding he receives from Alberta Works, he is an advisor with Alberta's Primary Health Care Opioid Response team and receives honoraria that help with basic expenses like food:

> I still see clients occasionally for extra money, whether that's to help using not cost so much, not cost me my place to live, or not cost me other important things like food or paying off my credit. I also have been working in the Opioid Response Initiative, so I do that once or twice a month and it's something that gives me a bit of money here and there through gift cards and it's an honorarium for volunteering my time as someone with lived experience.

As well as the Opioid Response Team, Brennan was invited to join the Alberta Mental Health and Addictions Youth Council, which also provides honoraria and

> brings many youth experiences and perspectives to light in order to help us decide what we want to work on as a group in terms of advocacy, consultation, treatment programs, mental health programs and ideas that could help others where we may have struggled. It involves many perspectives from about 13 years old to about 30 years old. I personally am just finishing up my volunteer process to become an official Patient Advisor and that way I will work as Youth Council Champion and get opportunities related to leadership and collaborative roles. CRISM [the Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Misuse]

> also has a specifically opioid-related perspective that I am able to bring my experiences as someone with lived experience but also having relationships with people using opioids and addictions, so that is another reason they have asked me to participate.

Brennan reiterates how being in treatment with iOAT has significantly reduced his living expenses and allowed him to focus on other avenues of employment besides sex work, including his recent hiring at the Chew Project as a peer support worker:

> Also thanks to the treatment. That does help hugely, because I'm not depending on [sex work]. Before, I absolutely was. I had to depend on seeing a client to make money just for my normal wellbeing, just to get by every day. Thankfully that's not the case anymore because of iOAT, and I think that gives me a lot more time to do other things in my life, such as starting work as a support, working as a patient advisor through the Opioid Response Initiative, which I love to do. I love that behind-the-scenes work.

Brennan depicts how he was empowered by Darcy and the Chew Project to use his experience for the benefit of others:

> I think [Chew] really inspired me, and so over the last couple of years I'd heard, "You'd be a really good person to work with people who are struggling with these things." I always believed that, but I never thought it would be the right time, until the last six months or so where I started to think that I could see myself in that position. Despite still using sometimes, despite not being where I want to be—those things are some of my strengths in life, those build to my strengths. And I think what's changed that perspective for me is that going to some of these initiatives and the behind-the-scenes work that I've been doing with the Opioid Response Initiative, they are *interested* in the difficulties. They want to hear those difficulties, because they help shape policies and they help change things from the inside. And that's been extremely rewarding.

I ask a follow-up question: "As opposed to having to keep that part of yourself in the shadows, hidden away, compartmentalized, the idea now is that you're seen as a whole person whose full experience is all relevant and part of who you are. Is that how you see it?" He responds to say,

> Exactly, yes. I would hide it from so many people, and feeling trapped like that is such a difficult and lonely place to be. But then to feel like these difficult experiences, these challenges of mine, are what help make changes and what helps people, it changed my perspective on being a peer support worker and how perfect I'd need to be before getting there, or how abstinent I'd need to be, or all these different expectations. I've seen that there's that balance there that's more important than being perfect. It's more about, to me, some of the work that I've put in and the care that I have behind it, rather than having to be perfectly abstinent. And I think just showing up sometimes is enough for some things. And I feel like I can get better at these things as I go. Darcy's been a huge part of that.

I ask Brennan if his treatment regimen allows him more time to pursue his passion for artistic expression. His reply is enthusiastic:

> Actually, music lately! I used to DJ for a few years. I loved it, and I learned how to make music using software online, and I took a couple courses for that. I absolutely loved it, and I really loved the community of it. Lots of really exciting people and exciting music. I love house music, dancing, things like that. Nowadays, it's really awesome because I can go to the library and they have a ton of software setup, they have keyboards that you can use, you can rent a room so you can make music in that recording studio. I also really love singing, and I love making my own music. That's another one of my passions. So that's kind of been the creative side that I've been working on.

Brennan describes the meaning of resilience from his perspective—a forward-looking and ongoing project:

> I think what resilience means to me is continuing to work on myself and work at accepting myself no matter what happens in my life, and no matter what I choose to do about it, that I'm never done. That it's always something that can be a work in progress, and there's always something that I can look at that can help me be a better version of myself.

My last question for Brennan to conclude our follow-up interview is whether he considers himself healthy, happy, and hopeful. His response is optimistic while leaving ample room for growth:

> Happy? No. Healthy? Getting there. Hopeful? Extremely. Happy, that's a big thing. [Pauses, deep in thought.] Not just in size but in understanding, in subjectivity. So many ways, it is huge. I definitely experience enjoyable emotions, for sure, so I look forward to—as I put more time into these things that I'm working on, for that to help result in an overall sense of wellbeing in life itself, in relation to other people as well…. All in all, I think I will feel happy and be happy in my life at the right time. It's not something that I can specifically control, but I can work on having a greater sense of being overall and enjoying things in life, being more mindful, being more present, bringing down some of my walls, experiencing relationships, things that I had closed myself off of. I think hopeful is a very important piece as well. And healthy, I think it'd be wrong for me to say that I am fully healthy, but it would be wrong for me to say that I'm not healthy at all. It's definitely something that's a work in progress.

Tanner: Pertinacious Performer & Open Book

Soft-spoken, taciturn, and thoughtful, Tanner is 27 years old. He self-identifies as a cisgender, queer, Caucasian male who is, conditionally, "also genderqueer 'cause of doing drag." Born in Medicine Hat and raised in Red Deer, Tanner came out as gay to his family at the age of 14, only to find himself homeless: "Some of my family members, being religious, didn't agree with it, so I was out on my own at 14 years old and took care of myself." Tanner's hobbies include performing as a drag queen, doing "random artsy things," watching television, and spending time with his cat and dog. Our conversation touches on the themes of Stressors and Risk, Building and Recognizing Assets, and Hope and (Hidden) Signs of Thriving.

Stressors and Risk: "I've always been falling through the cracks." Tanner was intermittently street-involved and/or homeless for nearly a decade, from the age of 14 until three years ago. I ask him about the main stressors in his life right now:

> Probably my mental health. Personality disorder and polysubstance abuse. Financial struggles as well. And the frustration of how difficult it is to navigate through the system that's supposed to help you.

Tanner has curtailed his methamphetamine use, and he no longer uses GHB, but he is now struggling with alcohol addiction. I ask him if he can clarify how the system has not met his needs:

> I went undiagnosed for probably close to a decade. I was misdiagnosed, I've been mistreated by psychiatrists when I was in psychiatric lockdown. I've always been outcasted, even by the system, or falling through the cracks. Nobody wants to acknowledge what they don't have to or what seems like a lot of work. Especially if you don't have that recognizable of a diagnosis.

Tanner has had extensive experience with the police throughout his life, precipitated by fluctuations in his mental health. I ask him if he feels he has been treated with respect by police:

> On occasion. But more often than not police are just really insensitive. And they think when you have a mental health crisis that you're just being violent or ignorant when it's really the complete opposite. Their approach to things is not always the harm reduction approach that they probably should take.

While he has found some stability in the last few years since moving in with his partner, Kyle, he has had recent encounters with EPS and felt he was not well supported:

> They've been called on me a few times for mental health crises. There's been a few good dealings with them but the ones that have definitely stuck out are the bad ones. They probably should have taken me to the hospital under mental health arrest, which they didn't do. This is after I freaked out with a knife in my hand and almost cut my fingers

> off by accident. And then another time when I'd been feeling suicidal and just attacking people from borderline personality disorder, they just would drop me off on 97th Street.

Tanner also feels he has been targeted by police for his gender expression. "I've been pulled over before for carrying a purse," he laments.

Until four years ago Tanner engaged in sex work as a survival strategy, to acquire money for food, shelter, and substances:

> I don't know if there would be a whole lot of positives from it, simply just 'cause of why a lot of people do it. For me, it was more of a survival choice than anything. So yes I was still making the choice to do it, but I didn't feel like it was always exactly a *choice.*

As with other young adults I interviewed, for Tanner sex work and drug use were intertwined: "'Cause you have to stay awake, plus you're trying to bury your feelings. 'Cause I don't think anyone is truly proud of selling themselves."

Tanner describes how, in his own experience, the risks of sex work emerged both from clients and other sex workers. He felt unsafe "with particular clients, or sometimes in the community of sex workers itself. It's a very selfish industry. But when you're doing something like that to survive, everyone's out for themselves." He recalls one frightening experience with a client: "He paid me, but then he wouldn't let me leave the room. And then he got really violent after doing some meth, 'cause there was no more coke or something. And he outweighed me by probably 150 lbs."

Building and Recognizing Assets: "There's no sense in trying to hide anything, especially your past." The Chew Project has been integral to Tanner's survival; without it, he would have had no other options, at least "none specific for youth such as myself." In addition to building a family of choice among non-relatives, Tanner has reconnected with his biological family and they "get along really well now." He lives with his partner, Kyle, who, with help

from Tanner's grandparents, supports him financially while he prepares to seek assistance from Alberta Works. I ask him what he considers his greatest personal assets at this time:

> Being intuitive, being empathetic, and being an open book, I guess? People have less reason not to trust you if you're honest about everything. And besides, there's no sense in trying to hide anything, especially your past. There's no point in having shame for it.

At the time of our interview, Tanner is three weeks into therapy to help him cope with his mental health challenges and to wean himself from alcohol dependency. I ask him if he is seeing any benefit from the counselling: "I think so. It's only three weeks in. I guess we'll find out."

Hope and (Hidden) Signs of Thriving: "Hopefully I can become a professional entertainer and support myself." Tanner has transcended homelessness and survival sex and is actively working to attenuate his mental illness and addictions. I ask him if he would consider himself resilient and to describe in his own words what resilience means to him:

> Yeah, I would [consider myself resilient]. Resilience to me is recognizing your situation, or even your past, understanding that, sure, some things aren't ok, but not letting it defeat you and still trying in whatever capacity that is. Even if it doesn't seem like there's any hope, just keep trying, because maybe things will become better.

"Would you consider yourself happy, healthy, and hopeful?" I ask. His reply is optimistic: "Hopeful, yes. Healthy, physically yes. Psychologically, getting there. Happy? Definitely, at times." Tanner's eyes light up when I ask about his hopes and goals for the future: "Drag. To make as much money as I can for the community, 'cause it'll be great for the resumé and then eventually hopefully I can become a professional entertainer and maybe support myself."

Jeremy: Artist & Facilitator, One Year Sober

Jeremy is 38 years old and was born in Edmonton. His parents split when he was young so he "kind of volleyballed between them," moving back and forth between Edmonton and

Vancouver. He graduated high school in Wainwright and discovered his talent for tattoo art early in his life, beginning his apprenticeship at the age of 16. He lived in Wainwright for about ten years tattooing before moving back to Edmonton, which is where he now resides. Presently he works in a kitchen as a prep cook and part-time with the Chew Project as a peer support worker. After living a closeted life for many years, Jeremy came out as pansexual when he was 27. At the time of our interview in late 2019 he has been substance-free for just over one year. Our open conversation includes the themes of Stressors and Risk, Building and Recognizing Assets, and Hope and (Hidden) Signs of Thriving.

Stressors and Risk: "I sold a lot of drugs." Jeremy's parents separated when he was young, and he describes a subsequently chaotic homelife:

> I was back and forth between my parents. My dad was always pretty good, but he was always working. My mom and her husband, her husband was a member of a bike gang and it was pretty chaotic. Pretty chaotic homelife.

Jeremy began selling drugs at an early age, which was encouraged and facilitated by his stepfather. Jeremy is quite forthcoming about his past engagement in survival crimes:

> Selling drugs was a big one. My mom's husband kind of versed me on selling cocaine when I was pretty young, so it was always something I did out of my shop. I always worked to supplement my income [as a tattoo artist by being] a drug dealer. Later on, when I found sex work, it was something I did to supplement my income as a drug dealer. Selling drugs was pretty much my mainstay, my fallback whenever I didn't have a great living as a regular worker. I sold a lot of drugs.

Consequently, Jeremy cites early substance use as a significant and chronic stressor in his life:

> Drug use was a big one. I was addicted to meth off and on since I was 19. Even before, I started using different drugs when I was as young as 12 years old. I was 12 when I started with acid, and marijuana of course. I was 14 or 15 when I tried cocaine for the first time. Those were really what bridged me to meth. I didn't find meth until I was probably 19.

Jeremy engaged in sex work through the year 2016, not so much as a survival strategy—he had his tattoo business and drug sales for that—but as a way to supplement his income: "It's something I did, not necessarily to survive at the time. I was selling meth to survive. But I had friends who were involved in the sex trade and tried for years to get me to join them." Jeremy relates how, as with Sam, Chris, Tanner, and Brennan, substance use was part and parcel of sex work, as he and his clients frequently engaged in PnP, or "party and play": "When I did engage in sex work, there was a fair amount of drugs involved every time—MDMA, GHB, and meth." Jeremy has also struggled his whole life with mental health issues. When he was younger, he was diagnosed with depression and paranoid schizophrenia, which run in his family and which were exacerbated by his substance use.

Building and Recognizing Assets: "Now my biggest asset is my sobriety." When I ask Jeremy what he thinks are presently his greatest assets leveraging him toward resilience, he replies without hesitation:

> For a long time I would have said my creative ability. Now my biggest asset is my sobriety. It's a lifestyle that I'm choosing to live. It's getting me places, whether it's peer support. My creative ability is something I can still use in this job, but I definitely like my sobriety.

His self-described second greatest asset—his creative talent—is presently showcased in the form of an elaborate, colourful mural painted on the wall at the Chew outreach office. Jeremy does not create art now as often as he would like, but he does see himself as a catalyst for creativity in others:

> I don't create as much as I'd like to these days. When I got out of recovery, I don't have chemical inspiration anymore so it's something I'm a bit slower with. But I like to facilitate. I'd like to tutor people. Facilitating and encouraging creativity in others has always been a source of strength for me.

Jeremy had a key asset when he was engaging in sex work as well—a friend who would host and screen his clients, minimizing the risk of harm:

> I had friends who were involved in the sex trade and tried for years to get me to join them. I had a steady friend who would arrange my customers for me. And we'd work together. It was like a group deal.

Rampant substance use notwithstanding, Jeremy never had any negative encounters with clients in sex work:

> I didn't know what to expect. So he already had his own list of clients and they were screened. He knew who I would get along with well and whatnot, so that was a big relief when approaching sex work, just having that buffer, that sort of screening process. My friend who was screening, he had an apartment we would work out of. So I was lucky enough to have that. I was lucky enough also that the client base he brought, there weren't any issues.

Presently, while Jeremy is still in contact with his father, he has cultivated a "family of choice" outside of his biological family and has "got a good support network right now," which includes Darcy at Chew.

Hope and (Hidden) Signs of Thriving: "I look forward to living, which is not something I could say when I was younger." As a sex worker, Jeremy "was astonished at how much money it brought in" and "it was definitely a boost to the self-esteem, working in such a sex-positive environment and being told, 'You should consider sex work.'" He describes how "there were a lot of drugs, but I didn't have any horrible encounters or anything. It was a fairly positive thing during that time of my life." Nevertheless, Jeremy has no plans to return to sex work because of the ways in which the activity is wrapped up in substance use: "If I didn't have my sobriety, it's something I would consider doing for sure. But as long as I have my sobriety, I'm trying to stay away from it."

Perhaps more than any other present or former Chew client I interviewed in this study, Jeremy is thriving—he has a safe and steady job, is no longer selling drugs or engaging in sex work, and is mentoring others through Chew peer support—and he attributes this success to his continued sobriety. He tells me how his life has been transformed since he completed treatment and discontinued his drug use:

> It's changed completely. The last year of my life has been completely unrecognizable from other years I've had. I always figured I was just a magnet for weird events when I was younger, and by younger I mean even a couple years ago. Now I've got routine. I do volunteer work with Crystal Meth Anonymous and I have a supplemental family through that fellowship. Life is more geared towards just doing the next correct thing, as opposed to encountering weird stuff and living chaotically. I struggle with depression and whatnot, and when I was actively in use, when I was younger I was given a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia. So mental health is something I struggled with for a long time. But my mental health seems to be pretty good. I'm living sober and aside from a bit of depression here and there, I feel like my mental health is pretty solid.

As with each of my second-phase interviews, I ask Jeremy if he considers himself healthy, happy, and hopeful. His reply is unequivocal:

> Yes! Yes. And whether I consider myself happy, that's something for the majority of my life I haven't been able to say. It's just in the last year I've managed to find happiness, which is a big one for me. I was always a habitually miserable person and now I like life. I look forward to living, which is not something I could say when I was younger. I was always in a suicidal ideation headspace and that's definitely not something I have to contend with anymore, which makes life a lot easier.

I follow up by asking if he lives with regret. Again, his reply is confident and insightful:

> I do and I don't. If someone said, "Hey, I have a time machine. Would you like to take back a bunch of years of your life?" I would do so. But I don't regret my experiences through addiction or sex work or anything. Regretting is just wasting time that I could be

> spending looking forward. If I'm looking back on things that I've done then I'm not living in the present.

As with Sam and Brennan, Jeremy's hopes and dreams for the future predominantly involve putting his turbulent lived experience to good use helping others:

> One day I'd like to get myself working as an addictions counsellor, or just as a counsellor in general, in any field, whether it's mental health, sex work, addictions. I'd like to use my lived experience to help push forward and make sure all those years of debauchery weren't a waste.

In the next chapter I engage in a comparative analysis and a discussion of interview data with respect to my research questions, contextualized by previous research in the fields of resilience and sex work. I also discuss the transversals of age, gender identity, and race/ethnicity as moderating variables in the recruitment equation, where the capacity and intrinsic motivation to engage in a research interview is marked as an indicator of thriving.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Sex Work & Risk

As I engaged in this study, I queried: How does the non-normative subsistence strategy of sex work among homeless and street-involved SGM young people in Edmonton relate to empirically established risk factors associated with sex work internationally and under current Canadian law? Certainly, research participants identified a broad array of stressors and risk factors across the personal, social, institutional, and cultural environments they have navigated (Table 1). Early substance use and mental illness were the most common variables identified among interviewees. They also named an assortment of risk factors associated with sex work, whether exacerbating the risks involved or emerging from the sex trade itself (see Table 2). Again, ubiquitous substance use, including consumption when providing sexual services ("party and play"), was the most common denominator of risk among the sex workers in this study. Interpreted here as an ambivalent coping strategy, substance use is discussed further below in the segments on coping and thriving, while this section focuses on the physical health risks associated with STIs and violence.

Table 1 – *Stressors and Risk Factors Experienced by Participants Across Contexts (as shared in interviews)*

	Participant				
Risk Factor	Sam	Chris	Brennan	Tanner	Jeremy
Early substance use	•	•	•	•	•
Family dysfunction/chaotic homelife	•		•	•	•
Homelessness	•	•		•	
Mood/personality/schizoaffective disorder	•	•		•	•
Negative encounters with police				•	
Rejection by family				•	
Suicidal ideation		•		•	•

Table 2 – *Experienced Risk Factors Associated with Sex Work (as shared in interviews)*					
	Participant				
Risk Factor	Sam	Chris	Brennan	Tanner	Jeremy
Assault by client			•	•	
Threats from pimps/handlers		•			
Difficulty screening clients		•		•	
Heavy substance use	•	•	•	•	•
Homelessness	•	•		•	
Sexually transmitted infections		•	•		
Shame	•			•	

Previous research has demonstrated that, compared to their cisgender and heterosexual peers, SGM individuals are at increased risk of sexually transmitted infections, particularly when engaging in sex work (Barreto et al., 2017; CPHO, 2011; Marshall et al., 2010; PHAC, 2014; Wilson et al., 2009). STIs were discussed with two Chew client research participants and featured prominently in my conversations with the lead intervention and outreach worker. Chris described an HIV scare he had after possible exposure to the virus, and Brennan indicated that STIs were the most salient risk he encounters in sex work; he gets tested, typically at the Chew OUTpost, every one to three months to mitigate the risk. Darcy similarly conveyed that Chew clientele, and particularly those engaging in heavy substance use and/or survival sex, frequently contract STIs and how, when left untreated, syphilis can lead to cognitive dysfunction. In fact, the Chew Project was initially set up to respond to a spike in STIs, and HIV in particular, in Edmonton, with MSM and trans-identified females comprising the most affected groups (Grace et al., 2019). Verily, our CS-sponsored survey of 32 Chew clients (Grace et al., 2019) revealed high rates of STI infection: 28% reported having been diagnosed with syphilis, 56% with chlamydia, 41% with gonorrhea, and 13% with genital warts. One participant (3%) reported being HIV-positive.

In the current study, three Chew clients, as well as the lead intervention and outreach worker, described violent threats or victimization in sex work, including two who have been

sexually assaulted. This proportion is consistent with Canadian studies focused on violence in sex work. In Hayashi, Daly-Grafstein, Dong, Wood, Kerr, and DeBeck's (2016) study, 64% of their sample of young male and female sex workers in Vancouver reported violent experiences in the sex trade, though this was found to be attributable more to drug involvement (and particularly drug dealing) than sex work itself. Similarly, in Shannon, Kerr, Strathdee, Shoveller, Montaner, and Tyndall's (2009) study of cisgender and transgender female sex workers in Vancouver who used illicit substances, 57% reported experiencing violence during the 18-month study period. While it is unclear how many of the assaults reported to researchers in these studies were also reported to police, among Chew clientele in Edmonton, reporting of violent incidents to authorities by sex workers is very rare—Darcy estimates fewer than 5%. He relates how johns do not report violence or theft perpetrated by sex workers either, as they are understandably reticent to seek help from police when doing so would directly implicate themselves in what has been deemed criminal activity. Correspondingly, when he was sexually assaulted, Brennan did not go to the police to report the assault because he did not want to get his client in trouble for purchasing sex.

Our participant-guided, open conversations provide a number of indicators regarding the lack of recourse available for participants when they were threatened or assaulted as male sex workers. For example, Brennan's experience plainly corroborates the arguments made by scores of researchers and advocates contending that most of the dangers connected with sex work in Canada are exacerbated by, if not a direct result of, the criminalization of the purchase of sex. In Brennan's experience, and Darcy's depiction of the experiences of the numerous young sex workers he supports and mentors, harm reduction strategies like indoor centralization, advertising, screening, negotiating boundaries, and holding violent johns and other third parties

to account are difficult, if not impossible, under the current legislative framework. Darcy conveyed his perspective that decriminalization would reduce the stigma around the sex trade and encourage better behaviour among clients and sex workers alike. The results of this study, then, reaffirm the necessity of sex work decriminalization.

Sex Work & Coping

This study considers how sex work among homeless and street-involved SGM young people in Edmonton relates to coping, and in particular atypical coping mechanisms found in the literature. Chapter 1 illuminates the hazy distinctions among the established categories of coping codified in previous research: engagement, disengagement, problem-focused, emotion-focused, meaning-focused, and social coping. I argued that the ambiguities among them, particularly in the context of discursive empowerment and the right to self-determination, point toward an appraisal of coping that ought to home in on the personal meaning and integration of coping experiences for the individual who is persevering, rather than looking for top-down normative indicators. Furthermore, I defined atypical coping strategies as purposeful movements that enable young people to transcend adversity, solve problems, and deal with stress, even if these strategies may transgress mainstream psychological theories and community conceptualizations of socially appropriate behaviour. Recall Ungar's (2011) suggestion that "we can use this principle of atypicality to argue that resilience will manifest in ways that we may not want to promote but that are necessary because of the social ecologies in which [young people] survive" (p. 8). Certainly, there is a pronounced degree of ambiguity as to what constitutes socially (un)acceptable behaviours and heterodoxy. However, throughout this manuscript, by applying queer critical posthuman theorizing to interpret research findings, I have worked to challenge the

normative moralistic framework and blame game that arguably overshadows more pragmatic analyses of survival behaviours.

Once again, Table 1 above depicts the significant sources of adversity and hardship the Chew clients interviewed in this study have had to surmount, often since a young age. Three of five have been homeless at some point in their lives, and family breakdown and/or dysfunction is a common thread contributing to street-involvement for at least four of them. One participant was thrown out of his home by family at the age of 14 directly as a result of disclosing his queer identity. Those young adults in this study who have faced homelessness do not feel safe accessing shelters in Edmonton. To escape and avoid the toxicity of temporary shelters and group homes, where they may be devalued and harassed, even robbed, assaulted and raped, and to make money to meet their basic needs, where addictions, mental health issues, and homelessness preclude them from getting "regular jobs," these young men have engaged in sex work. At times, this was perceived as their only viable means of survival. The narratives of these young men recast the disengagement coping mechanism of avoidance—of eschewing a public system of social, health, and policing services they feel does little to meet their unique needs as vulnerable and marginalized SGM young people—into an active, meaning-making exercise of circumvention and transgression through sex work and other survival crimes to find their way.

While a queer methodology and analytical lens problematizes rigid categorical boundaries, I posit that sex work falls into two tenuous categories among participants in this study: reactive coping (survival sex) and proactive problem-solving (gainful employment). For Sam, Chris, and Tanner, sex work represents a wearisome and unappealing way to cope with poverty and addiction. As Tanner laments, "You're trying to bury your feelings. 'Cause I don't think anyone is truly proud of selling themselves." Sam feels ashamed of taking advantage of

men by enticing them to pay for sex, while Chris finds the sex trade "ridiculous," exhausting, stressful, and even flat out dangerous. For these young men, sex work is a survival mechanism borne of desperation. One heartbreaking note left to Darcy by a 19-year-old gay man who accessed Chew portrays how sex work for him was tied into his self-destruction, despair, and ultimate suicide:

> Yo [Darcy]. I am killing myself tonight. I am sorry to disappoint you but I am a fuck up. I am done with the street. I am done with being a piece of meat to survive every day. I just want it to be quiet. Drugs are my friends. Stay well buddy and thanks for making a difference in my chaos. But I want to peace out! Later man. (Grace et al., 2019, p. 5)

Plainly, the adaptive merits of sex work as a basic survival strategy for young people like Tanner, Chris, and Sam are muddled with stressors and risks. On the other hand, a strong case can be made for sex work as a fruitful, proactive problem-solving and income-generating strategy for Brennan and Jeremy (and Darcy). The clearest distinction between these two groups of men appears to be homelessness and food insecurity. The latter three had their most basic needs for sustenance and shelter met already, and they used sex work as a lucrative and tolerable, and even at times enjoyable, means of income. While there were always palpable risks associated with sex work, and while for Brennan and Jeremy the trade was still wrapped up in substance use, their engagement in sex work may nevertheless be construed as thriving. This argument is discussed more fully in the section below discussing sex work in relation to indicators of thriving.

Other atypical coping mechanisms that have been identified by researchers include drug use, drug trafficking, oppositional defiance, early school leaving, truancy, vandalism, and gang involvement (Caine et al., 2013; Korth, 2008; Malindi & Theron, 2010; Pessoa et al., 2017;

Ungar, 2004, 2007). Indeed, two of five Chew clients who participated in this study admitted to selling drugs in the past to supplement their income, while all five possess an extensive history of heavy substance use, including stimulants like methamphetamine, cocaine, and ecstasy, depressants such as GHB and alcohol, and opiates. For most participants, the use of these substances, particularly before they spiraled into physiological addictions that began to overshadow other stressors, was a means to cope with feelings of loneliness, isolation, shyness, guilt, and shame. Reflecting on the ambivalent coping strategy of substance use among SGM individuals, Rainbow Health Ontario (2014) offers this insight:

> Substance use is often viewed as a source of harm. While this can be true, it is also important to recognize substance use as a way to reduce harm and suffering in people's lives as well. Use may mitigate emotional or physical pain, or it may enable people to socialize with others and find a community of support and acceptance. For this reason, it is important to understand substance use in the context of an individual's social and personal life. This is especially true of LGBTQ people who experience high rates of discrimination and stigma. (p. 1)

Nevertheless, we should celebrate Jeremy's success. Having worked to escape the cycle of addiction and now embracing his sobriety, substance use has no place in his self-definition of health and wellness. He even considers his sobriety to be his most substantive asset at this point in his life. Brennan, on the other hand, has found a comfortable equilibrium in conjunction with his family doctor and other health professionals. Brennan's substance use appears to fit the mould of atypical coping, as it serves a socially facilitative role while he engages in harm reduction strategies to curtail the risk of overdose, infection, contusions, and withdrawal. He is fortunate to be enrolled in the injectable opioid-agonist treatment (iOAT) program, which

minimizes his personal financial burden and the necessity of acquiring costly street drugs with questionable purity. For Brennan, the goal for now is not to achieve absolute sobriety, to get "clean," but instead, in conjunction with Alberta Health Services, he wishes to transition away from street drugs, relying on professionally administered injections of pure substances. This allows him to maintain his tolerance, avoid withdrawal symptoms, and enjoy the socially facilitative effects of opiates that have enabled him to navigate a tumultuous ecosystem and negotiate for himself a sense of wellbeing in spite of his unorthodox coping strategies.

Sex Work & Asset-Building

In conducting this research, I investigated how sex work engagement among homeless and street-involved SGM young people in Edmonton relates to assets that have been demonstrated to support resilience. Several key building blocks of success were identified by participants in this study: interpersonal and community assets, including social relationships with clients, Darcy and the Chew Project, and, contingently, police officers; and personal assets, such as artistic/creative talent, empathy, generosity, hopefulness, experience with addiction, and sobriety. This discussion emphasizes those assets that appear to interact with sex work, whether maximizing its safety and utility, or emerging from sex work itself.

Even one trustworthy, significant, and competent adult can play a critical role in promoting the resilience of a young person. Kaye's (2007) study identified "sugar daddies," or generous johns who may serve a caretaking role, as one potential asset young sex workers can develop in the trade. Similarly, Darcy indicates that some of the younger sex workers involved with the Chew Project acquire regular clients serving as stable elements, even surrogate father-like figures, to care for them for a time. None of my research participants identified such a figure in his own life, though Brennan conveyed how some of his clients are "really lovely people" and

that he enjoys spending time with them. Instead, for the Chew Project clients I interviewed, Darcy himself, in conjunction with the services and resources offered by the project, appears to fill that pinnacle role of mentorship and support. Nonjudgmental, infinitely patient, a keen listener, and a parent himself, Darcy has learned how to maximize his support for young people without making promises he cannot keep. Working with vulnerable youth, he remarks,

> has taught me to be realistic with my own kid and really listen to what he's telling me. And I think I got that skill because I work with street kids and I have to find ways to really navigate how to understand them, see where they're coming from. So that's built a strong relationship for us, too, because then we have awesome communication. And just like the street kids that can talk to me about anything—my son, I always said, you can literally talk to me about anything. And there's gonna be no judgment.

Darcy and Chew offer harm reduction tools and safety plans that have enabled their clientele, including the five Chew client research participants in this study, to use substances and engage in sex work as safely as possible under current legislative and regulatory frameworks.

Police officers, although sworn to protect and serve, have nonetheless historically contributed to stressors faced by vulnerable young people, particularly racial, sexual, and gender minorities, and those who are experiencing homelessness, substance use, or survival sex (Boyd et al., 2016; Fitzgerald & Carrington, 2011; Movement Advancement Project, 2016; Ti et al., 2013). However, when they have the education and supports they need to maintain their own mental health, attenuate compassion fatigue, and cultivate empathy, they can function as human assets for those who are struggling (Ahern et al., 2017; Boudreau, 2012; Grant et al., 2019; Greeson et al., 2014). Participants in my study revealed a spectrum of police interactions. As someone with persistent and severe mental health concerns—including borderline personality disorder, which is associated with emotional dysregulation, chaotic relationships, self-harm, and

substance use (APA, 2013; Perugi, Angst, Azorin, Bowden, Vieta, & Young, 2013)—Tanner's own experiences encapsulate this continuum. He recalls some mutually respectful interactions with officers while maintaining that police are typically dismissive, cold, and uneducated with respect to both mental illness and gender diversity.

Darcy relates how certain officers, including the occasional uniformed beat cop and two openly queer officers who visit the Chew outreach office out of uniform, strive to contribute as knowledge workers and to improve the face of law enforcement with the young people he cares for. As conciliatory authority figures, mentors, and role models, these officers have the potential to serve as community assets that have been shown to support growing into resilience (Grace, 2015). Darcy and other Chew Project staff, with one of their central mandates being to facilitate compassionate policing (Grace, 2018a), act as educators and liaisons for and with EPS; in our interviews, Darcy never employs the terminology extrajudicial measures, but he indicates that "diversion," or circumventing the formal justice system in favour of uniquely tailored, non-punitive community supports offered by the Chew Project, is a crucial component of the outreach and intervention work he undertakes in conjunction with EPS. Reverse stings, no doubt frustrating in the moment for a sex worker expecting to cash in on a job—Darcy jokes that they will often ask, "So, are you gonna pay me now?"—nevertheless demonstrate a commitment, if tentative and partial, by EPS to employing harm reduction rather than disciplinary strategies for dealing with those involved in the sex trade.

While Darcy is optimistic that progress is occurring in police-community relations, none of the Chew Project clients interviewed in this study indicated that an EPS member had served as a clear asset in his own life. In the first chapter, I echoed the argument made by Wood and Marks (2007) that positive cultural and operational changes in a police organization will be incremental

and hard-won. Quite so, in Edmonton we have gradually progressed from the disgraceful Pisces Health Spa raid of 1981, during which 46 police officers and two crown attorneys arrested and humiliated 56 men at a bathhouse frequented by men who have sex with men (Holota, 2015), to a moving and heartfelt apology 38 years later by the city's progressive new chief of police, Dale McFee (CBC News, 2019). McFee admits that mistreatment of sexual and gender minorities is still happening today: "Perhaps not as actively or intentionally as in the past, but it is such a systemic part of our structures and practices that it demands our vigilance to address" (CBC News, 2019, para. 11), a sentiment to which Tanner and Darcy can attest. To Darcy's mind, this vigilance begins with educating members of the police force around the nuances of LGBTQ identity and expression, as well as SGM-specific comprehensive—sexual, mental, social, emotional, and physical—health needs, particularly for those members of the community who engage in sex work. The Chew Project plays a pivotal role in this regard.

Perhaps the most pronounced personal asset divulged by the participants in this study was their artistic proclivities. Poetry and prose, drawing and painting, singing and songwriting, and dancing and lip syncing were among the hobbies used as creative outlets by research participants. An eye-catching rainbow-themed mural adorning one wall in the Chew OUTpost serves as an enduring reminder of the remarkable talent and imagination possessed by some of these peripheralized members of the community. It may be no coincidence that three of the four young men in this study who indicated they create art also identified empathy—the ability to understand and intuit the emotions of others—as a key personal asset. For Brennan in particular, this empathic propensity has enhanced his ability to connect with clients in the sex trade, to make them feel present, valued, and comfortable, and to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and reciprocal enjoyment. Sam's empathy and generous spirit, on the other hand, have dissuaded him

from continuing in sex work, as he could not shake the nagging feeling that his johns were unwittingly being taken advantage of. Instead, he prefers to engage in transgressive altruism, for instance by breaking curfew and distributing food to people in need, taking advantage of pliant, durable systems and institutions to meet his own basic needs and help others without exploiting the vulnerabilities of the individuals he encounters in his life on the street.

Both Brennan and Jeremy perceive their lived experience with addiction as an asset enabling them to support others who are struggling with substance use. At the time of our second interview, Brennan is actively contributing to several outreach and support groups—the iOAT working committee, Alberta's Primary Health Care Opioid Response, the Alberta Mental Health and Addictions Youth Council, and the Chew Project. Jeremy, too, has begun work as a peer support worker at the OUTpost. In our interview I ask Jeremy what advice in his peer support role he wishes to impart to project clientele who are engaged in sex work. His answer is to maintain an authentic sense of self:

> Everybody has passions and I think a big one is don't let yourself forget. Don't let yourself drift so far away from things that you—in my own case with creativity and art, I forgot, I lost sight of who I was as an artist. Whereas I would like to see other people retain who they are through sex work, or addiction, or whatever. I'd like to see people able to keep their identities through it. It's easy to lose yourself in things like that.

Getting to know these two young men, and incidentally observing them in training sessions under Darcy's mentorship at the OUTpost, I have noted the maturity, passion, and fearlessness with which they leverage their troubled histories as assets and testaments to support others who may be struggling to find hope. I can rest assured that young people accessing Chew Project services in times of need could not be in better hands.

Sex Work & Thriving

As I engaged in this research, I questioned how sex work engagement among homeless and street-involved SGM young people in Edmonton might relate to indicators of thriving, considering evidence that positive outcomes may be hidden by normative assumptions in marginalized populations. Table 3 lists a selection of typological indicators of thriving from Grace (2015) that were relevant to the young adult participants in this study. (I omitted indicators that were difficult to ascertain from interview data, such as "believing in community" and "valuing diversity.") By my determination, most selected indicators from this inventory were achieved by each participant. Additionally, I have posited a number of indicators that emerged from interview data that are specific to my research sample (Table 4). As I argued in Chapter 1, the normative indicators compiled in Grace's (2015) typology are generalized to a broader queer youth population, and with the present sample of homeless and street-involved SGM young people, this barometer appears only to scratch the surface of meaningful thriving. Arguably, the emergent indicators derived from my conversations with participants are more evocative of the disparities in thriving among them, with only Jeremy succeeding in all indicators, and Sam, Chris, and Tanner meeting only two of six.

Table 3 – *Indicators of Thriving (selected from Grace, 2015) Apparent at Time of Latest Interview*

	Participant				
Indicator	Sam	Chris	Brennan	Tanner	Jeremy
Attachment to family	•	•	•	•	•
Civic engagement			•		•
Coming out	•	•	•	•	•
Coping	•	•	•	•	•
Exhibiting leadership			•		•
Finding stable shelter		•	•	•	•
Helping others	•		•		•
Overcoming adversity	•	•	•	•	•
Seeing choices	•	•	•	•	•
Seeking out resources	•	•	•	•	•
Willingness to admit setbacks	•	•	•	•	•

Table 4 – *Additional Indicators of Thriving Posited from Interview Data*					
	Participant				
Indicator	Sam	Chris	Brennan	Tanner	Jeremy
Comfortably managing substance use (including abstinence)			•		•
Maintaining sobriety					•
Independent living (i.e., paying rent)			•		•
Stable state-sanctioned employment					•
Hopes and dreams for the future	•	•	•	•	•
Participation in research interview	•	•	•	•	•

In this study, resilience is construed as the capacity to survive and thrive in the face of adversity and trauma; it is both a process and an outcome, and one that is non-linear and likely to be impeded by setbacks along the way (Grace, 2015). The trajectories of each of the five young adult participants in this study demonstrate fluctuations and setbacks, to be sure. Conceptually, thriving can be measured according to categorical indicators, while resilience is more subjectively inferred from an individual's perceived ability to navigate and overcome significant adversity (Grace, 2015; Meyer, 2015; Rutter, 1993, 2012). By combining all previous tables (Table 5), we can get a more complete portrait of resilience, where risk factors and indicators of thriving count together toward our inferred appraisal of an individual's resilience. Compared to Jeremy, Tanner meets fewer thriving indices, but he has had more risk factors and stressors to overcome on his journey. Perhaps, then, we would nominate Tanner as the Chew Project client participant most exhibiting resilience in this study, even if he has experienced sex work as an ambivalent coping strategy, still contends with alcohol addiction, engages in erratic and impulsive behaviour, and relies on others for financial support. Still, in keeping with a framework of ecological decentrality and to avoid stumbling into neoliberal pitfalls of individualism and competitiveness, Table 5 is meant to serve primarily as a visual representation

of a constellation of risk and resilience factors experienced by members of Edmonton's street-involved and homeless SGM population, not a between-participant comparison.

Table 5 – *Aggregate Stressors, Risks, and Indicators of Thriving*

	Participant				
Risk Factor (General)	Sam	Chris	Brennan	Tanner	Jeremy
Early substance use	•	•	•	•	•
Family dysfunction/chaotic homelife	•		•	•	•
Homelessness	•	•		•	
Mood/personality/schizoaffective	•	•		•	•
Negative encounters with police				•	
Rejection by family				•	
Suicidal ideation		•		•	•
Risk Factor (Sex Work)					
Assault by client			•	•	
Threats from pimps/handlers		•			
Difficulty screening clients		•		•	
Heavy substance use	•	•	•	•	•
Sexually transmitted infections		•	•		
Shame	•			•	•
Indicator of Thriving					
Attachment to family	•	•	•	•	•
Civic engagement			•		•
Comfortably managing substance use			•		•
Coming out	•	•	•	•	•
Coping	•	•	•	•	•
Exhibiting leadership			•		•
Finding stable shelter		•	•	•	•
Helping others	•		•		•
Hopes and dreams for the future	•	•	•	•	•
Independent living (i.e., paying rent)			•		•
Maintaining sobriety					•
Overcoming adversity	•	•	•	•	•
Participation in research interview	•	•	•	•	•
Seeing choices	•	•	•	•	•
Seeking out resources	•	•	•	•	•
Stable employment					•
Willingness to admit setbacks	•	•	•	•	•

More than extrinsic indicators, self-appraisal is pivotal to Ungar's (2004) definition of resilience as "the outcome of negotiations between individuals and their environments to maintain a self-definition as healthy" (p. 81). Notably, Sam indicated he was happy despite being homeless and was content with the choices he had made precipitating his current circumstances. Jeremy, Brennan, and Tanner all indicated that they do indeed consider themselves resilient, as well as conditionally happy, more or less healthy, and incontrovertibly hopeful. Sam and Chris, too, readily conveyed their hopefulness for the future and their dreams for success in art and business, respectively. The SGM youth interviewed in Asakura's (2016a) study stated that getting out of bed every day and having hope for the future despite "knowing that they must continue to struggle to exist within their marginalized lived realities" (p. 11) is a sufficient measure of resilience for young people who have faced significant adversity. According to these criteria, each of the Chew clients who participated in the current study is exhibiting resilience.

As the behavioural focus of this study is on sex work, this warrants a discussion about whether participants have demonstrated thriving as sex workers in particular. Are there certain contexts in which engaging in sex work can clearly enable or indicate thriving? In the above section on sex work and coping, I tentatively dissected the sex trade into reactive coping (survival sex) and proactive problem-solving (gainful employment). Ungar (2004) contends that it is the "perception of choice, any choice, that underpins constructions of resilience. Decisions, good or bad, offer an opportunity to author an identity" (p. 143). With their bellies full, and a roof over their heads, Brennan, Jeremy, and Darcy all exhibited a proactive, approach-driven, even entrepreneurial modus operandi with respect to sex work. Each of them expressed that the sale of sexual services could be a viable way to make a living, even when other alternatives may be available. For Brennan and Jeremy, sex work has been generally self-esteem-enhancing, and

Brennan has enjoyed the human connection and intimate contact, assuaging his loneliness. Engaging in sex work has also enabled Brennan to build his vocational capacity, enhancing his networking and negotiating skills and allowing him to develop his own sense of mastery as a self-employed service provider.

Sam and Tanner, on the other hand, convey sex work as purposeful, yes, but more of a stressor—a distasteful behaviour that they were resigned to—than a freely chosen and providential means of adaptation. It is worth reiterating Tanner's comment on the matter: "For me it was more of a survival choice than anything. So yes I was still making the choice to do it, but I didn't feel like it was always exactly a *choice.*" Nevertheless, engaging in sex work as a survival strategy has a pragmatic focus in terms of meeting physical needs like eating and finding shelter. They may prefer having another choice, but such reactive coping is part of staying alive. Indeed, Chris's interview depicts a vacillation around sex work; he sometimes feels he is thriving in the trade but his success is fragile and fleeting under pressure from gangs and other third parties:

> I was making *a lot* of money. Some nights I would make $1000. I kind of miss those times.... I had all these aliases that I was using and I was doing really, really good for a while. But then I said no to a drug deal and it all came crashing down!

Chris's engagement in survival sex exposes him to significant risk under the purview of the Hells Angels and other dangerous criminal elements, not to mention party and play, STIs, and exhaustion. Darcy and the Chew Project will no doubt continue to serve as integral harm reduction resources, hopefully enabling him, if not to thrive, exactly, then at least to survive. According to the criteria shaped by Asakura (2016a) and his discursively empowered participants, by pressing on every day and exhibiting hope under the most challenging of

circumstances, Chris is demonstrating resilience, even now as he faces exploitation by sex traffickers and struggles with a meth addiction that exacerbates his mental health issues.

Arguably, the data in this study suggest that, for Jeremy and Brennan, sex work is a less ambiguous coping strategy, and one that instead carries a predominantly positive slant. Jeremy perceives the sex trade to be incompatible with his sobriety, and he is thriving, without drugs or sex work, now more than ever before. But a strong case can be made that he was thriving as a sex worker, too. Party and play notwithstanding, the risks associated with sex work for Jeremy were relatively mild (see Table 2), as he was matched with a compatible pool of clients by a friend who also provided a safe venue for transactions to occur. He had a home and a tattoo shop, and sex work provided extra income while enhancing his self-esteem. Perceptibly, it was a stepping stone—and a lucrative and manageable one—on his path to the sobriety and stability he currently enjoys.

Brennan still engages in sex work on occasion, relying as much as possible on his established pool of clients for safety, comfort, and convenience. Aside from the risk of STIs, Brennan's primary concern when engaging in the sex trade is cancellations and logistical issues. After speaking with me for several minutes and deciding I was trustworthy and nonjudgmental, Brennan opened up about how he thrives in sex work—he enjoys it, he is good at it, it makes him feel good about himself, he makes a lot of money, and he has developed viable strategies for mitigating the risks. Indeed, he considers himself "self-employed" and would happily pay income taxes as a sex worker, and his success in the sex trade has imbued him with the confidence to ideate about other entrepreneurial pursuits:

> Not only do I like being self-employed, it's something that makes me feel like, "Oh shit, you can make your own business!" It doesn't even necessarily have to be sex work, but I

> could make my own business. And just imagining different business models, like what if I had a van and I tattooed in different cities?!

Brennan manifests both elements of thriving that have been posited in this study—self-determination and objective indicators. Accordingly, I am confident in my assertion that sex work among the population served by the Chew Project can, under certain conditions, serve as both an adaptive, if socially and legally delicate, coping mechanism as well as an indicator of thriving.

Hidden Resilience as a Transgressive and Useful Construction of Resilience

To review, resilience as a construct, process, and outcome is inferred from a subjective assessment of four interrelated, ecologically distributed categories: stressors and risks; assets and protective factors; coping mechanisms (which can serve as assets and/or risks); and signs of thriving. The notion of hidden resilience, an emergent, transgressive construct central to this study, pragmatically proposes that some indicators of thriving, the adaptiveness of certain unconventional coping strategies, and concomitant manifestations of resilience may be overlooked due to a preoccupation with risk factors and population-based normativity. Hidden resilience also speaks to our collective failure—speaking broadly of privileged figures in the nebula of research, policy, and practice—to adequately combat stigma and capricious morality.

This study was constructed with attention to the buoyancy of the human spirit, revealing an understanding of resilience that embraces context and rejects teleology and arbitrariness (Ungar, 2004). It espouses a contingent understanding of positive adaptation, which for many vulnerable young people might mean simply surviving the day, rather than using a lens of normative health to conceptualize resilience in vulnerable SGM youth (Asakura, 2016a). The lived experiences portrayed by the six participants in this study demonstrate the ways in which

the marked potential of sex work as a conditionally robust, effective means of coping is evident and yet will likely continue to be rejected or overlooked by decision-makers and laypersons alike. This eschewal is due largely to the salience of stigma, physical risk factors, and law enforcement, which could be mitigated through decriminalization, harm reduction, and educational strategies with respect to both sex work and the substance use that often accompanies it. Legislators and policymakers in particular need to hitch their high horses and find common ground with their marginalized and disenfranchised constituents—those who are too often deemed criminals, nuisances, and undesirables for the strategies they employ to survive when the system fails them. Pity, disgust, and dogma have no place in professional assessments of risk, thriving, resilience, or associated policy work.

The SGM youth interviewed by Asakura (2016a) in Toronto were nominated as exemplars of resilience by their peers and service providers despite their ongoing struggles with numerous stressors, including school absence, mental illness, past suicide attempts, food insecurity, and housing instability. These youth rejected normative construals of positive adaptation, such as the absence of mental health issues and success in school, exhibiting instead evidence of hidden resilience that, notably, was not invisible to peers and support staff. Asakura's study crucially elucidates the hidden resilience of his participants, and similarly with my doctoral study I hope I have achieved my goal of clearing the normative smoke screen that conceals the incredible resilience—the paradoxically "ordinary magic" (Masten, 2001), enabled here by atypical coping strategies and indicated by irregular signs of thriving—that has been demonstrated by these six remarkable men. Their experiences demonstrate the myriad ways in which they are deserving of our recognition, accommodation, and respect, as citizens, agents, and survivors. Each thrives in his own way, even as positive progression is non-linear and there

are always obstacles and setbacks to deal with. The young men who participated in this study have not succumbed to the fallout. They have not completed suicide. They are hopeful and ambitious, and they carry on. Accordingly, their lives exhibit hidden resilience tied to atypical coping.

Recruitment, Intersectionality, & Participation-as-Thriving

Of the 32 Chew Project clientele who completed the confidential and anonymous Ministry of Children's Services survey, 66% identify as persons of colour and 19% as non-cisgender (e.g., transgender, genderqueer), and the average age was 21 (range 15-29) (Grace et al., 2019). Similarly, data logged by Darcy and described in the Chew Project 2019 mid-term report revealed that, of the 128 documented youth who accessed the Chew Project over a six-month period that year, 70% identify as Indigenous or persons of colour, and their age ranged from 10-26 (no immediate data was available with respect to gender identity) (Wyness & Grace, 2019). In contrast, of the sample of Chew Project clients featured in the present study, four (80%) identify as Caucasian, all five identify as cisgender (though Chris and Tanner both embody *expressions* of gender-queerness as an occasional cross-dresser and drag queen, respectively), and the average age at the time of their most recent interview was 29 (median 27; range 25-38). As Darcy invited anyone who accessed the Chew Project and met the basic inclusion criteria to participate in my doctoral research interviews (SGM/YMSM, age 18-29, and a history of sex work; Jeremy was included as a propitious and ad hoc exception to age criteria), we are left to wonder why the participants in this study do not better reflect the project's demographics.

Following the lead of Asakura (2016a, 2016b) and Grace and co-researchers (2019), I typified participation in this study as an indicator of thriving in itself. Clearly, if a young adult is

experiencing a mental health crisis, for example, or is incarcerated, they are not in a position to participate in a research interview (one young man who agreed to an interview was arrested the day he was to meet with us and we lost contact with him). Conversely, having the emotional and physical means, and the enthusiasm, to participate in this entirely voluntary study, devoid of pressure or coercion and with minimal incentive, seems to indicate a young person is doing relatively well. Why, then, were interviewees predominantly white, cisgender, and over the age of 25? I surmise that this phenomenon speaks to the power of privileged axes of differentiation, even within a generally disadvantaged population.

At our follow-up interview in January 2020, the final interview for this study, I ask Darcy about the demographic discrepancies I have observed. His response is enlightening, as many, even most, of the SGM sex workers he sees in his online outreach are young men of colour, and he is seeing a novel trend toward trans-male-identified sex workers. The characteristics of the population sample in this study, then, reflect neither those of typical Chew Project clients nor of SGM sex workers in Edmonton more broadly. Darcy points to levels of comfort and apprehension as key factors that influenced our recruitment success:

> I think because a lot would never be engaged in this kind of research. They don't want to talk about it. If you go online to LeoList and stuff, to the male escorts, a lot of those guys are men of colour. The majority, sometimes, are men of colour. But it's getting those guys in and being comfortable is harder too.

I ask Darcy, "Do you think age is a factor? Like, they've kind of come out the other side?" He replies, "Yeah, the younger ones are scared they're gonna get busted by doing anything like this, or sometimes even coming to Chew, they're gonna be identified."

In contrast to other individual characteristics that were identified as risk factors and personal assets in this study (e.g., mental illness, which can be treated, and empathic and creative

abilities, which can perhaps be cultivated), participants' age, gender identity, and ethnic identity are obstinate, if not entirely fixed, transversal variables in the resilience function. The challenges I faced accessing gender and racial minorities may be indicative of the additional stressors they encounter in their daily lives simply for how they identify and present. Their sense of safety and comfort, even in the quintessential safe space that is the Chew OUTpost, cannot be taken for granted, particularly in light of the inescapable facticity of Darcy's and my whiteness. In ongoing efforts to meet the needs of clientele in the intersections of sexuality, gender, race, and ethnocultural differences, the Chew Project has since procured funding for a queer Indigenous support worker, whose presence during my doctoral study may have facilitated a sense of safety, comfort, and gatekeeping for Indigenous clientele and other young persons of colour. Furthermore, the advanced age of participants in this study—and particularly of Jeremy, who, at age 38, demonstrates more signs of thriving than any other client of the project—may be indicative of them having more time and capacity to recover from adversity, trauma, and impediments to their individual and social development. This is indicated by, among other factors, their ability to cogently and comfortably participate in a research interview.

The following chapter concludes this dissertation by proffering recommendations based on study outcomes, discussing opportune future research directions, and sharing a selection of five personal and professional insights that I recorded in my journal as I engaged in reflexive inquiry and action over the course of my doctoral study.

Chapter 6: Concluding Perspectives, Recommendations, & Reflexive Insights

> Marginalization is a social process, not a label.
> It is an action that yields a desired result.
> (Joanna Rummens & George Dei, 2013, p. 115)

Recommendations

The primary objective of this study has been to enrich resilience theory by exploring and evaluating how vulnerable SGM young people make sense of their successes and setbacks as they overcome pervasive, chronic adversity and trauma. This involved investigating how participants identify and describe resilience and its constituent constructs in a safe, nonjudgmental setting and on their own terms. I engaged in this study in the spirit of contemporary resilience research, which has shifted the frame from a pathological and deficit-centred model to instead focus on assets and protective factors that can promote positive outcomes through evidence-based intervention and policy decisions. In meeting this primary objective, I have featured the stories of six resilient queer-identified men. These narratives illuminate the diversity and divergences among them, as well as the common threads that bind them as members of a disenfranchised and stigmatized population with limited access to timely and meaningful resources.

Perhaps the most notable finding of this study, from a policy perspective, is the degree to which each client who participated has relied on the Chew Project and its overstretched lead intervention and outreach worker—whom clientele refer to as their "gay Yoda"—for life-preserving resources and supports. The precarity of Chew Project clients is reflective of its own vulnerability as an organization, as the project relies on soft money—private donations and government grants—to stay operational. Public funding is more tenuous than ever in the present political climate of social and fiscal conservatism that has seen rollbacks in essential public

services and protections for vulnerable Albertans, all ostensibly in the name of dutiful restraint and communal sacrifice (Russell, 2019). Furlong (2013) reminds us to be diligent and skeptical as we are pushed and pulled by these changing tides: “Marginalization is frequently linked to a resource deficit, but it can also be linked to culture and to subjective orientations as well as to policies that enforce the separation of those with certain characteristics” (p. 139).

Quite so, the raw and colourful experiences recounted with poise and equanimity by the research participants in this study, as well as those conveyed in two recent Chew Project reports (Grace et al., 2019; Wyness & Grace, 2019), underscore the stark realities of squalor and indignity endured by dozens of street-involved and homeless SGM youth and young adults in Edmonton. The Chew Project’s crucial, life-affirming utility for the hundreds of downtrodden and resolute young people it serves every year, as well our collective responsibility to better intervene in the atrocious living conditions many of them experience, cannot be overstated. In the six-month period from April to October 2019, Chew Project staff performed 89 suicide interventions (Wyness & Grace, 2019), and Darcy keeps a binder full of suicide notes left behind for him by young people who have tragically completed suicide.

Stemming from this troubling reality, my first concrete recommendation in this dissertation is an entreaty to support vulnerable and alienated SGM youth and young adults: The Chew Project—in the spirit of triage, compassion, and the sanctity of life—must be a top fiscal priority for the provincial government moving forward. Furthermore, other jurisdictions are implored to adopt and adapt Grace’s C3 model in shaping their own initiatives to attenuate the enduring systemic and structural processes of marginalization and to address the unique, harsh realities vulnerable SGM young people face in communities across the country. Inclusion, as Rummens & Dei (2013) aptly assert,

> is not simply a "seeing," nor an "adding" or "bringing in." One can, after all, be included while continuing to exist on the margins of social life.... Real social inclusion and integration is about ensuring equitable outcomes for all of our diverse youth, by directly addressing and compensating for existing differentials in power, prestige, privilege, status, and resources, and simultaneously challenging any unexamined sense of entitlement devoid of matching mutual responsibility to others. (p. 119)

Myriad stakeholders, across diverse ecologies and sociopolitical strata, must coordinate our efforts, championing transformative discourse, policy, and programming to better account and compensate for the inequality and injustice that marks the lives of so many of our young people. Public service providers, such as police officers, nurses, and social workers, comprise a crucial piece in this patchwork quilt of awareness, accommodation, and basic dignity. Hence, with my future research I will endeavour to investigate caring professionals' knowledge and awareness about SGM youth and young adults—particularly those who are transgender or gender-nonconforming, Indigenous, people of colour, and newcomers—and their needs in terms of access and accommodation in community and institutional contexts. The ultimate goal of this pursuit will be to address the unequal status and adjustment of SGM young people persisting across life contexts such as family situations, social services, schooling, the justice system, healthcare, and the street.

The second objective of this study has been to investigate how transformative research methods nested in a research to advocacy and action model can be effectively employed to engender tangible, substantive improvements in the lives of young people, empowering them to be problem-solvers and agents of change who can enhance their personal recognition and accommodation in diverse social settings. While the fruits of this objective are difficult to

measure, interviewees did seem to engage in reflective processing of their historical narratives as they participated in these research interviews. They also seemed genuinely grateful for the opportunity to contribute their voices to research that may influence decision-making in policy and practice. Indeed, my impression at this juncture is that qualitative research interviews as natural conversations under careful conditions are an effective, ethically sound means of centring the voices of those whose experiences, perspectives, and opinions are often excluded from public discourse. Simultaneously, a queer critical posthuman framework decentres and diffuses the responsibility for their plights. By letting participants lead and take charge of the interviews, their personal comfort, emotional safety, and individual agency was maximized, even if this method did, at times, leave some stones unturned.

Fortunately, the survey we developed and conducted for the Ministry of Children's Services, as reported by Grace and his research team (2019), included participants drawn from the same core population during the same approximate time period, thus effectively contextualizing and enriching the qualitative data collected in my doctoral study. This complementary data allowed for cross-checking and the inception of both harmonizing and discordant perspectives. In light of this fortuitous dynamic, my second recommendation is that future studies investigating complex social issues with vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations should endeavour to employ mixed methods research. By utilizing pointed, structured surveys that can be completed in private and on a young person's own time, in addition to participant-driven open conversations in carefully controlled settings, rich and meaningful data can emerge, all the while minimizing discomfort for research participants. Such methods allow them to be in control as they volunteer themselves to "psychologically disrobe" and to verbally recount potentially traumatizing experiences. Not one young person appeared to experience any

significant degree of distress while participating in this study, even as sensitive topics did arise. I attribute this in large part to the organic, participant-driven nature of the interviews, as well as the soothing and facilitating presence of the lead intervention and outreach worker as gatekeeper and conduit. Indeed, my confidence and comfort with interview methods has been reinforced with this research project. Moving forward on my own journey as a scholar, the effective use of mixed methods as a means for transformative research may require further training in statistical methods, a worthwhile investment to be sure.

My third recommendation echoes the call to action petitioned by numerous researchers and advocates who have implored lawmakers to decriminalize sex work. Hitherto, Justin Trudeau's Liberal government, now in its fifth year in power, has done nothing to address the crisis of criminalization that propagates socioeconomic inequality, physical danger, and psychological trauma, thus allowing one of the more deleterious and ideologically suspect legacies of the Harper era to endure unfettered and unchecked. The federal government's failure to address the working conditions of our country's intimate labourers proliferates their social exclusion, "a political, material, psychological, and spiritual mindset, action, and practice that favours some and disadvantages others" (Rummens & Dei, 2013, p. 119). Brennan's lived experience as a sex worker in particular speaks to the potential of the sex trade as a fortuitous and lucrative form of freely chosen intimate labour, particularly when individual assets such as sex-positivity, empathy, an entrepreneurial spirit, and charisma are catalyzed by community assets like the Chew Project and its harm reduction and educational resources. Ideally, decriminalization will espouse a gradual deflation of "whore stigma," allowing instead for a celebration of the skillfulness, resourcefulness, and vivacity of sex workers as vocational service providers like any other. This should encourage a harmonious, healthy relationship between

intimate labourers and their presently suspicious and anxious clients, who fear prosecution and public shaming as they avail themselves of a most enduring and steadfast profession.

This doctoral research study was intended to explore sex work as a potential avenue of non-normative empowerment. Entering this study, I acknowledged that this route would be complex, ambivalent, and replete with contingencies, and the results demonstrate this ambiguity. Participants have experienced varying degrees of success, personal fulfillment, and slippage into substance use as they have employed sex work as a coping and problem-solving strategy. Sam and Tanner have perceived the sex trade as a useful survival strategy, but one that is concomitantly shameful and degrading. Chris's mental health issues and drug use make him especially vulnerable to exploitation and dangerous situations, but he does appear to enjoy intermittent and conditional thriving in sex work by his own appraisal. Jeremy did well enough as a sex worker, substance use notwithstanding, and will avoid sex work as long as his sobriety is intact. Brennan's experience, meanwhile, is the most reflective of thriving in sex work, both by his own determination and by my impression according to various extant and emergent indicators.

Darcy's own personal history suggests that the sex trade for sexual and gender minorities need not be embroiled in heavy substance use, but his reflection of the experiences of Chew Project clientele, as well as the detailed stories provided by the five clients who participated in this study, suggest sex work in Edmonton's street-involved and homeless SGM population tends to orbit around drugs. This trend is reflected in Vancouver as well, with Argento and colleagues' (2018) study finding 74% of male sex workers in that city report using crystal meth. Substance addiction is a key variable cutting across research participants in this study, a preoccupying and at times controlling factor that can interfere with cognitive and emotional competencies and

impede a young person's ability to exhibit resilience, hidden or otherwise. In the future I intend to scrutinize this conundrum more deeply, and thus we arrive at my fourth and final recommendation: Future studies investigating how sex work interacts with risk-taking, asset-building, coping, thriving, and resilience more broadly should endeavour to dig into the related issue of substance use more comprehensively than the scope of this study has allowed. Perhaps one useful method, time permitting, would be to locate and interview young people like the Darcy of years past, who have engaged in sex work without the liability of substance use and addiction. This would enable a better analysis of the role of substances in sex work, and vice versa.

According to survey data with 32 Chew clientele, 60% of clients admit to dealing with substance use (Grace et al., 2019). This number may be higher due to social desirability bias as well as the possibility that substance users are less willing or able to complete a survey. Nonetheless, we can safely say a significant minority of young people who access the Chew Project do not struggle with substance use. Among this same sample of 32 youth, 59% indicated they sometimes (rarely, occasionally, often, or always) have sex for money, and 66% for a place to sleep. The similarity of the figures around sex work with those indicating substance use evoke some interesting questions, which would require a larger sample in order to infer statistical significance, such as: How many of those 60% of young people who struggle with substance use are also among the approximately 60% who have engaged in sex work? What other demographic, behavioural, and experiential factors are associated with substance use and with sex work? Future research should more thoroughly investigate the relationship between substance use and sex work, a task that, in my experience, could be best approached using mixed methods such as surveys and interviews.

My Learning Journey

I have learned a great deal, personally and professionally, from my engagement in this research study. To conclude, I proffer a few tenuous, practical reflexive insights, which I recorded in my personal journal as this research journey unfolded, that have emanated from the co-navigation and negotiation of the research process with my participants. Firstly, it has become apparent that reflexivity *is* ethical practice. That is, ethical practice is reflexive, and reflexivity is motivated foremost by ethics. Reflexivity demands that I proactively account for how my participants will benefit from the research process, how I can minimize the harm from potentially salting fresh wounds and unearthing old traumas, and how I can ensure the fidelity of my interpretations, professing the lived truths of these young people while also recognizing that the knowledge gleaned from this inquiry is contingent, constructed, and partial.

Second, reflexivity is affective and visceral. It is permeated with emotion, feeling, intuition, and instinct. It cannot be distilled to the intellect, to a sterile rationale or procedure. The heart belongs to the reflexive, and I see this as one of the latter's greatest strengths. I operate on faith that not just charts and tables but also poignancy and passion *must* be effective means to encourage investment from academics, policymakers, legislators, caring professionals, and other stakeholders in order to rally compassion and effect social transformation. Certainly, it has worked on me; the emotive reflexive accounts provided by Lennon (2017) and McDonald (2013, 2016) compelled me to continue digging into their narratives in an attempt to walk in their shoes and carry forth their shared torch of ethical reflection and engagement.

Third, reflexivity is uncomfortable. It requires us to ask disquieting questions and face disturbing truths. In the spirit of narrative knowledge-building, I provide an anecdote to illustrate. Last spring, my best friend John and I were strolling down Whyte Avenue together, on

our way to a pub to enjoy the first warm patio day of the year. As we neared the pub, a young person walked toward us on the sidewalk going the other way, someone who, based on my partial and indeterminate impression in the moment, was probably queer-identified and possibly street-involved. What happened next was subtle and lasted only a few seconds, but I found it quite troubling. The approaching youth noticed us and veered away suddenly and anxiously, head-down, to give us a wide berth as we passed. I interpreted this distancing as an act of suspicious, perhaps fearful, avoidance.

I still contemplate that moment. John and I are both openly gay, but he in particular would be read by most passers-by as "straight"—he is tall and muscular, with an easy, confident, masculine walk. Even so, it had never occurred to me until that moment that we might be coded as threatening by anyone navigating a shared public space. Upon reflection, this event—and my own fallible interpretation thereof—nevertheless epitomizes the wildly disparate social positions of me and my participants, situating the interview room as an ephemeral silo that may, in part, mitigate that incredible strangeness, that potential for fear and hypervigilance, at least to some degree. But what about before and after, in the open world of "real life?" Do I, by virtue of presenting as a rather straight-looking man who embodies a normative cisgender masculinity, propagate feelings of marginalization and suspicion in vulnerable queer and trans others when I am going about my daily routine? Are John and I complicit with forces of homo/bi/transphobia because of the uncritical way we carry ourselves in public? Perhaps I should don a rainbow pin or safe space lapel so that queer and trans people navigating public spaces are less likely to be anxious around me. Perhaps, though, such an act of visibility might make *me* a target of homophobia in the street. Am I a coward, then, for not being more visible? I am forced to consider how these dilemmas imbricate my relationship with my participants, which ostensibly

begins and ends in the interview room, but that actually extends backward and forward in time indefinitely. I am left to wonder if a researcher-participant relationship can be healthy and ethical if I am an inadvertent symbol of oppression or an emotional trigger on the street.

With these quandaries unsettled—and perhaps even unresolvable—we arrive at my fourth and penultimate reflexive insight. I have found the contrition, indignance, and childhood flashbacks precipitated by an encounter such as that described above have the tendency to propel me into a reactive, compensatory trajectory that again centres and elevates me as a privileged figure in this relational, methodological matrix. Indeed, I have found what we might refer to as the "saviour complex" to be an ever-present threat to epistemological egalitarianism in my work. In resistance to this complex, I am mandated to contemplate to what degree my research and advocacy stems from my personal traumas of the closet and growing up in a conservative household and community. How much of this work is for my own healing and validation? Have I positioned myself as a rescuer, emancipator, even scapegoat, casting myself into a cage match with social conservatives in order to deflect the tyranny of heterosexism and queerphobia from those with weaker defenses, one rally, interview, publication, or Facebook post at a time?

To my mind, the saviour complex further excavates the pitfalls of traditional liberalism and classical humanism, of top-down proclamations about justice and human rights. How do I as an educator resist, then, the tendency to perch myself high atop the ivory tower of academia, assuming my role as "the legislator of knowledge and the owner of truth" (Braidotti, 2018, p. 182)? How do I ensure I speak *to* and *with*, but never *for*, the vulnerable (Giroux, 1992), employing a *power with* rather than *power over* approach (Wilson & Neville, 2009)? In order to avoid imposing a universalized, emancipatory scaffolding that may not resonate with my participants, and to better navigate the tensions between my politics of location and theirs,

Wilson and Neville's (2009) notion of *cultural safety* in research with vulnerable populations is useful. They suggest that researchers can facilitate a safe space for dialogue and negotiation by reflecting on our own implicit cultural mores, exercising epistemological humility and a willingness to recognize the expertise, worldviews, traditions, and historical, sociocultural, and political realities of our participants.

In my experience, the saviour complex may encourage, too, an onto-epistemological myopia, which can also be tempered by the lens of cultural safety. In this project and in my daily life, I am committed to a queer critical posthuman eco-philosophy that decenters the individual and knocks human agency and freedom down a peg in order to proliferate a more egalitarian notion of personhood. However, participants in my study will bring their own values, convictions, and beliefs to the table, emanating from all manner of axiological paradigms. For my participants, some of whom are just trying to survive from one day to the next, my eco-philosophy might be perceived as privileged and out of touch. With this in mind, actively acknowledging and embracing contrasting politics of location points to "how social identities occupy contradictory and shifting locations in which it becomes possible to open up new spaces for conversations and forms of solidarity" (Giroux, 1992, p. 26). Braidotti (2013) suggests that an authentic posthuman empiricism is grounded in the lived experience of participants, rooted in a politics of location that is "socialized, mediated, and relational. You start by accounting for it and from there we move on to a number of directions" (p. 183). Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere (Hankey, 2018), in order to make any transformative gains, educational researchers will always have one foot caught in a generalist fissure; it takes an active, engaged sense of reflexivity, incredulity, and irony to avoid altogether slipping into chasms of universalism and salvation.

Finally, in the spirit of posthuman thought, this dissertation ends on an affirming, expansive note with my fifth reflexive insight. I need to take meticulous care to avoid elevating myself as a truth-bearer, to be mindful of psychological complexes that threaten to feed on the triggers and traumas marking me as a researcher-advocate, and to embody a politics of accountability that actively addresses my complicity in colonial, masculinist hegemony. Favourably, a turn to queer critical posthuman reflexivity reassures me that the deeper my honest engagement with these tensions, the more qualified I become in reality to conduct this research. As McDonald (2013) suggests, queerness shakes up categories and their meanings, labels that fit me like White man, queer, student, researcher, advocate, ally, accomplice, imposter, and colonizer. On some level, all of these classifications carry some truth, and yet queerness imbues them with fluidity and contingency, leaving even the most troublesome open to negotiation, positioning them as speed bumps rather than barricades.

In the midst of navigating these subjectivities, and perhaps despite some of them, I believe it is important to continue to mobilize the sort of research described in this dissertation. Delaying this potentially transformative work may be unconscionable given the conditions the most vulnerable members of the queer and trans community are facing today. There are no easy answers to the ethical conundrums I have outlined above, but as Grace (2015) implores us, it is time to make it better *now* for sexual and gender minority young people, as tomorrow may be too late.

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Appendix A – Consent Form for Young Adult Participants

Studying Resilience in Street-Involved and Homeless Sexual and Gender Minority Youth Engaged in Sex Work: Form for Young Adult Interview Research Participants

This research project is for sexual and gender minority (SGM including LGBTQ) young adults from Edmonton and area who are involved in the Community, Health, Empowerment & Wellness (CHEW) Project. Jeffrey R. Hankey at the University of Alberta is conducting this doctoral research under the supervision of Dr. André P. Grace, director of the CHEW Project. You are invited to participate, as you choose, by taking part in open-ended individual interviews. The results will be used to improve educational, health, and community supports for you and other SGM youth and young adults. This research gives you an opportunity to provide your input to help us in this work.

As you are comfortable, we will engage in a conversation about how you view growing into resilience; that is, how you become happy, healthy, and able to problem solve and move forward. This conversation will relate to your involvement in sex work. Interviews may take up to 30 minutes. By providing us with your input, you share information that we will use to make life better now and in the future for SGM youth and young adults. You might consider some of the items to be sensitive and stressful to answer. If you have concerns and need help and support from the CHEW Project, we will provide it. We have a counsellor and youth outreach workers who can help you. Just let us know and it will be handled as confidentially as possible. For help, you can contact Corey Wyness (CHEW Project Coordinator/Support and Outreach) at cwyness@ualberta.ca or (780) 263-2221.

You are invited to provide independent consent to participate in this research. You may provide consent 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 have the right to opt out of participating in the research at any time, without penalty. This will in no way affect your participation in any of the programs for youth and young adults offered by the CHEW Project.
- You may choose not to answer any particular interview questions that make you uncomfortable.
- You accept that if you discuss the possibility of self-harm or dangers to yourself, CHEW researchers will follow up to help and support you. In these cases, we may be limited in our ability to guarantee confidentiality.
- Interviews will be audio-recorded and then transcribed.
- You can withdraw your research data up to four weeks after the interview.
- Processes to provide security, confidentiality, and anonymity are built into the design of the study:
    - Interview data will be stored securely on password-protected devices.
    - You can choose to be identified by a pseudonym (an invented name of your choosing) or, if it is your preference, your first name. No surnames will be used.
    - Only the researcher, Jeffrey R. Hankey, and his supervisor, Dr. André P. Grace, each of whom is required to sign confidentiality agreements, will have access to research data and information.
- You agree that the researcher can use information in secondary writing beyond the research report (PhD dissertation), which includes such writing as conference papers, book chapters, or journal articles. The same ethical considerations and safeguards will apply to these secondary uses of data.
- You can ask Mr. Hankey or Dr. Grace to provide you with access to the research report resulting from this research.

If you have questions, please email Jeffrey R. Hankey at jrhankey@ualberta.ca or Dr. André P. Grace at andre.grace@ualberta.ca.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

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: _____

Researcher's Print Name: ***Jeffrey R. Hankey***

Signature: _____

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

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B: Open-Ended Research Interview Questions (CS Research)

Questions for Youth Participants:

- Demographic data
  - Age
  - Community of origin? If you moved to Edmonton, why?
  - Self-identification
    - Sexual orientation
    - Gender identity
      - Transitioning? Social/hormonal/surgical/legal
  - Ancestry
    - Ethnic identity? E.g., Indigenous? White? Other?
- Factors leading to homelessness
  - Was there a pivotal factor that led to familial breakdown?
  - What supports were missing to prevent current circumstances?
- Previous CS involvement
  - For children/youth with previous CS involvement, how could we meet your needs better?
- HIV/STI infection
  - Where do you access testing/treatment/therapy?
  - What would make access easier?
  - Are you engaging in unprotected sex? How often? What factors would lead you to be more likely to engage in unprotected sex?
  - Do you have access to condoms and/or birth control?
  - Do you feel safe accessing STI/sexual health resources? How can this be improved?
  - Do you, or have you, engaged in IV drug use?
- Substance abuse
  - What substances do you use? How often and under what conditions? Do you use them to cope?
  - Have you accessed treatment services? What was your experience with that?
- Income
  - Where do you get your money?
- Survival sex and sex work
  - Ever been involved in or considered survival sex or sex work? Past, present, future?
    - PSECA involvement? What was beneficial? What was not? Did you return to sex work?
    - What are the risks you encounter? How do you minimize risk?
    - Do you encounter stigma? How do you deal with it?
    - What are the benefits/assets? Does engaging in sex work influence or relate to your identity? How?

    - Does the youth have a “travel path” involving them leaving town frequently to maintain a low profile? What is their travel routine?
- Suicide ideation/attempts
    - Where do you get your emotional support? What activities/supports enable you to cope and survive?
- Who is your family or support network? Who would you ideally like to be connected to?
    - Other than Corey, do you have at least one caring adult you can go to for support?
    - If Indigenous, connected with culture/spirit/community?
        - If so, which band/nation/reserve?
        - Would accessing services on your reserve be preferable to the city?
        - Connected with an Elder? If not, would you like to be?
- Do safe spaces exist for you? Where are they? What makes them safe?
- What do you need?

Appendix C: Open-Ended Research Interview Questions (PhD-Specific)

Questions for Young Adult Participants:

- Could you tell me about yourself as you are comfortable sharing? What are your interests, goals, and priorities at this time in your life?
- [As a follow up to question 1, ask research participant about demographic details that were not provided already, e.g.:
    - Age
    - Community of origin and journey to Edmonton
    - Ancestry/ethnocultural identity]
- As you are comfortable, can you tell me how you describe yourself in terms of your sexuality and gender?
- What are and have been the main sources of stress in your life?
    - What are the factors that led to your street-involvement/homelessness? Was there a pivotal factor that led to leaving your situation? What supports were missing to prevent your current circumstances?
- Where do you get your money? Have you ever engaged in "survival crimes" such as stealing food or other things you needed, or selling drugs?
- Have you ever been involved in sex work?
    - How do you view sex work? A way to survive? Something else?
    - What are the risks you encounter? How do you minimize risk? What could be done to make it safer for you?
    - Do you encounter put downs or negative attitudes from others? How do you deal with that?
    - What are the benefits of sex work? Are there things you like about it? How does it make you feel? Does it relate to your identity or your sense of who you are?
    - Is there any downside in terms of how being involved in sex work affects you?
- Who do you consider your family? Do you have a support network in terms of people you can go to for help? Who would you ideally like to be connected to?
    - Do you have at least one caring adult you can go to for support?
    - [If Indigenous] Are you connected with your culture/spirituality/community?
- What does it mean when someone is described as resilient?
    - Do you consider yourself to be resilient? a survivor? someone who thrives? someone who can solve problems and make changes?
- What have you learned or what are you learning that helps you to be resilient (to problem solve, move forward, and thrive)? Where is this learning taking place?
- What do you consider to be your most important assets as a person at this time and space in your life; that is, what do you see as your best qualities that help you problem solve and get by every day?
- Are you happy? Healthy? Hopeful about the future?
- Do you have any questions for me?