

Episode 252- Dr. Lauren McInroy: Participation of Online Fandom Communities and Identity Development of LGBTQ Youth

[00:00:08] Welcome to inSocialWork, the podcast series of the University at Buffalo School of Social Work at www.inSocialWork.org. We're glad you could join us today. The purpose of inSocialWork is to engage practitioners and researchers and lifelong learning and to promote research to practice and practice to research. We educate. We connect. We care. We're in social work.

[00:00:37] Hello my name is Louanne Bakk and welcome to inSocialWork. LGBTQ youth have increasingly been represented in social media particularly within fandom communities and actively used information and communication technologies as a form of socialization and support. In this episode our guest Dr Lauren McInroy discusses her research exploring the relationship between participation in online fandom communities among LGBTQ youth in certain aspects of identity development. Dr. McInroy describes her own experiences leading to her interest in this important topic and articulates both the risks and supportive aspects associated with the use of the Internet and online fandom. She explains how online fandom can foster resilience, heighten well-being, and help LGBTQ youth navigate challenges. The episode concludes by stressing why social workers need to recognize the importance of online communities for marginalized adolescents and young adults and the profession's ethical responsibility to respond to changes promoted by the increasing use of technology. Dr. Lauren McInroy earned her Ph.D. at the University of Toronto. Her research investigates the impacts of information and communication technologies on the well-being of marginalized adolescents and emerging adults with a particular emphasis on LGBTQ youth. She explores how sexual and/or gender minority youth build communities of support, engage in identity development activities, foster resilience and wellbeing and engage in advocacy using digital technologies. She was interviewed in September 2018 by Dr. Nancy Smyth, our dean here at the UB School of Social Work.

[00:02:45] Hi this is Nancy Smyth, dean and professor at the School of Social Work and I'm really excited today to talk to Lauren McInroy about her research. So Lauren can you start us off by just telling us about who you like to do your research about?

[00:02:58] Absolutely. So my research is with LGBTQ youth, which refers to adolescents and young adults who are generally between the ages of 12 and 29 who identify as members of a community that includes lesbian gay bisexual transgender and queer people as well as people with a range of other sexual and gender minority identities.

[00:03:26] That's great. Now I do want to ask you if you could say a little more about how queer is understood because I'm going to guess that some of our audience particularly people who are listening across international boundaries may not always know how that's used in the U.S.

[00:03:40] Absolutely. So it's used in the community as sort of a reclamation of a term that in the past has been quite pejorative or used as a slur. So members of the community who used this term had sort of reclaimed it for the community. It can be used as an individual identity but it can also be used as sort of a broader identity that applies to a number of different more specific subidentities if that makes sense. So queer people may use that as an individual identity but it's also used quite often to refer to a queer community would refer to the LGBTQ community. I don't know if that was the best way of explaining it.

[00:04:21] That's okay, it's complicated but I think it at least helps people who maybe haven't heard it used in this context. And before we get a chance to do a deep dive into your research can you just talk about why it's important to really talk to these folks, because I think that people may not

understand what we know and what we don't know.

[00:04:36] Yeah absolutely. So we know from the research that LGBTQ youth as a population really experience disproportionate risks to their well-being. So for example they frequently experience family and peer rejection, discrimination and bullying and harassment and many other forms of violence and victimization due to their minority sexual or gender identities. There's also a fact that they experience a range of elevated health or mental health risks. So these include high rates of anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation and suicidality and many other risk factors. And then in addition to the difficulties that many LGBTQ youth experience in their off-line context of socialization. So that is at home at school and in their communities. There's also emerging indications that they may experience greater risks on the Internet. So for example be at greater risk of cyber bullying or online harassment. However the emerging research that I and other colleagues are doing is demonstrating that the Internet also offers LGBTQ youth really unprecedented opportunities to access resources and support even when such benefits are difficult or even impossible to access in their offline lives. So I think this is really a key point. Understanding the risks that the Internet and online technologies pose to young people's well-being is extremely important. But to some extent the focus on risk has been disproportionate in the scholarly literature until recently. We really need to look at the simultaneous opportunities that are offered to young people through their engagement with the Internet and online technologies. And I think this is particularly true when it's research with populations for whom such opportunities are not available to them off-line.

[00:06:46] That makes perfect sense. I think that we should probably always get nervous as social workers, as researchers when we start to look too much on one side of the equation or the other. Risk and supports and positives are all part of the picture, and if we're only focusing on one we're probably not getting the complete picture. So this is great that you have a more holistic view of what's going on and in part of your research. So it would be great to hear more about the research project itself. So what can you tell us?

[00:07:11] Absolutely! So I'm going to talk today civilly about the research for my dissertation project, which was actually just to set a bit of context for listeners was collected as part of a larger study called Project Queery. If you Google us you'll probably find us on the Internet. So the parent study is run by Dr. Shelley Craig at the University of Toronto and is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. So Project Queery was a mixed methods online survey of approximately 6300 LGBTQ youth from across Canada and the United States. And participants were aged 14 to 29 and we used what I think is a really cool multipronged online recruitment strategy that involves outreach to offline organizations that serve the population as well as to online social media groups specific to the population as well as paid online advertising on Facebook and Twitter. So we were able to generate quite a substantial sample. So the study focused on the Internet engagement of LGBTQ youth including the impact of online technologies on their health and mental health, their identity development and their coping and resilience. And then my dissertation research was one subsection of the Project Queery survey and the study was called Project Social Fan Work, and focused on LGBTQ young people's participation in online fandom communities. And I was lucky enough to generate a sample of about 3600 participants who identified as participating in online fandom.

[00:08:56] That's an impressive number. I don't know of many studies that managed to get that kind of a sample except the really incredibly large funded studies across the country and certainly not of this population.

[00:09:06] Yeah it's very exciting. The research on LGBTQ youth has disproportionately been done with clinical samples or school based samples often because they're much more easily accessible.

So we were thrilled youth were very engaged in participating, that online recruitment was extremely effective and sort of drawing them in and then they often shared with us that it was almost therapeutic to be able to complete a survey that they were so engaged and so happy to be able to be asked these questions and to share their experiences. So we were very excited.

[00:09:39] Well I'm going to guess that there are at least a subset of listeners who don't really understand what a fandom community is so could you say more about that?

[00:09:47] Absolutely. So again setting a bit of context. We know that virtually all adolescents and young adults in the United States and Canada are online and that the vast majority are very active in their various online spaces. So fandom is not a new thing. It's got well over a century of history behind it but it's a subculture in which individuals really engage in collective communities around shared interests in ideas or objects, very often an idea or object from popular culture. So as an example, since I know that could still be a little bit confusing, communities might form around a book series that the individual community members enjoy or a television show that community members are really passionate about. So members of fandom communities have really deeply personal connections to the cultural objects they're interested in and sometimes participate in producing or consuming what's called fan work related to their interests. and fan work is a kind of community based or community created media. So art or writing or video. So again as an example, a community member might draw a picture of their favorite character from their favorite book series or they might write a story based in the setting of their favorite television show for example. So community members are really creatively building upon the source media, and other community members then look at and read this content and may provide the creator with feedback and it really creates a source of community engagement. And what's really notable is that one of the most distinctive genres of fan work and one of the most popular is called slash which is fan work that is explicitly focused on LGBTQ themes and characters. So my research project really focused on the online dimensions or online components of fandom. As online technologies have increased access to these participatory communities potentially particularly for LGBTQ and other youth populations.

[00:12:15] That's helping us to dive down deeper now. I'm a little interested in what made you decide to pursue this topic.

[00:12:20] Absolutely. I think that's a great question. So I am not shy about the fact as a millennial aged person that I was deeply engaged in numerous online communities as a teenager and as a young adult and I participated in various online fandoms. So I guess you could call me an Acafan which is the term that's used to refer to an academic stand or someone who studies fandom but also identifies as a member of the community. So in my experience there was a significant subpopulation of LGBTQ youth in these communities who were really making use of what they perceived as a relatively LGBTQ inclusive space and community context in which to engage in really important developmental activities. To access community and social support and to really bolster their well-being. But this was just what I was sort of perceiving as an individual community member. So when I went looking there sort of presupposition I had was really born out in the very very limited existing literature and community based data that existed. Most of the research on fandom and LGBTQ populations is theoretical or it's on adult populations. But there were those indications there that LGBTQ youth may be particularly active in online fandom communities. So I strongly felt that the opportunities within online fandom communities to really foster identity development and well-being of LGBTQ youth and really how they were fulfilling their needs for services outside of what we think of as a traditional service provision context really necessitated attention by researchers and then also social work practitioners and social service organizations who were engaging with this population.

[00:14:27] Interesting so I think that that personal background of yours being able to really

understand these communities and really shape the larger Richlands that you were able to bring to during the research and it's not uncommon. But I think it's wonderful when we can acknowledge that explicitly so people can understand how important our own experience can be in shaping how we come to what we choose to do research on. So tell us more about what you discovered.

[00:14:49] Absolutely. So the about 4900 youth participants who got to my section of the online survey because it was quite an extensive survey and my dissertation data collection tools were in the later half of the survey. As I said earlier approximately 3600 of them identified themselves as participating in online fandom communities. So three quarters of LGBTQ youth in study or 74 percent identified that they participate in online fandom communities. So I think that number is really significant in terms of thinking about it about online and in communities as a social context for LGBTQ young people. So when we asked them about their favorite online platforms or where they were actively engaged online. And we ask this question of the full 6300 participant sample of Project Queery fandom was ranked sixth in overall popularity behind a number of very large platforms. So for example YouTube, Facebook and Tumblr. But what's really notable is that many of these most popular platforms are noted for their active online fan components and communities. And then we asked participants about what platforms they felt were most supportive of their well-being an online fandom like second only behind the music streaming service.

[00:16:19] Wow.

[00:16:19] Yeah. So I was thrilled when I saw the results and it sort of bore out what I was hoping would be there and really taken together these emerging findings really indicate that online fandom communities might be a significant supportive social context for LGBTQ.

[00:16:38] Let me just highlight something here because I think that many social workers when they think about technology they think about particular application platforms. But what I'm hearing is important is fandoms occur across many different types of application platforms and understanding even to understand ask about fandoms helps us understand that there's many ways that youth could be participating in a particular fandom because it could be one that's on Facebook or another one that's on Tumblr or one that's in Youtube and that if you ask only about the software applications you're going to miss some important things.

[00:17:11] I think that's absolutely true and I think that's true of other types of online communities as well that youth are really navigating multi-platform communities. So with the example of fandom, so you might on a fandom specific platform or on Tumblr that might be where you're consuming a lot of your fan work so you're reading stories you're looking at images then on YouTube you might be watching fan videos that people have created using footage from your favorite television show and then on Twitter you might be following the celebrities who are actors in the show or who are the producers or directors of the show. So it's really these communities are multi-platform. And as I said I don't think it's only unique to fandom I think many different kinds of online communities sort of spread across platforms and different activities take place on different platforms. But it's all part of a larger community that youth are engaged in.

[00:18:07] What did you find?

[00:18:08] So my dissertation mostly focused on two specific aspects of LGBTQ youth lives in relation to online fandom. First identity development and second their resilience and positive adjustments. So with regard to identity development the quantitative results showed something interesting. It indicated or they indicated that LGBTQ youth who participated in online fandom communities might actually begin their LGBTQ developmental process earlier and progressed through several notable socially mediated identity milestones more quickly than their peers who did

not participate in fandom and those milestones included for example the age they first knew they were LGBTQ or the age at which they first told someone that they were LGBTQ. Phantom participants were also more likely to identify with what we would consider non-traditional LGBTQ identity labels or identity labels outside of the LGBTQ acronym or initialism. And then they really articulated that their participation in online fandom was what introduced to LGBTQ identities and terminology to them. However it's really important to note that I can't say that fandom participation was the cause of these differences between fans and non-fans. There were also other important differences between LGBTQ youth who participated in fandom and those who didn't. So for example those who participated in fandom tended to be younger than those who did not participate.

[00:19:52] Can you highlight what kinds of ages we're talking about here in terms of age?

[00:19:56] Yeah absolutely. So it was interesting the average age of the sample was just shy of 18, so about half of participants were under 18. But we did have a very broad age range. We were trying to capture youth across their developmental trajectory so participants range from 14 all the way up to 29. And part of what I'll talk about later and I think was also going on in the data was that the younger youth were the ones who were engaged and more deeply in fandom currently whereas older youth may have often participated when they were younger but have aged sort of being as deeply embedded in fandom communities. So there could have been something going on around that, there could have also been the fact that just the age of LGBTQ youth coming out is decreasing across the board. We know that youth were coming out at younger ages. So that shift between when our 29 year olds were teenagers and when our 16 year olds were answering the survey currently as teenagers we may have also seen a change from that as well in terms of their identity development trajectories and their disclosure milestones.

[00:21:05] That sounds important and I guess I did want to just highlight one thing about identity here because I'm recalling from a conversation you and I had before about this that sometimes people tend to think about these identities has sort of fixed, like you come to an identity you come out and then that's sort of it. But my sense was that for some people anyway these can be fluid identities that shift over time. Is that what you found as well?

[00:21:26] Absolutely. That is true of LGBTQ youth generally and true of LGBTQ young people. In my study specifically that identity's youth are really exploring experimenting with identity labels and really engaging in a process of understanding what identities and identity labels that best for them and it's never stagnant. As youth age as their circumstances an internal sense of themselves change the labels that they apply to their identities also change. But what I think was so interesting about fandom and what so many youth said was that phantom communities and the fan work they were consuming really introduce new identities to them that they didn't know existed. Right? So they never knew there was a label that fit the way they were feeling until they saw it represented in a piece of fan work. So it was really sort of like a lot of them are talking about. I always knew this was how I felt but I didn't know there was a label for it or an identity that went along with that and fandom really opened that up for you and allowed them to understand that there were more identities available to them than just what sort of become the standard LGBT.

[00:22:40] So were there other things related to identity development that emerged from your research that you think people would like to know?

[00:22:46] Absolutely. So I think one of the most interesting things is for those who did participate in online fandom communities we asked them if they felt that fandom participation contributed to their LGBTQ identification and a majority of participants, 71 percent said yes and that participation did contribute to my LGBTQ identity development. While a significant minority 27 percent said no, fandom participation did not contribute. So it turns out based on the quantitative and qualitative

analyses that the overarching framework of fandom participation and identity development is really one of individualized experience based on needs and preferences and is really influenced as I spoke to earlier by participants' personal developmental trajectories. So it was really about what LGBTQ youth wanted and needed out of their fandom participation and where they were in their identity development process when they were engaging with and in answering the survey. So many participants felt that their participation in online fandom communities as I mentioned facilitated their discovery or realization of their LGBTQ identities and supported their exploration and experimentation with their identities in what they perceived as a relatively safe anonymous and supportive space. This exploratory work is exploration and experimentation as I sort of mentioned earlier really through engagement with fan work. So for example youth may read or write stories based on LGBTQ characters with identities they share or thought they might share or a lot of youth were also engaging in role playing as different characters with different potential LGBTQ identities to really try identities on and see what identities really fit best for themselves. So online fandom and a significant presence of LGBTQ content and other LGBTQ people in fandom really allowed many participants to feel validated and normalized in their LGBTQ identities and really for a lot of youth encourage feelings of self acceptance and being authentic. It also encouraged some youth to share their identities both offline and online and thus supported some LGBTQ youth's coming out processes. And really notably even for those 27 percent I mentioned earlier of youth who felt online fandom did not directly contribute to their identity development, many of those young people still articulate the ways that their protests petition in online fandom was really valuable to their well-being. So this included the fact that fandom through fan work provided better representations of LGBTQ people than they could see in mainstream media that it offered access to important LGBTQ knowledge that it validated their LGBTQ identities even if it didn't directly contribute to their identity development. And that it really offered access to friends and support in communities of interest.

[00:26:05] Well that's going to take us into I think some of the other findings that to have, but before we do that I just want to ask a little bit more about this 27 percent. You talk about different developmental trajectories. You have a sense for that 27 percent what their trajectory might be that really influence the way in which they were using fandoms?

[00:26:23] So it's a little hard to tell. Based on the data I have available I did have a lot of young people who told me that they knew they were LGBTQ before they ever participated in fandom so I've known since I was in kindergarten for example, right? So long before they were really engaged online they knew they were LGBTQ identified so they didn't see fandom as directly contributing to that sense of identity development. Many other youth just said "I love participating in these communities. They're very enjoyable for me but they're not where I do my identity work." So I think it was very much the youth who engaged in fandom for what they needed when they needed it. It's certainly not true that fandom contributes to the identity development of all LGBTQ youth. But the fact that a significant majority almost three quarters said it does contribute I think is quite significant. And then something that we as social work practitioners and researchers need think about.

[00:27:19] The picture that I'm sort of getting here is that the richness of fandoms provides opportunities for youth to interact and get what they need and are looking for at whatever stage of identity development they're at. And it looks like there's also opportunity for them to get some other things in terms of role models, things that help them promote well-being.

[00:27:38] Absolutely. And I'm happy to share some of that as well. First of all again to set a bit of background on this sample. So this was a sample of LGBTQ youth that had experienced really significant challenges that necessitated resilience or access to opportunities to facilitate their wellbeing. So as examples 87 percent of the participants in my study had experienced anxiety

during their lifetime, 84 percent had experienced depression, 80 percent had experience poor body image, 79 percent had had problems sleeping, 78 percent had experienced mental health problems and 74 percent stated that they had experienced stress that they really felt they couldn't handle. And in the past six months over half, 52 percent had thought about killing themselves and a significant minority 44 percent had actually tried to kill themselves at some point in their lives. This was a population that was really struggling with those health and mental health and ecological challenges that I spoke about where we started our conversation. So when I asked them quantitatively about the importance of fandom participation to them and the ability of fandom to make them feel stronger or more resilient as well as to help them recover from difficult experiences the responses were actually quite moderate and varied widely. And I think this is again what we just talked about around identity development. That it's very likely due to the wide variation in what youth felt they needed out of their engagement with standup. So those who needed support and positive reinforcement and community and role modeling as I'll talk about it in a minute, could access it in tandem while those who didn't require such support or didn't require such support in the context of fandom didn't seek it out. So the qualitative analyses really indicated that fandom offered a significant source of social support for many of the LGBTQ youth who participated. Particularly in that it reduced their feelings of isolation and allowed them to feel more connected to LGBTQ community and to something they felt passionate about. And it really provided opportunities for a very interesting process of informal mentorship. So fandom communities contained like minded people particularly contained many other LGBTQ identified youth and participants could engage in an informal process of guidance and mentorship with other young people in these communities who shared both their identities and their interests. So for many participating in online fandom also fostered resilience. A lot of you spoke about how it helped them to navigate challenges particularly related to being LGBTQ. So for example and work story may talk about a problem similar to one they were having in their offline life and they could use that story as a model for how to respond to that problem in their day to day lives. But it also helped with non LGBTQ challenges so just feeling less isolated or dealing with bullying that wasn't related to their identity.

[00:30:57] It also facilitated really an inner sense of strength and motivation which fostered their well-being through supportive contexts and seeing complex LGBTQ representations which encouraged them to have a more positive outlook and to understand that they had the capacity to overcome challenges.

[00:31:19] A lot of different elements of exploration and a chance to really develop and see strengths and different perspective. I mean it's clear that people are getting social support here but there there's also a creative element to what they're doing. When people think about creative therapies that offer people ways to express and explore things that that's a strong component of this too and I think the complexity and richness of what's there really starts to emerge because you've combined the quantitative and qualitative research tools and are able to get all of this out.

[00:31:48] Absolutely. I definitely think in terms of, we talk about it so much in practice around sort of creative participatory approaches to working with young people and youth are doing a lot of this online, which I think is in their own sort of self form communities, which I think is very interesting and has again some parallels between what's going on in online communities and what's happening in practice contexts.

[00:32:11] Were there any other significant findings for resilience or adjustment or identity that you think people should know? Because I know you have a lot of data can't obviously go through all of it but have a sense for sort of what the big pieces are that people need to be aware of.

[00:32:25] So I think the big pieces are in terms of what I think social workers can take away from the research is that as we know online technologies are really continuing to become increasingly

ubiquitous for all age groups in Canada and the U.S. but especially for younger people. We know again from the Project Queery research that youth are using a lot of mobile devices, are using multiple devices are almost constantly online, a lot of them.

[00:32:55] So it's really an ethical responsibility for social workers and social service organizations and researchers to respond to these significant changes that have begun to be caused by technology in terms of communication processes and socialization and individuals environment.

[00:33:15] Go on a little more about that because I think that this is the part where social workers struggle. It's like "okay, I know this but how should I be responding and thinking about this and including what is it I really need to learn about more so I can be more effective in working with sexual minority youth?"

[00:33:30] Absolutely. I think the takeaway here for this population this online community is that the importance of online fandom to the individuals who participate in it really can't be understated and can't be sort of dismissed as just sort of what they're doing online. These are really developmentally and socially critical contexts for many of the young people who are participating in them. And the results of my research suggest that countless members of a population who experience significant risks are meeting at least some of their needs through online fandom communities. So I think more broadly when it comes to youth and their online engagement social workers really need to take young people's participation in online communities seriously and recognise that online communities are often just if not a lot of the time more valid and significant to youth than their various offline contacts so their engagement at home or at school. Every generation of young people has had designated spaces that are socially important to them where youth socialise and engage with peers and engage in informal learning. It's just that for contemporary youth online contexts have been incorporated as important social spaces and increasingly many aspects of young people's lives will be mediated by technology and their experiences will be shaped by their online and other digital engagement. And with regard to LGBTQ youth I think this is really important because I think this is also particularly true for youth who are marginalised or who struggle with safety and belonging in their various offline contexts. So technologies that foster communal social spaces and permit communities of interest or common experience despite geographic distance are increasingly important. This is also particularly important for LGBTQ youth because LGBTQ young people are able to engage with like minded peers with similar interests to them as well as consciously cultivate a digital presence into idealized self representations online which social work practitioners need to recognize may be particularly important to a marginalized youth who face significant barriers to their identity development, their self representation and their self expression offline. So I think young people who are not able to see their true selves in their off line spaces to represent themselves the way they identify, dress the way they want, express themselves in whatever way they want. They can't do that online because of the potential repercussions they experience some of the discrimination and victimization I talked about earlier. So you are really able online to create and cultivate and really embody true authentic representations of themselves, right? so when they don't have access to doing that online they are able to sustain themselves through doing that online. And it's true of LGBTQ youth but I think it's also true of other marginalized youth populations. So social work practitioners engaging with LGBTQ youth should really encourage participation in online fandom content communities when it's proving supportive and productive. And I think what we spoke about earlier around balancing risks and opportunities, so I think when young people's participation online is proving supportive is helpful to them is contributing to their well-being that practitioners should be facilitating that for young people while at the same time balancing potential risks, right? So reinforcing online safety and making youth aware of potential consequences of their online behaviors in a realistic way. So really that balance of risks and opportunities when engaging with online technology.

[00:37:35] As I listen to you I'm sort of struck by conversations I have with many different social workers about just technology behavior online and how much variation there is and what people understand. And in terms of what's actually happening in those spaces and people making distinctions sometimes between online and real life and yet what I hear from you is what's happening online is very real and very important to the support of these youth that if you decrease isolation that has a very real positive consequences for people's mental health and overall well-being online and offline.

[00:38:07] Absolutely. For a contemporary people I can say LGBTQ specifically but I think again it's more broad. Their online lives are just as real to them as their offline lives, often just as not more meaningful. Particularly as I said for youth who are struggling to get that sort of what they need in their offline lives their online friendships their online communities are really so crucial to their well-being. So I really think that and I know it can be very challenging for social work practitioners sort of keep up with what youth are doing on the internet. I certainly struggle, I need like a panel of 16 year olds to tell me what's actually going on on the Internet. So it's really I think asking, being open, as aware as you can be and asking you about their online engagement I think is the very first step. That still is not done as much as it should be, to actually in addition to when you're sort of having a first meeting with a youth, in addition to asking them about home and school and sort of their offline life to also ask them about their online life and its importance to them and what they like and don't like about it, what they're getting out of it. I think can be a really important first step in terms of opening up and telling youth that they can share about their online realities that you as a practitioner understand the importance of their online spaces to them and consider them valid and important to discuss. I think it's a great first step in that it's less about specific platforms because I think those change very quickly platforms that are popular today are very different have new ones that were popular even a couple of years ago. So some knowledge of platforms and sites and such I think is important but what's really more important is asking about individual experiences in the context of the internet.

[00:39:56] Yeah really important questions I think for social workers to consider asking. Especially of youth but I would say of all ages in this point, right? Because it can vary a lot. And it tells people that you're aware that for some folks that these become very important spaces. So now I'm curious if people want to know more about your work and about this topic what you would recommend they do sort of to find out more.

[00:40:18] Absolutely. So I'm always open to an e-mail. I'm always happy to hear from people who are interested in the work I'm doing. But in terms of looking at some of the research my first article for my dissertation is available in the Journal of LGBT youth. And if you were interested in the full Project Queery study we had a study protocol paper in JMIR research protocols or as I said you can certainly Google us, you'll find our website. And I have several other papers that are forthcoming. So if folks are interested I'm happy to receive an e-mail and that I'm happy to share with them once it's available.

[00:40:55] That's terrific. What's next?

[00:40:56] My research trajectory is really currently focused on exploring the experiences of LGBTQ youth in other online communities and investigating what elements of these online communities are salient for social workers to understand when working with this population. So I'm currently starting up a project on body positivity so looking at LGBTQ youth's experience and the online body positivity movement and then in terms of extensions from Project Queery I'm part of INQYR which is the International Partnership for Queer Youth Resilience. So this was an extension of Queery and it's headed by Dr. Shelley Craig at the University of Toronto and again is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. So we're beginning to engage in a

cross cultural exploration of LGBTQ youth's use of technology and their resilience. So we actually have more regional networks that we are engaging with, so the United States, Canada Mexico and the United Kingdom. So it's really a cross disciplinary cross cultural project that we are starting to engage in around LGBTQ youth's use of technology and again if you Google us you'll find us, and then really more broadly I'm focused on facilitating the digital literacy of contemporary social workers and really encouraging social work as a discipline to be proactive in response to emerging technologies. Also I'm thinking about how clients bring their technologies with them when they engage in practice both literally they're bringing their phone into session but also figuratively, right, The experiences they bring with them from the Internet into practice as well as how social workers can effectively use technologies in their practice. So thinking about how social workers can thoughtfully incorporate technology and online communities into practice.

[00:43:02] You have enough topics there to take yourself many years in a rich research agenda and actually I have no doubt that they'll be a point at which we'll probably be talking again because I can hear some really exciting possibilities with the work that you're embarking on. Thank you so much for taking time out to talk about your work. I'm excited about this and I think listeners will find this to be a really rich topic that will be, just listening to it again now for me how much deeper my understanding is and I would encourage people to listen to the podcast a couple times.

[00:43:31] There didn't seem to be a lot there, yeah. I really appreciate you taking the time to ask me about my work and for the opportunity to share it more broadly. I'm a big fan of the podcast and I'm very excited by the opportunity to be able to contribute.

[00:43:46] You've been listening to Dr. Lauren McInroy's discussion on participation in online fandom communities among LGBTQ youth. I'm Louanne Bakk. Please join us again at [inSocialWork](#).

[00:44:08] Hi I'm Nancy Smyth professor and dean of the University at Buffalo School of Social Work. Thanks for listening to our podcast. We look forward to your continued support of the series. For more information about who we are as a school, our history our online and on the ground degree and continuing education programs we invite you to visit our website at www.socialwork.buffalo.edu. And while you're there check out our technology and social work resource center. You'll find it under the Community Resources menu.