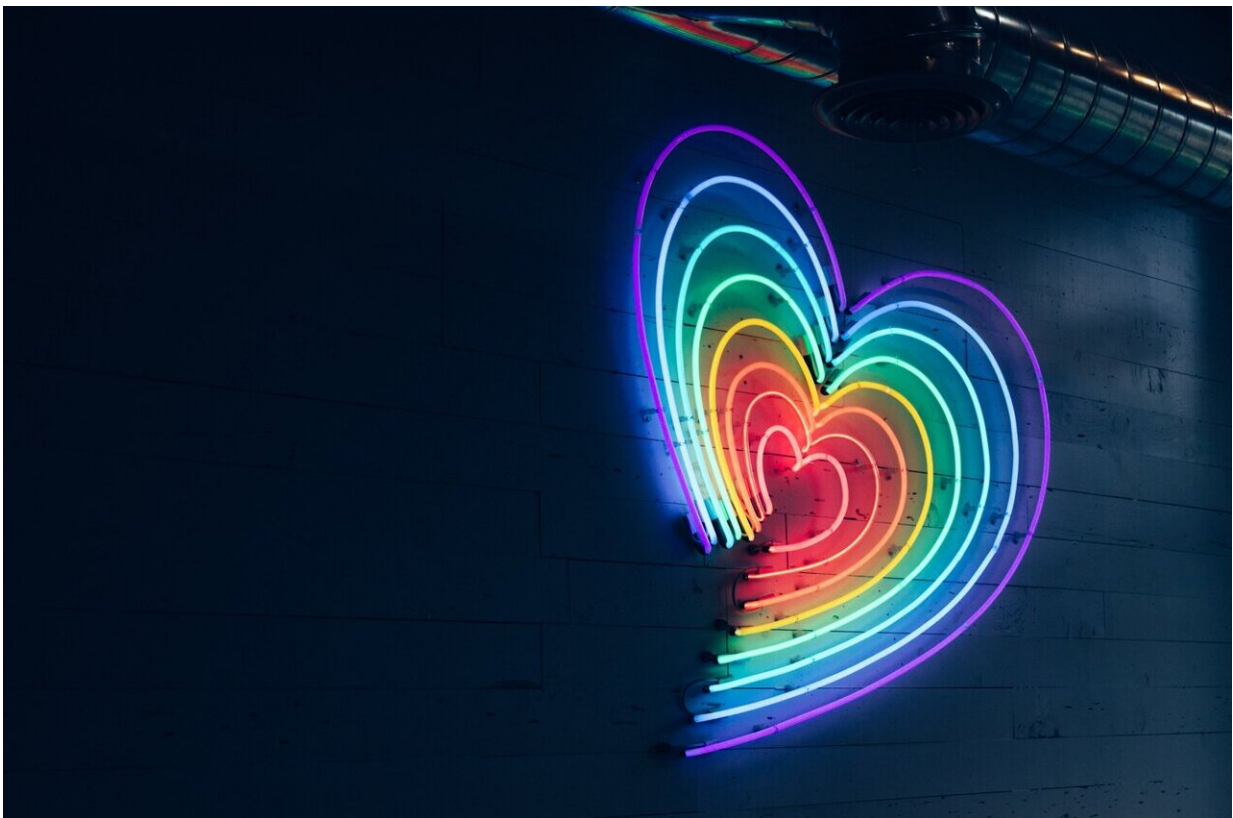


Uniquely designed research reveals resilience among LGBTQ+ individuals during the pandemic

June 16 2021, by Jennifer French Giarratano, Sumar Deen



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When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Kristie Seelman saw an opportunity to empirically counter a false narrative about LGBTQ+ individuals many

consider "at risk." New research could document their resiliency and strength.

Seelman and Elizabeth Mynatt, a Regents' Professor in Georgia Tech's College of Computing and executive director of its Institute for People and Technology (IPaT), had been named Fellows on a Public Interest Technology University Network (PIT-UN) Challenge Grant and were exploring how to best match Seelman's research interests in LGBTQ+ issues with Mynatt's on human-computer interaction.

"The idea of studying resilience and COVID came to me while I was on a run, when the pandemic was feeling very overwhelming," Seelman said. "I began thinking about how Beth and I could use the opportunity to forefront stories about what's going right for people. Beth and I talked through some ideas and landed on doing a mixed-methods project."

They are using multimedia technologies—video, audio, photography and written text—[through a longitudinal, diary-based study](#) to document how LGBTQ+ adults demonstrate resilience and coping strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We believe our study will counter predominant narratives of LGBTQ+ people in the Southeast as being 'at risk' by demonstrating the creativeness, resourcefulness and strength of this population," Seelman said. "It will show how these adults coped with social, psychological, financial and physical health challenges during the pandemic, whether or not they are due to the crisis. It also will document how adherence to social distancing guidelines may impact the relationship between LGBTQ+ adults' social connectedness and their mental health."

The project's design is unusual for [social science research](#) in that it gives those who participate the opportunity to share their stories in multiple digital formats—a far cry from a standard online survey. "We wanted

participants to be able to tell their stories in the format that worked best for them," explained Mynatt. Also important is the project's community [advisory board](#) made up of people who identify within the LGBTQ+ community, live in the Southeast and are leaders connected to the community in various ways.

"Our advisory board is guiding our methodology and how we want to use the data when the study is complete," Seelman said. "We will use the wisdom of this group to understand what will make the best impact in reaching the public with these stories."

The research explores themes that include hope, social and emotional connections, health, pets, nature, arts and culture, and future visioning.

"We're using the strength of the digital technologies available to us to allow people to bring in a variety of topics that will enrich the data and encourage different ways of sharing," Mynatt said. "They can choose whether they're willing to have those stories shared with the public in some way in the future or kept just for research purposes. We believe others will be inspired by experiencing these stories, both now on the project website and in future project exhibitions."

Already they're seeing evidence of strength, hope and resilience among their LGBTQ+ subjects.

"In general, there's been a lot of discussion around reexamining and investing in relationships. These people are finding ways to maintain or strengthen connections with the friends and family they really want to have strong relationships with. They're being really creative about that," Seelman said.

"The other thing that has struck me is how they talk about their relationship to work. They've been having deeper reflections about their

jobs or what they do for a living, how it contributes to their life purpose, and how this may shift their perspective towards not being willing to just sacrifice everything for a paycheck. There's something about the pandemic that is making some people step back and evaluate their relationship to capitalism and employment and think about how to prioritize their life.

"It's a joy to read and see and hear what people are sharing. They have a lot to grapple with and offer a lot of lessons learned," she said. She also feels the research taps into a larger truth.

"We're showing this community has strengths and ways of creatively approaching the pandemic by sharing energy and resources with each other and getting through this together."

Seelman hopes the work will have a long-term impact. "Decades from now, when people are looking to learn from this moment in time during the pandemic, they'd be able to find these stories and learn from them. Sharing how you get through a really difficult global event like this can inform people in the future, too."

More information: LGBTQ+ Rise Up: lgbtqriseup.ipat.gatech.edu/

Provided by Georgia State University

Citation: Uniquely designed research reveals resilience among LGBTQ+ individuals during the pandemic (2021, June 16) retrieved 7 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-06-uniquely-reveals-resilience-lgbtq-individuals.html>

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