

# Chapter 5

## The Digital Development of LGBTQ Youth: Identity, Sexuality, and Intimacy

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### **ABSTRACT**

*We use a developmental tasks framework to guide the exploration of digital media and the development of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth. Since digital contexts are ubiquitous, it is clear that youth use them in the service of developmental tasks such as formation of identity, pursuit of intimacy, and development of sexuality. Research suggests that LGBTQ youth use digital media more often than their peers, likely due to the challenges they face. At the same time, electronic peer-victimization and sexual health are concerns since LGBTQ youth are more likely to be at risk. Drawing on extant research we will show that digital media use is associated with stigma-related stressors and risks while concurrently offering opportunities for healthy development. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research that should help bolster our understanding of how digital contexts may predict the development and well-being of LGBTQ youth.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Emerging adulthood is believed to be a distinct developmental period, although that uniqueness may vary as a function of culture (Arnett, 2006). Nevertheless, there is a high degree of affinity for digital media among most emerging adults regardless of where they live (Brown, 2006; Arnett, 2014). This may be because digital media can help in dealing with developmental tasks such as identity formation,

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expressing autonomy, as well as exploring relationships (Coyne, Padilla-Walker, & Howard, 2013). According to a Ipsos/Google survey, emerging adults are essentially always connected and that 92% of them often use more than one device at a time (Google, 2012). One cross-sectional survey showed that nearly 100% of emerging adults in the U.S. reported that they used the Internet with some regularity (Jones, 2002). More specifically, another study found that emerging adults reported spending about 3.5 hours a day on the Internet, often via social media (Padilla-Walker, Nelson, Carroll, & Jensen, 2010). Additionally, they report spending at least 45 minutes a day using digital devices such as smart phones (Jacobsen & Forste, 2011). There has been considerable research done on emerging adults and digital media in general, but few studies have examined specific groups.

Much of the research concerning lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth is specific to older adolescents as well as emerging adults (e.g., 16-24), and therefore we use the term youth to encompass this broader age range. Survey data suggest that LGBTQ youth are even more likely to use digital media than non-LGBTQ peers (GLSEN, CiPHR, & CCRC, 2013). However, it is not especially clear why LGBTQ youth use digital media more often and whether this use is related to their development and well-being. The research on LGBTQ youths' digital media use has also yielded mixed and inconsistent results. Some findings suggest that digital media use may leave LGBTQ youth at heightened risk for peer victimization or poor sexual health (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012; Bolding, Davis, Hart, Sherr, & Elford, 2007), whereas others indicate that digital media may enable them to develop in a healthy and educated manner (Magee, Bigelow, DeHaan, & Mustanski, 2012; Mustanski, Greene, Ryan, & Whitton, 2014). Moreover, despite the increased risk of exposure to threats such as electronic peer victimization (i.e., cyberbullying), LGBTQ youth are more likely than their peers to report using digital media for peer support, health information, and civic engagement (GLSEN, CiPHR, & CCRC, 2013).

Given these polarized findings, it is important to explore how digital media may predict the development and well-being of LGBTQ youth, topics that have not been thoroughly addressed in the literature. These limitations are magnified by the notion that adolescence and emerging adulthood are critical transitional phases when well-being may be tenuous (Steinberg, 2008; Arnett, 2000). To address these shortcomings, this chapter describes the role of digital media in the lives of LGBTQ youth. Specifically, we start by exploring the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ youth as that offers insights into how digital media may be unique for this population. Next we present the developmental framework guiding the chapter, followed by a discussion of the role of digital media as youth deal with the key developmental tasks of exploring identity, coming to terms with their sexuality, and pursuing intimacy. This developmental framework offers a useful way to conceptualize and synthesize the extant literature on LGBTQ youth and digital media. Our synthesis suggests a modest, albeit beneficial, theoretical foundation for future work to be built upon. Finally, the conclusion identifies gaps in the literature, as well as future directions for research and program design.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Unique Challenges Faced by LGBTQ Youth**

To understand the relation between LGBTQ youths' digital media use and well-being, we begin by examining the stigma, health disparities, and unique developmental challenges that they face (Mustanski, Birkett, Greene, Hatzenbuehler, & Newcomb, 2014). In particular, LGBTQ youth are exposed to stress-

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ors related to their minority status such as victimization and uncertainties regarding their identity. The combination of typical daily stressors and stigma-related stressors leaves them at an increased risk for psychopathology and poor psychosocial adjustment (Meyer, 2003; Bos, Sandfort, de Bruyn, & Hakvoort, 2008). Other difficulties specific to LGBTQ youth development include accessibility of supportive friend and romantic partners, acceptance of one's own identity, as well as challenges surrounding sexuality and support (Mustanski, Birkett, Greene, Hatzenbuehler, & Newcomb, 2014). Moving forward, we will frame these difficulties within a traditional developmental framework.

### **Developmental Framework**

To further understand the implications of LGBTQ youths' digital media usage, we draw from extant research on developmental psychology and digital media to offer a guiding framework for this chapter. Adolescence and emerging adulthood are transitional periods when youth are faced with the developmental tasks of solidifying their identity, forming intimate relationships with peers and romantic partners, as well as accepting their sexuality (Arnett, 2000; Sternberg, 2008). In addition, the transitions of emerging adulthood due to moving from home for college or work may further emphasize youths' reliance on peers and romantic partners for much needed support (Collins & van Dulmen, 2006). The unique features of emerging adulthood – not quite independent financially or otherwise – means that youth have additional time to deal with the aforementioned developmental tasks (Arnett, 2000). Importantly, social contexts including the family and peer group play a vital role during these transitional stages (Arnett, 2000; Hill, 1983). Similarly, research has shown that aspects of the social context such as school climate, peer relations, as well as parental dynamics predict the development and well-being of LGBTQ youth (D'Augelli, 2012). Scholars have argued that digital worlds present youth with opportunities to interact and communicate with peers and thus have become an important social context where sexuality, identity, and intimacy are played out (Subrahmanyam, Greenfield, Tynes, 2004; Subrahmanyam, Smahel, & Greenfield, 2006). On this view, digital media may be another important social context for LGBTQ youth, and similar to other contexts, play a role as youth deal with the developmental tasks facing them. In the next sections, we adopt this approach to examine the role of digital media in key areas of LGBTQ youth development.

### **DIGITAL MEDIA AND LGBTQ YOUTHS' IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT**

One of the most distinctive features of emerging adulthood is the exploration and development of identity (Arnett, 2000). Although identity exploration begins in adolescence (Erikson, 1968), it continues into emerging adulthood. Aspects of identity such as one's vocation and worldview require more experience, thought, and time to truly form. Research also suggests that during the same phase, there is continued cognitive growth as complex forms of contemplation, self-reflection, and a sense of self develop (Arnett, 2006). However, the exact timing and processes surrounding identity development may vary. Although the above statements apply to all youth, nonetheless it is very likely that LGBTQ youth may go through the identify formation process differently than their non-LGBTQ peers due to the unique challenges facing them.

Research on identity development among LGBTQ youth reveal that digital media are being used to find information to facilitate the exploration of self, for development of a sense of self, and understanding the implications of emergent identities (Bond, Hefner, & Drogos, 2009; DeHaan, Kuper, Magee, Bigelow, & Mustanski, 2013; Hamer, 2003; Hillier & Harrison, 2007). These findings are consistent with previous research, which has shown that social media, online videos, and other digital contexts provide a safe atmosphere for all youth to express themselves and explore their identity (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2012). Digital media and the Internet appear to offer new resources and contexts that enable LGBTQ youth to achieve tasks associated with identity development that historically occurred offline. Nevertheless, one qualitative study on LGBTQ emerging adults showed that factors such as context, culture, and relationships seemed to predict exactly how digital media were used (Kuper & Mustanski, 2014). For example, those who were seemingly isolated or rejected by parents were more likely to utilize digital media as supplementary resources in ways that promoted healthy identity development by encouraging self-acceptance. Another qualitative study of 63 gay or bisexual male youth found that the participants utilized a wide range of digital tools (e.g., social media, mobile apps, informational resources) to explore and ultimately come to accept their identities; they also reported using digital media to increase self-awareness of sexual identity and to learn more about the LGBTQ community (Harper, Serrano, Bruce, & Bauermeister, 2015). Other studies have also shown that digital tools are more likely to be used by LGBTQ youth in the pursuit of developing identities, intimacies, and sexualities when offline resources are insufficient (DeHaan et al., 2013; Hillier & Harrison, 2007).

LGBTQ youth's preconceived notions about the nature of digital media as well as previous experiences specific to the Internet may predict their perceptions about how helpful digital media could be for their identity development (Kuper & Mustanski, 2014). Specifically, if LGBTQ youth had negative perceptions of the online LGBTQ community, then they were less likely to utilize them as helpful resources. It is possible that internalized homophobia, potentially as an artifact of stigma-related stressors, contributed to negative perceptions of the online LGBTQ community. Making sense of emerging sexual and romantic identities are critical tasks for which digital media may be utilized (Kuper & Mustanski, 2014). Again, LGBTQ youth seem to utilize digital tools when offline resources that supplement development are either unavailable or lacking.

Nevertheless, sometimes limitations in support can cascade or be reproduced online. In other words, an LGBTQ youth's susceptibility may be triggered by offline experiences which, then, may leave her/him more vulnerable to negative online experiences. The combination of negative experiences across online and offline contexts appears to diminish healthy identity development by interfering with the formation of self-acceptance (Kuper & Mustanski, 2014). The additional stress of difficulties online may also have deleterious consequences for LGBTQ youth when pursuing the development of intimacy.

## **DIGITAL MEDIA AND LGBTQ YOUTH'S INTIMACY DEVELOPMENT**

Studies have found that during adolescence and emerging adulthood, youth are more concerned with peer relations than familial relations (Collins & Laursen, 2004). Since youth largely use digital tools to communicate with peers, these digital platforms become increasingly important at this point in their lives (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2012). Friends and romantic partners are critical sources of support and intimacy for older adolescents and emerging adults (Coyne, Padilla-Walker, & Howard, 2013). Yet, the vital nature of peer relations may leave some at risk for peer victimization or poor sexual health.

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These topics warrant exploration with regard to LGBTQ public health, since they are often related to poor outcomes such as suicidality (Ybarra, Mitchell, Kosciw, & Korchmaros, 2015; Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009) or contraction of infectious diseases (Mustanski et al., 2014). In the next section, we will explore how digital media might augment or weaken the healthy development of intimacy among LGBTQ youth.

### **Peer Victimization**

Digital media can be sources of stigma-related stressors such as peer victimization (i.e., being victimized by an act of aggression from a similarly-aged peer). For instance, compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers, LGBTQ youth were more likely to report being victimized via digital media, feeling just as unsafe online as offline, and being victimized online and offline simultaneously (Cooper & Blumenfield, 2012). For LGBTQ youth, electronic peer victimization has been found to have similar outcomes as offline peer victimization including poor mental health, feelings of loneliness, and reduced academic achievement (GLSEN, CiPHR, & CCRC, 2013). Additionally, like offline victimization, electronic peer victimization is often related to a victim's actual or perceived gender expression (i.e., gender nonconformity), gender identity, and/or sexuality (GLSEN, CiPHR, & CCRC, 2013) which is in line with minority stress theory since these appearances and expressions tend to elicit stigmatization from peers. However, electronic peer victimization may be more insidious because it can occur at any time, leave little to no escape, is relatively permanent, and may have a larger audience. Additionally, because of the potential for anonymity and disembodiment within digital contexts, electronic peer victimization can be more extreme than offline victimization (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2012; Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2012; Suler, 2004). Although digital contexts can be a source of victimization, they also offer opportunities for healthy relationships and social support, the topic of the next section.

### **Social Support**

In addition to being a safe platform to explore identity, digital media enable youth to access peer-based social support in meaningful ways (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2012). Social support is the perception that one is part of a social network and/or the actuality of being cared for by others. In other words, digital media provide a platform for self-disclosure, closeness, and developing relationships, all key to the pursuit of intimacy. Connecting to and exploring online communities associated with one's identity can encourage the evolution of LGBTQ youths' self-acceptance offline (Hillier & Harrison, 2007). Coming to terms with one's sexual orientation or gender identity is vital for self-acceptance and is positively correlated with self-esteem and mental health (Savin-Williams, 1994). Thus it is possible that due to increased acceptance or social support, LGBTQ youth are more likely to self-disclose and develop intimate relationships online. These notions are supported by data showing that LGBTQ youth often reveal their identities online before doing so offline (GLSEN, CiPHR, & CCRC, 2013). Furthermore, Savin-Williams (2005) speculates that the trend towards revealing one's sexuality or gender identity earlier in life is partially attributable to the growth and availability of virtual communities and digital social support.

The nature of social support and affinity for type of support (i.e., peer-based, parental, and romantic) is believed to be dynamic and generally carries positive implications for development and well-being. For example, one cross-sectional study on 97 LGBQ youth found that all social support has a protec-

tive role in their psychosocial adjustment, even in the face of peer victimization (Williams, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2005). Research has also shown that youth who had clear support from a peer were less likely to be victimized offline and displayed lower levels of internalizing symptoms such as depression (Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999). Often victimization and its consequences are defined by social contexts such as a youth's environment and social support, which serve as buffering agents (Espelage & Swearer, 2008). Therefore, social support likely moderates the relation between victimization and poor outcomes for all youth, but may be especially critical for stigmatized youth like those who identify as LGBTQ. The protective role of digital support for LGBTQ youth is not as well established, but one cross-sectional study of 5,542 U.S. youth did find that LGBT youth were more likely to report that online friends were important due to the emotional support they provided (Ybarra, Mitchell, Palmer, & Reisner, 2015). More research needs to be done in this area to validate the findings.

Eliason and Schope (2007) suggest that peer support is integral to the beginning stages of sexual minority development and resolving feelings of being different. Although somewhat of a dilemma, it demonstrates the unique situation of LGBTQ youth, wherein disclosure of identity simultaneously puts them at risk for alienation, but also in a position to acquire much needed support. Furthermore, the fear of ostracism may hinder youth's self-disclosure about their identity, making it difficult to utilize social support, and therefore further delaying healthy development. Digital media can potentially help to reconcile these challenges.

Research is limited regarding the value of online intimacy for LGBTQ youth, yet some recent findings are pertinent to this issue. Using a resiliency-based framework to examine whether openness about one's LGBTQ identity shaped well-being, one cross-sectional study on 7,816 LGBTQ youth found that openness did relate to higher rates of victimization; however, openness was also indicative of higher self-esteem and lower levels of depression, suggesting that online presentation of identity may have the potential to facilitate healthy development, including intimacy (Kosciw, Palmer, & Kull, 2014). As expected, youth who revealed their LGBTQ identities in rural environments were more likely to be subjected to victimization, indicating that digital media may be essential for youth in more isolated environments. Digital media can offer a more controlled and safe environment for LGBTQ youth to develop their relationships, while diminishing risks associated with disclosure (i.e., peer victimization). Digital media can also offer a sense of belonging and acceptance. However, another cross-sectional study of 425 LGB youth aged 16-24 reported that although perceived offline social support did offer a certain compensatory effect, it did not fully reduce the negative effects associated with offline peer victimization (Mustanski, Newcomb, & Garofalo, 2011). This suggests that although social support is important, it is not sufficient when it comes to mending the consequences associated with peer victimization.

Another consideration for intimacy is whether relationships formed (e.g., friends and/or romantic partners) online are as meaningful as offline relationships. Early studies specific to heterosexual youth suggest that online relationships were perceived as not being as 'real' (Šmahel, 2003). These youth mostly connect online with peers who they already know offline (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2012), and thus digital media can serve as a tool to develop and enrich those relationships. More recent studies have found that digital media do contribute to developing relationships, connectedness, and social support (Davis, 2012; Grieve, Indian, Witteveen, Tolan, & Marrington, 2013). This was especially true when offline affairs were inherently challenging or lacking (Indian & Grieve, 2014). Therefore we speculate that digital media may be helpful for LGBTQ youth who often feel isolated and are subject to unique developmental challenges. One cross-sectional study on LGBQ Dutch youth aged 16-24 years found that

they often utilized digital media to find social support (Baams, Jonas, Utz, Bos, & van der Vuurst, 2011). Others have found that the LGBTQ youths' perception of online relationships and support was predicted by background and experience with the online community (Kuper & Mustanski, 2014). In sum, online social support is likely more valuable for youth who are stigmatized or lacking offline support (Hillier, Mitchell, & Ybarra, 2012), yet some LGBTQ youth may find digital resources more useful than others.

## **LGBTQ YOUTH SEXUALITY AND DIGITAL MEDIA**

Although emerging adults do not necessarily have to cope with the physical and sexual changes brought on by puberty like adolescents do, they are still faced with coming to terms with their sexual self (Erikson, 1968). Similar to other discussed developmental tasks, digital media may serve as both a resource and liability within the domain of developing sexualities. For example, digital media have enabled youth to access sexually explicit content with considerable ease. For all youth, there are concerns that exposure to sexually explicit content may distort the youth's understanding of sexual norms or healthy behavior (Greenfield, 2004; Lo & Wei, 2005). Yet, others suggest that exposure to sexually explicit content may be an important component of sex education (Watson & Smith, 2012), especially when other sources of information are lacking, which is often the case for LGBTQ youth.

### **Sexual Health**

Despite the concerns about sexual risk stemming from LGBTQ youths' use of digital media, it is important to consider some ways in which digital tools can foster healthy development. The Internet is a treasure trove of sex-related health information which is used by health care providers and youth alike (Fox & Jones, 2009). Magee and colleagues (2012) completed a mixed-methods study on 32 LGBT youth aged 16-24 years and found that healthy sexual development, including feeling comfortable with one's maturing body and accepting the new or stronger feelings of sexual arousal (Steinberg, 2008; Brooks-Gunn & Paikoff, 1993), largely occur within the context of websites, video content, social media, and smart phone applications. Similarly, one mixed method study of 329 sexual minority men aged 18-24 years found that sexually explicit content found online played a significant role by reinforcing and facilitating a better understanding of sexual attraction and arousal (Mustanski et al., 2011a). The content may validate LGBTQ youth's sexual feelings as being normative despite previous exposure to stigma, and thus, promotes personal acceptance.

Most youth are particularly concerned with sexual health information as they search for it more than any other health-related topic (Buhi, Daley, Fuhrmann, & Smith, 2009). Searching for sexual health information may be crucial for LGBTQ youth since schools and their sex education programs typically fall short when providing information specific to this population. Moreover, digital media may act as a bridge to offline sexual health resources like community centers and therefore facilitate the healthy development of sexuality. However, online health resources are not equally credible, and youth may need training in searching for information and source credibility (Mustanski et al., 2014). Researchers should continue to examine the integrity of online information as well as the processes by which LGBTQ youth determine the quality of these online resources.

## **Sexual Risk**

LGBTQ youth often use the Internet and digital tools to meet sexual partners. Bolding, Davis, Hart, Sherr, and Elford (2007) conducted a longitudinal study on 810 young men who have sex with men, and found that over a few years, there was a significant increase in participants reporting that they found their first sexual partner online (i.e., 2.6-61.0%). Finding partners online presents an important opportunity for them, as they may be isolated and not be able to explore romantic intimacy otherwise (DeHaan et al., 2013). At the same time, research indicates that LGBTQ youth are at an increased risk to engage in high risk sexual behaviors (Mustanski, Garofalo, Herrick, & Donenberg, 2007). Additionally, a meta-analysis of 15 studies found that online sex-seeking behavior among sexual minority youth was linked to a history of unprotected sex (Liau, Millet, & Marks, 2006). These findings should be interpreted with some caution as several of the studies included in the meta-analysis had limitations, such as the use of a retrospective design that did not allow researchers to determine if the online sex-seeking and engagement in high risk sexual behavior were clearly related (Mustanski, Lyons, & Garcia, 2011). Studies without these limitations did not support the findings that online sex-seeking behavior was associated with increased sexual risk (Mustanski et al., 2007). The propensity to make poor sexual health decisions is likely a separate factor from how partners are met (Mustanski et al., 2011a). It is also important to consider that the desire to develop romantic intimacy and come to terms with one's sexuality, without access to typical offline outlets or peers, could, theoretically, leave LGBTQ youth at an increased risk for online solicitation or exploitation by older adults.

Sexting describes the sending or receiving of sexually suggestive pictures or messages via digital media. Specific to all youth, the prevalence of sexting ranges from 10% to 35% with older youth being more likely to engage in this behavior (Klettke, Hallford, & Mellor, 2014). Concerns about youth sexting focus on the associated risks, including the distribution of content without consent, being charged with producing/owning/transmitting child pornography, and the potential for distress or mental health issues (Judge, 2012). The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n = 1839) suggests that LGBTQ youth are more likely to engage in sexting, possibly because of their isolation and reliance on digital media to explore intimacy and sexuality (Rice, et al., 2012). Longitudinal research with LGBTQ youth is needed to further investigate the relationship between sexting and possible poor outcomes like engaging in sexually risky behaviors.

Digital media may present risks for LGBTQ youths' understanding of healthy sexual relationships as sexually explicit content and online forums are two of the few means of accessing sexual health-related information and the available content is not always accurate or helpful (Magee et al., 2012; Mustanski, Greene, Ryan, & Whitton, 2014). Nevertheless, a study examining the development of sexuality and sexual health as a function of exposure to digital content would illuminate this uncertainty and is another topic that demands further investigation.

## **CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Development is a process which may attenuate well-being and this may be especially true for LGBTQ youth given their unique developmental challenges. Throughout this chapter, the extant literature has been reviewed to illustrate how digital media may enhance the healthy development and well-being of LGBTQ youth. It is intuitive that a population who are subjected to challenges, like coming to terms with sexuality or gender identity, would utilize tools available to them. We suspect that LGBTQ youth are more likely



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to use digital media in the pursuit of developmental tasks, but this strategy is not necessarily risk free. Digital media are important social contexts, wherein stigma-related stressors and protective factors can be realized, and are also a forum where the development of identity, intimacy, and sexuality unfold. Our synthesis offers support for the notion that using a developmental framework for understanding the role of digital media in the lives of LGBTQ youth is warranted. Furthermore, our conceptualization could serve as a foundation for rigorous research or sophisticated model development.

There is a clear demand for additional studies on LGBTQ youth that utilize creative research designs and examine contextual factors such as digital media. Ignoring social contexts, such as digital media, when investigating the development and well-being of LGBTQ youth, would profoundly distort our understanding of this population (D’Augelli, 2012). Similarly, it is important to incorporate the role of digital media when studying the developmental tasks faced by LGBTQ youth to further augment our understanding of their well-being. The development of tuned measures and refined conceptualization of constructs concerning LGBTQ youth and digital media would further enhance our understanding. For example, it is still unclear how exactly online social support should be examined for LGBTQ youth. It may be the medium through which the support is received or perhaps the origination of the relationship which tends to predict the potential buffering roles. Alternatively, a sense of belonging or community could be the features which prove the most meaningful. Also, measures specific to electronic peer victimization do not necessarily account for the motive like offline measures designed for LGBTQ youth do. In other words, offline measures seek to illustrate that the victimization is particular to LGBTQ youth’s identity or gender expression and this dovetails nicely with minority stress theory. Furthermore, the nature of online peer victimization may vary as a function of platform or source.

Although it is tempting to suggest that digital tools are simply risky or supportive, these dynamics are more likely predicted by the unique developmental challenges facing LGBTQ youth (i.e., exposure to victimization, having access to safe social support, and accurate health-related information (see Table 1). That said, our review was not able to find sufficient scholarship concerned with how to magnify the opportunities afforded by digital media. Additional translational research needs to be done to assess the effectiveness of programs that target victimization, offer a safe online environment, as well as foster accessibility and accuracy of health-related information. Moreover, there is a clear dearth of research examining how digital media relate to transgender or gender nonconforming youth. Finally, studies that could help illustrate exactly what predisposes LGBTQ youth to utilize digital resources while avoiding risks would further enhance our understanding of their well-being.

*Table 1. Relations among LGBTQ youth development, risk, and opportunity within the context of digital media use*

Youth Developmental Tasks	Digital Media Use	
	Opportunity	Risks
Sexuality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information</li> <li>• Social Support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Misinformation</li> <li>• Exploitation</li> </ul>
Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity Exploration</li> <li>• Development of sense of self</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Isolation</li> <li>• Exposure to negative identity-related experiences</li> </ul>
Intimacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Support</li> <li>• Access to Relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solicitation</li> <li>• Victimization</li> </ul>

LGBTQ youth appear to be utilizing digital media to access opportunities since findings have shown they can be tools to promote healthy development (Magee, Bigelow, DeHaan, & Mustanski, 2012; Mustanski, Greene, Ryan, & Whitton, 2014; GLSEN, CiPHR, & CCRC, 2013; Bond, Hefner, & Drogos, 2009; Hamer, 2003; Hillier & Harrison, 2007). Digital media may be instrumental for LGBTQ youth since their offline worlds often restrict the development of key milestones due to stigma-related stressors and other difficulties (Mustanski, Birkett, Greene, Hatzenbuehler, & Newcomb, 2014; Meyer, 2003). LGBTQ youth face unique developmental challenges and digital media may help lessen these restrictions. Although digital media are not without risks, with proper use, they may largely contribute to the well-being and healthy development of LGBTQ youth. These new media are clearly a significant contextual factor and may predict the development of LGBTQ youth, but we still do not understand what predisposes a youth to utilize them as a resource, while avoiding or coping with the risks. It may be a trait the youth has (i.e., resilience), other contextual factors (i.e., school climate or social support), or specific resources offered by digital platforms.

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