Improving Mental Health of Sexual and Gender Minority Young Adults

How (Character) Strengths are Experienced by Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual

Individuals Aged 18 to 27 living in The Netherlands.

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Abstract

Research into Sexual and Gender Minorities (SGMs) often focuses on depression, anxiety, and stigmatisation. However, limited research focuses on positive mental well-being. This is better known as positive psychology, which aims to study strengths, instead of poor mental health. This study aims to find how (character) strengths are experienced by Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual (LGB) young adults aged 18 to 27, using Generative Participatory Design throughout the process.

The study consisted of two workshops among eight participants. The first workshop focused on general well-being, including activities like describing how an object or photo makes participants feel well, and group discussions. The second workshop was focused on (character) strengths, generating individual mind maps and group discussions.

The findings suggest that LGB young adults feel strong as individuals both despite and because of sexuality, experience a broad range of strengths (feeling proud, creative, and open-minded), and feeling positive towards oneself. In addition, the LGBTQIA+ community is seen as a specific strength, which can serve as a safety net for poor mental health. Even more so, participants explicitly highlight their uniqueness and how they do not see themselves as victims. The LGBTQIA+ community might act as a positive institution, specifically fostering personal growth, which is a recommended topic for future research.

Limitations include recruitment and response bias. Still, this study can further develop the field of knowledge, as the unique experiences can help understand the strengths that LGB young adults possess and counteract the victimisation towards these individuals.

Keywords: sexual and gender minorities, positive psychology, character strengths, generative participatory design

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How Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Young Adults Experience (Character) Strengths

Poor mental health, like feelings of depression, anxiety, or stress, is found frequently among LGBTQIA+ youth and young adults. According to Huijnk and Van Beusekom (2021), Dutch lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) teenagers between the age of 11 and 16 experience lower quality of life and more mental health issues than similar aged heterosexual teenagers. For example, problems in sleeping and social media bullying lead to poor mental health, like feelings of unhappiness, which is often due to the family situation or school environment in which the teenagers do not feel safe (Huijnk & van Beusekom, 2021). Moreover, Dutch LGBTQIA+ youth and young adults face problems related to violence and stigmatization (Huijnk et al., 2021). Similar results were found among students in the United States of America, where many psychiatric problems occurred, such as substance abuse and anxiety (Grant et al., 2014). However, limited research has been carried out in positive psychology, which aims to focus on positive mental well-being and strengths, instead of poor mental health. By examining how (character) strengths are experienced by lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals aged 18-27 living in The Netherlands, this research aims to contribute to the field of positive psychology.

LGBTQIA+ individuals will henceforth be referred to as *Sexual and Gender Minorities (*SGMs), including (but not limited to) individuals who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer[1], intersex[2], two-spirit[3], and asexual[4] (*Sexual & Gender Minority Research Office*, n.d.). It also includes individuals with a different sex development[5], and individuals who do not identify with any of the latter terms, but whose orientation, identity, or expression is characterized by non-binary constructs of gender, sexuality, and/or orientation (*Sexual & Gender Minority Research Office*, n.d.). The term SGM ensures the inclusion of all relevant identities, without the possibility of accidental exclusion of individuals (National

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[1] "One definition of queer is abnormal or strange. Historically, queer has been used as an epithet/slur against people whose gender, gender expression and/or sexuality do not conform to dominant expectations. Some people have reclaimed the word queer and self identify in opposition to assimilation (adapted from "Queering the Field")" (*LGBTQIA Resource Center Glossary*, 2022, "Glossary" section).

[2] "An umbrella term to describe a wide range of natural body variations that do not fit neatly into conventional definitions of male or female" (*LGBTQIA Resource Center Glossary,* 2022, "Glossary" section).

[3] "An umbrella term encompassing sexuality and gender in Indigenous Native American communities. Two Spirit people often serve integral and important roles in their communities, such as leaders and healers. It may refer to an embodiment of masculinity and femininity, but this is not the only significance of the term" (*LGBTQIA Resource Center Glossary,* 2022, "Glossary" section).

[4] "A broad spectrum of sexual orientations generally characterized by feeling varying degrees of sexual attraction or a desire for partnered sexuality" (*LGBTQIA Resource Center Glossary*, 2022, "Glossary" section).

[5] "Disorders of sexual development (DSD) encompass a group of congenital conditions associated with atypical development of internal and external genital structures" (Witchel, 2018, p. 90).

Institutes of Health Sexual and Gender Minority Research Coordinating Committee, 2020). To illustrate, around 1 of 10 Dutch people can be described as SGM: 4-6% of the Dutch population feels attracted to the same gender, and 3.9% do not identify with the gender assigned to them at birth (Handreiking LHBTI-emancipatie, 2021).

Mental Health of LGB Young Adults: A Different Approach

One aspect of mental health has been overlooked: positive mental well-being. Bryan (2017) found that research on SGM youth and young adults has primarily focused on their vulnerability to victimisation, neglecting their positive well-being and strengths. By challenging the normative understanding of SGM individuals solely being victims, a shift towards acknowledging their positive traits and changing heteronormativity in research can yield valuable data on strengths instead of poor mental health (Bryan, 2017). As a matter of fact, focussing on negative aspects of mental health may even lead to the inability of SGM youth to see themselves in a positive light (Bryan, 2017). More recent research portrays similar standpoints, underlining the importance of changes in education with SGM youth specifically by tackling heteronormativity and focusing on positive well-being in addition to poor mental health (Bryan, 2019; Ceatha et al., 2022).

Another way of studying mental health that might consider such shortcomings of the normative psychopathology is through *Positive Psychology*. Here, the focus lies on the individuals' strengths rather than illnesses, targeting concepts at different levels; the subjective experience in the past, present, and future; positive individual traits; and group level traits (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Multiple studies have found that applying positive psychology provides a more complete vision to one's mental health, instead of focusing solely on the distresses (Alex Linley et al., 2006; Gable and Haidt, 2005; Gillham & Seligman, 1999).

The rise of interest in positive well-being led to the conceptualisation of *Character Strengths* as "positive traits reflected in thoughts, feelings, and behaviours" (Park et al., 2004, p.603). Peterson and Seligman (2004) make a distinction between six virtues: wisdom, courage, humanity, transcendence, justice, and moderation. Each of these virtues contains specific trait-like character strengths that make individuals strong and virtuous. For example, within the general virtue of courage, the strength of persistence is found. While virtues and character strengths are related concepts, a distinction is required. Virtues can be seen as overarching principles, whereas character strengths represent specific manifestations of those virtues. Character strengths closely relate to positive psychology, as the research and theories

of positive experiences align with traits that people possess (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

(Character) Strengths in LGB Young Adults

A gap is found in LGB young adult experiences, as most research into LGB young adults focuses on subjects as violence, feelings of safety, and depression (Huijnk et al., 2021; Huijnk & Van Beusekom, 2021; LHBTI-emancipatie, 2021). However, studies into character strengths in SGM individuals do exist. For example, Antebi-Gruszka et al. (2020) examined character strengths among SGM individuals of all ages, and found that hope, social intelligence, love, perseverance, and gratitude were positively related to high mental well-being, with hope showing the strongest association. This result may be due to the belief to overcome the perceived negative situation, like being stigmatised. Similarly, Job and Williams (2020) translated literature of positive psychological interventions with the use of character strengths to SGMs. They found that strengths like humour, spirituality, and forgiveness needed more attention in research, to develop fitting interventions for SGMs. For example, forgiveness could be an insightful strength as it was shown to serve as a coping resource, as many SGMs face negative experiences like discrimination and microaggression. Forgiveness is predicted to prevent rumination from happening within the target group.

An example of a strength next to the character strengths as defined by Seligman and colleagues that SGM youth could possess, is being proud. Russell and Richards (2003) argue that LGB youth and young adults that are proud of their sexual preference are more resilient, leading to less stress-related symptoms and higher self-efficacy. However, this claim cannot be generalised to the population as the sample included mostly women, as well as people with higher educational background from one area in the United States. This study addresses this gap by focusing on a different context and population, specifically LGB young adults that live in The Netherlands.

Improving Mental Well-Being of LGB Young Adults: Generative Participatory Design

Thorough research into experiences of (character) strengths would contribute to existing literature by creating a more balanced and complete picture of mental health and well-being. It would also contribute towards improving the mental health of young LGB individuals by tailoring interventions to specific needs of both an individual's symptoms and strengths. Positive psychological interventions have proven to complement existing interventions by providing a more balanced and complete vision, considering both the problems and strengths in mental health (Duckworth et al., 2005; Shoshani & Steinmetz, 2014).

Specific to the aim of potentially using the findings from the current study for the development of positive psychological interventions, the study will use a *Generative Participatory Design* (GPD). GPD is distinct from other participant-focused designs in the involvement of participants (Vandekerckhove et al., 2020). Not only are participants involved in every step of the process, but the participants also share their experiential knowledge by acts of creating, telling, and/or acting. This will help them to reflect and build onto their experiences for future situations by having more insights about their strengths. These characteristics make for an effective design and rationale considering the scope of this research, as character strengths have not yet been studied together with LGB young adults. This design is particularly fitting for this research as it investigates the unexplored territory of (character) strengths within the context of LGB young adults that live in The Netherlands. By capturing the participants' experiences and reflections, this study not only serves as valuable data for research purposes, but it also provides a foundation for potential interventions tailored to the unique needs of LGB young adults. Thus, the research question that guides this study is: how are (character) strengths experienced by lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals aged 18 to 27, who live in The Netherlands?

Methodology

Design

In this study it is the aim to collect data about the experiences of participants. Hence, a qualitative descriptive research method is used. GPD provides the appropriate tools throughout the process by including participants in every step of the design with creative activities (Vandekerckhove et al., 2020), through the course of two workshops. This study is embedded in a larger project on mental health and well-being of SGM youth and young adults. The University of Twente Ethical Committee Behavioral, Management and Social Sciences (230457) has approved the study before the start of recruitment and workshops.

Participants

The target group consisted of LGB individuals aged 18 to 27-year-old who live in The Netherlands. The inclusion criteria for participants consisted of LGB individuals between 18 and 27 years old that live in a university city in The Netherlands, available for one or both workshop(s) and skilled in English language as it is important that the participants could talk openly about their experiences. Exclusion criteria were the existence of significant mental or medical conditions, as that is beyond the scope of the research and the workshop facilitators would not be able to provide support in this aspect. Therefore, the research is explicitly focused on the experiences of individuals and does not aim at counselling or advising

individuals dealing with diagnosed mental illness. The participants have been recruited with the use of convenience sampling via Instagram, LGBTQIA+ communities (S.V. Exaltio and Miauw Queernight), and personal contacts. Before the first workshop, there had been contact with 14 individuals, of which eight officially attended. The exclusion of six individuals was based on availability issues, and issues regarding mastery of the English language.

A total of eight participants have been recruited, with a mean age of 22.38 (SD = 1.80). Within this sample, three identified as male, two identified as being genderfluid[6], and three identified as female. Lastly, the sample consisted of three different nationalities.

Researcher Description

As a researcher, I am part of the target group. Following reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2008), personal ideas about sexuality in relation to mental health and well-being are relevant to mention during each step of the process in the study. The prior understandings have influenced the research in the following ways. First, as a researcher during the workshops, it was in the best interest of all stakeholders involved to make the participants feel comfortable and safe. This went beyond merely the acknowledging and adhering to the inclusion principles set forth by the Shaping Expert Group (*SEG Inclusion*, 2022), as it entailed actively adopting the perspective of participants. Cultivating mutual respect was of most importance during both workshops and achieved by accommodating to the participants' needs by waiting outside the building due to its size and potential navigational struggles as well as informal conversations before the start of the workshops itself. On top of that, I have had contact with three out of the eight participants before, which could have led to more honest responses, as well as less honest responses because of personal connections. This could have an impact on the results. For instance, one potential risk is that the researcher may have preconceived notions or biases about the participants, which could influence the data collected (Krueger & Casey, 2014). Another risk is that participants feel uncomfortable sharing their honest opinions if they feel that they are being observed by someone they know (Barbour, 2018). This could result in a potential skew of the results of the workshops. It is important to be aware of the latter possibilities.

Procedure

The first workshop included six participants that are part of the target group. Before the start, all participants read the information sheet and signed the informed consent (see

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[6] "A person whose gender identification and presentation shifts, whether within or outside of societal, gender-based expectations. Being fluid in motion between two or more genders" (*LGBTQIA Resource Center Glossary,* 2022, "Glossary" section).

Appendix A). The aim was to gain knowledge about general understanding about the experience of mental health in SGM and was carried out together with two other researchers studying improving mental well-being of SGM young adults, but with different focuses. For this workshop, a room at the University of Twente was booked that met the needs of carrying out a focus group study (see Figure 1). The workshop lasted for 1,5 hours. Drinks and snacks were provided during the break and afterwards.

As can be seen in Appendix B, the first workshop started with a name and pronouns round, for everyone to know how they liked to be referred to. The group of participants then described an item or photo they brought with them and explain how that piece makes them feel well. This not only served as an icebreaker for the participants to get familiar with talking about well-being and positive psychology, but it also made them more comfortable together as a group, as suggested by Visser et al. (2005). On top of that, Visser and colleagues (2005) explain how asking the participants to bring to think and bring something to the first workshop helps to sensitise them; preparing, encouraging, and triggering them to talk about their experiences. An example of an item was a necklace that reminded the participant to feel proud of their sexuality, explicitly referring to the shift she experienced when becoming more comfortable about her sexuality. This was followed by a total of nine statements aimed to provoke a reaction from the participants, stimulating discussions. The three researchers formulated the statements together, with three statements based on each researcher's specific focus. The statements that belong to this study were: "I am proud of being who I am", "Being LGBTQIA+ is a strength of mine", and "As an LGBTQIA+ person I am seen as a victim". These statements were related to the topic of the research, mentioning concepts like victimisation and strengths. The participants could raise their hands if they agreed or not. A group discussion between participants followed, as discussions have proven to be effective in letting the participants make collective representations while presenting their own identities (Callaghan, 2005). Lastly, the workshop included a short discussion on how the participants think about GPD and eHealth interventions, to include the other researcher's focus as well as the bigger aim of the project this study is embedded in.

Figure 1

Workshop 1: Six participants discussing statements, at University of Twente.

The second workshop included four participants in total, with two participants that already joined the first workshop (therefore already familiarised with the workshops bigger aim and the researchers), and two new participants. Beforehand, the new participants signed the informed consent and continued with a name and pronouns round. As this research workshop was only aimed at the specific focus (character) strengths, the workshop was only guided by one researcher, with one other researcher being present to avoid "lone-worker risk". This term refers to the risks that come with working outside the sight of other workers or supervision (Griffin & Neal, 2000), for example struggles during data gathering or the interpretation of data.

The focus was to discover and talk about character strengths, allowing the participants to generate an individual mind map and explain it verbally afterwards (see Appendix C for script). According to Visser et al. (2005), surface knowledge is the upper layer of data that can be gained. However, with the second workshop, the aim was to tackle the deeper layer of knowledge, gaining information about latent needs; needs that participant are yet to become aware of about the future. These needs are important as they provide information about a deeper level of understanding about one's experiences (Visser et al., 2005). Therefore, the participants were asked to think about their strengths in relation to their sexuality, which they had to write down. Then, the character strengths were shown on the screen, and asked again to write down character strengths in addition to the strengths they had already written down and encouraged to look for similarities and differences. Then they were asked to make an individual mind map using all different kinds of colours, shapes, stickers, etc. This mind map acted as a canvas for ideas, emotions, feelings, and in particular, strengths, that they resonated with in relation to their sexual identity (for finished mind maps see Appendix F). It is found that different generative tools each contribute to portraying participants' unique experiences,

including paper mind maps (Stappers & Sanders, 2003). The specific question asked was: "What makes you strong?". All character strengths and virtues were shown on the screen, making it easier for the participants to make decisions about which strengths they most resonated with.

Figure 2

Workshop 2: Participants talking about their mind maps.
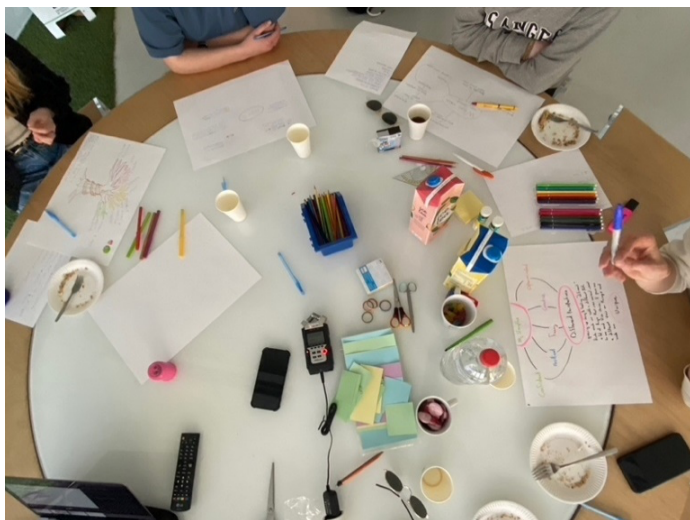
Data Analysis

For the analysis of qualitative data, thematic analysis is be used. Recording of the workshops was carried out through a recording device. The recordings of both workshops were transcribed manually and saved in ATLAS.ti (Version 9.1.3 (2089)).

Thematic analysis (TA) is an effective method that has been widely recognised and utilised as a reliable approach to analyse and interpret qualitative the data. Braun and Clarke (2008) conceptualise TA by formulating themes and uncovering patterns and meaning, which leads to a deeper understanding of the topic. TA is applied in the following way. After manual transcription of both workshops, the transcripts were checked and read multiple times to familiar oneself with the data (for transcripts see Appendix D and E). Consequently, reading through the transcripts, initial codes and themes were established. The initial codes and themes resulted in a set of codes. The codes were then organized into themes and sub-themes with the use of a thematic map. Lastly, the themes and subthemes have been refined and shaped in accordance with the data, checking for correctness. The themes were given meaning and explanations by adding examples. For instance, the quote: *"Even now, even here at university. A few of my straight friends, they're like: I wish I was gay so I could make so many friends."*, belonged to the subtheme of "A better connection with individuals from

LGBTQIA+ community than with (and between) cisgender-heterosexual individuals", which ultimately was included into the main theme "The LGBTQIA+ community can serve as a safety net for poor mental health".

Results

Through thematic analysis, the following main themes were formulated: "Feeling strong, despite and because of sexuality", "A broad range of strengths and feeling positive towards oneself", and "The LGBTQIA+ community can serve as a safety net for poor mental health". Each theme contains several subthemes that are explained using quotes of participants.

Feeling Strong, Despite and Because of Sexuality

Overall, the participants found themselves to be strong individuals. This was not only present despite of their sexuality, but also because of their sexuality, emphasising the multifaceted nature of their experiences. For example, participant T stated: *"Because I always think I would have been creative I don't think my sexuality had that much influence on it"*. Thereby feeling strong despite of their sexuality, but later continuing with explaining the following: *"...and then I started thinking more about it, and I just wrote down that; growing up being and feeling works different kind of when you walk a different path. Other things that were normal, were not normal to me and vice versa. And it gave me different perspectives on things, and it made me unique in a way."*. This implies that even though sexuality may have caused a certain level of uniqueness, still, he thinks that the strengths he possesses would have already been there. Participants sheds light on the complex relationship between his sexuality and his strengths, therefore demonstrating the interplay between identity, strengths, and the experiences that come with their sexuality. A more specific strength that depicts the theme is creativity, which was also found to be because of their sexuality, and because the participant experienced to have a different perspective on the world. Participant A highlighted how her creativity served as a manifestation of creativity, enabling her to assert boundaries because of it in the following way: *"It also made me a lot stronger; I have more courage to say no and other things to people that I don't like, or that don't treat me well. So that made me stronger too and yeah, I am more creative and openminded. And not only because of my sexuality, but also more openminded with what other people think and why they think it and I want to know that; what's going on there."*. Her openness was fostered by her sexuality and deepened her understanding of others. This suggests that strengths were not limited to individual domains but extended to interpersonal dynamics, emphasising the broader impact of sexuality on personal growth.

LGB Young Adults Do Not See Themselves as Victims

      This theme uncovers the different perceptions on victimisation. A "victim" was referred to as an SGM suffering from societies victimisation and stigmatisation. The perceptions of participants challenge the common association between SGM individuals and victimisation. Participants interpreted the term differently, therefore differed in opinions. For example, participant J said: *"I think that a lot of LGBTQIA+ persons would like to see themselves as victims. Because it's just an association with any stigmatized group. It's easy to forego dealing with your own problems. But I don't think that.",* which concerns their opinion to how SGM individuals see themselves, rather than how society sees SGMs. Later, they add onto their opinion by saying: *"I don't think the queer community is seen as a victim. If anything, it's insane how confident queer people are, and that's more impressive than anything else.".* Participant J's statement was later refined: *"when people do see queer people as victims. That's to me very patronising. I like, and also in connection with assumptions like, oh, you're doing they're doing so poorly. They don't fit in, that's so bad for them. Ehm, or in general, like, oh, yeah, they're mentally ill. But I don't know if victim, maybe I'm just not confronted with that, personally.".* On the other hand, participant T thinks the following, he expresses a desire for a shift towards a unified perspective: *"I think it's still unfortunate that we are being seen as a minority. It's also important to not keep thinking about ourselves as a minority. Instead think of us versus them, about thinking it's just us. Everybody can be a little different. And that doesn't matter",* which concerns a different take on the subject by directly addressing being seen as a minority, and how he thinks that it should be dealt with instead. Overall, participants collectively reject the notion of being seen as victims, even though they believe that society does. Still, they are not bothered by potentially being seen as a victim personally. As a matter of fact, they demonstrate a sense of resilience and self-empowerment.

Sexuality Empowers Self-expression, a Key Factor to Feel Strong

      Additionally, feeling strong was discussed in connection to feeling able to express oneself in terms of sexual preference. For instance, participant J thinks: *"exploration and identity expression is central which I why I think that it's a big strength that we can live very authentically as ourselves as queer people.",* focusing more on the general aspect of how self-expression can help queer people to feel strong. However, others talked about their personal experiences, like participant S: *"when I go out with my queer friends, and then we dress super feminine, or like when we put on makeup and everything. And then we are walking down the streets, like you know, there will be all these very typical Indian people judging us, you know, looking at us or, you know, they like, when the past by you can actually feel the*

uncomfortableness in their face. And that makes me happy.". In this case, the participant feels happy and strong because of the discomfort of people that do not accept them in the way they express oneself. Participant M also liked to express herself, using colours and expressing life and its vitality*: "I find myself a colourful person, I love colours and I'm adding them to my life, to clothes, to my room, to everything really. And I made like a, some swirls around the trees because I feel like the colours just give life to the tree.".* These experiences show how self-expression is a common and important aspect to feeling strong, which can be experienced in different ways, ranging from adding it in the form of shapes and colours to one's life, or as feelings that build through the discomfort of people that do not accept them.

A Broad Range of Strengths and feeling Positive Towards Oneself

Participants displayed to be generally positive about themselves and their strengths, with significant emphasis on what specific strengths they possess. This was not only in general, but also in relation to their sexual preferences. Participant T acknowledged this sense of optimism by asking participant M and A about the their views on themselves: *"...what I enjoy about you two specifically, is that you have a big, optimistic view, much more about a tree and growing."*, later continuing with explaining how he is also optimistic about himself, but in a different way: *"I'm just very comfortable and nice where I am, and it's really nice hearing from you, very nice and optimistic like yeah, I'm still growing and I'm still learning and it's really good and I'm happy to hear that you've found that comfort with yourself."*. Thereby highlighting his contentment and comfortableness, finding satisfaction in present circumstances rather than seeking personal growth. On the other hand, there was a perceived lack of strengths, for example participant Y, who thinks that being gay automatically means that people expect you to be creative: *"…the most different part is that I'm not really creative [laughing]. I mean I know that lots of people in the community are creative. And that's really nice, and I've always been like "Oh well I'm not really one of those persons!".* Thus, despite the overall positivity of participants, the lack of strengths was depicted as well through humorous reflection, expressing a divergence from the stereotype that comes with their sexuality.

Feeling Proud as One of the Biggest Strengths

All participants agreed to feel very proud of who they are. For example, participants Y stated it the following way: *"I have a lot of people looking at me all the time. That can be anxiety inducing, but just through stupid confidence and pride that I project outwards that helps me just to kind of live my life. Being very proud outwards helps because there's always someone saying that I shouldn't be."*. Participant S added onto this by underlining how

important an accepting environment is in relation to feeling proud: *"...people who accepted me the way I am, I did not have to hide myself anymore. That's when I realised there are also people who will accept you for who I am. That's when I started coming out to people. And it just went on and on and on, and I'm just really proud of what and who I am."*. These perceptions depict the differences in how one shows and develops a strong sense of pride. Participant Y emphasises self-confidence, whereas participant S had to rely on their social circle to get to that point. Ry provided a perspective in relation to poor mental health, by being able to choose a better way to be oneself: *"I get to choose who I want to be. And just because that's kind of like my identity is my creation and that's why I find a lot of pride in it because I put a lot of work into it.",* also referring to an effort that makes worth being proud of. Overall, the pride helps participants to navigate through social challenges, embrace their self-identity, and self-worth.

Broad Range of Seligman's Character Strengths, like Wisdom and Knowledge, and Moderation

The participants mentioned all six general virtues of the character strengths and virtues defined by Peterson and Seligman (2004). Overall, the most discussed virtues were wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, and moderation. Wisdom and knowledge were explained by participant A: *"I do have since I came out, I know how to communicate with other people, and how to treat them, and I think that's a part of the wisdom and knowledge, I think. So that's something I've learned by myself, because I didn't have a lot of out-friends...",* focusing on how a coming out can provide knowledge on treating others, as well as how this was done without the help of others. Within this virtue, participant M also mentioned the strength of love of learning: *"I drew a tree, because I love trees, I think they're great. What I like about trees is that they're always growing. I feel like I am too.",* this signifies the recognition of personal growth as on ongoing process. The participant's reference to personal growth represents her appreciation for lifelong learning, parallel to the growth of a tree.

The virtue of humanity led to a discussion about the strengths of self-regulation and forgiveness, where participant Y thinks of himself as kind and forgiving: *"Also, being kind makes me strong. Accepting everyone around me. And I feel like that when I can control myself around others also makes me strong. Because then you can adapt to, sometimes maybe necessary if it's like a bad situation or whatever.",* and *"I mean I would say I'm personally quite forgiving, like even in childhood. I forgive everyone like, in an hour [laughing]. Honestly, I'm not sure if this has to do with that, I'm gay or not, but I feel like I guess it's just me that I don't like generally, that everyone is nice to each other, and peaceful, and there's*

no bad vibes around.". In contrast to this, participant T can hold grudges, especially in relation to being a minority, which adds onto the importance that participants assign to forgiveness: *"related to my pettiness, is that I'm kind of tired of always having to be a better person. Because growing up, being bullied and that stuff, I was always like they are the problem, they are being mean, and I was taught to be the better person. I'm tired of that, bit that's like one part of being LGBTQ is that, because of being a minority, you always have to be a better person. Because the moment you do something wrong, it's kind of in some people's eyes a justification of like "look at that relnicht". That's something I find annoying, and I have to be more nice to people and have to be more accepting in a way. Because some people just don't care. Again, my pettiness is just a normal reaction sometimes.".* In this discussion, two participants talked about their differences in dealing with hatred of others, and how they in turn, are expected to behave. On the one hand, participant Y thinks of being kind as a value, a way to live and he puts more effort into how he wants to be seen by others. On the other hand, participant T has struggled with being unforgiving for a longer time, and after careful consideration, finds himself to not be able to be kind and forgiving at any given time, even though it is expected of him. It shows a difference in the experience of kindness and forgiveness.

A Broad Range of Additional Strengths, like Being Open-minded and Confident

Some strengths were particularly mentioned that did not necessarily belong to Seligman's character strengths. These included confidence and open-mindedness. Open-mindedness was most often described together with other strengths, traits, and the LGBTQIA+ community. For example, participant M stated: *"It's a community that you know you can rely on, a community that respects each other. It's a really, I see it as a really energetic environment, where everyone is really happy and always ready to support each other or hype each other up. And that's why I feel very free and openminded, and that's something I really like.".* Through coming-out, and becoming acquainted with the LGBTQIA+ community, one is also becoming acquainted with different people and orientations. Similarly, participant T stated the following about being open in his own sexuality: *"And as you said it's very nice you also said you tend to date more girls, that's also an example of how sexuality can be very fluid, instead of being 50/50. I think that I'm fully gay, I'm fully open to any girl, I haven't really met anyone that does that for me. But you know what I'm still open for it. It's also a part of the growing process.".*

While confidence is described in relation to a threatening environment for which they had to build confidence to overcome it, as participant T said: *"I also had confidence, I think*

kind of growing up and always being different. I kind of learned early on to not give a damn about what people do. And I see with other friends around me having a much harder time with standing out. And I think I've always kind of stood out, so I don't really care anymore.". This perception depicts that the participant remains unfazed by societal expectations, showing resilience and a strong sense of self. Some others mentioned the experience of confidence in difference ways, like participant M: *"Since coming out, I feel like I'm more confident in things that I see to other people and things that I do. Sometimes I would be a little insecure, like oh, what if I do this, isn't this weird or won't find people this a bit strange? And now, I just don't think about it anymore.",* which is more focused on the reflection that came with coming out; being able to put the fear of what others may think aside. These narratives reflect the empowering nature of open-mindedness and confidence itself, as well as the transformative power that self-acceptance can have on the latter strengths.

The LGBTQIA+ Community can Serve as a Safety Net for Poor Mental Health

Something that can be seen as a red threat throughout the workshops was the way that the participants talked about their experiences of belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community. This highlights the community's sense to provide a sense of support and safety, that may counter the external challenges. The first comment on this subject was explicitly mentioned by participant J: *"implicit and explicit forms of discrimination in the environment both things like getting called the * like randomly to things like a lot of toilets being separated by men and women. And clothing stores the same, ehm, like very, a very wide range of spectrum on microaggressions to actual aggression, that hamper my mental health. And it's buffered by community resilience from the environment that I have with queer people.".* On multiple occasions during the research, the participants referred to overcoming poor mental health with the help of the community. For example, participant Ro experienced the following: *"…I really didn't know any other queer people that didn't live like half an hour train ride, at least away from me. Ehm, and the first like two years that I was here, I also kind of isolated myself. And when I then finally, I think it was over [inaudible] actually that we got to the first like, Exaltio, like, almost a year ago, actually. And it was like, like, such a whole new world of just like being able to express myself and not like having this constant fear of like, oh, can I say that? Or is this going to, Is this going to tip the situation into like, the bad area? Ehm, and it's been like, it's brought me so much joy that I've actually joined committee work. Which I still can't believe, I am normally not that proactive.".* These accounts exemplify how the community can act as a vital support network, that can even stimulate individuals to get out of their comfort zones.

A Feeling of Connectedness, Acceptance, and Understanding

Participants often resonated with strongly with feelings related to either connectedness, acceptance, or understanding that they found within the community. These feelings ultimately helped them to be more openminded, or more connected with themselves. An example can be found in the statement of Participant Y: *"...it's like you have a sense of community, coming together, activities together. Have some deeper connection,"*. This was agreed on by participant Ry: *"I mean, we've seen that when you're in a community where you accept it and where you don't get called slurs or you don't get like belittled for your lifestyle choices, as they call it. Ehm, that you can be queer and perfectly mentally healthy. And yeah, I don't think that you can equate that."*. This especially underlines the importance of acceptance, as well as participant J: *"I think that if you would have an environment or community where everyone was in the LGBTQIA+ community, that everyone would be like, happy and fine. And I think if you had a statement that said being LGBTQIA+ goes hand in hand with the environment that you're in, and how accepted that environment is, that would be statement I would agree to."*. The shared experiences as well as the supportive environment allow individuals to be their authentic selves, positively impacting their well-being. The emphasis on the community and its valuable advantages shed light on how participants not solely proudly talk about individual strengths, but also about acceptance and influences from their surroundings.

A Better Connection with Individuals from LGBTQIA+ community than with (and between) Cisgender-heterosexual Individuals

Many participants spoke about how it is easier to connect with people from the LGBTQIA+ community, as opposed to cisgender-heterosexual individuals. Making friends and connecting to people is thus seen as easier in comparison with straight individuals, as participant Ro explains: *"I love my straight friends. But there are certain things like if I talk about certain things, you don't have that overlap in experience."*. All participants agreed on the strength of the community and seeing themselves as privileged to belong to it, like participant S: *"Even now, even here at university. A few of my straight friends, they're like: I wish I was gay so I could make so many friends."*. This privileged and positive feeling portrays the fulfilment that the participants experience when talking about what belonging to the LGBTQIA+ means to them. It suggests a shared understanding among LGB individuals, as they have similar experiences, challenges, and identities. A lack of overlap with cisgender-heterosexual individual could create a sense of disconnect and limited understanding. When in fact, understanding and connection is one of the main topics discussed.

Discussion

This study aimed to provide insights into the experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) young adults regarding their strengths, as there is limited literature about positive psychology within this target group. To ensure adequate involvement of LGB participants and researchers the study employed elements of generative participatory design (GPD), including sensitisation and creative activities. With the use of thematic analysis, the following themes were formulated: feeling strong despite and because of sexuality, a broad range of strengths and feeling positive towards oneself, and the LGBTQIA+ community can serve as a safety net for poor mental health. The themes shed light on the unique perspectives of participants.

The first main finding was that participants see themselves as strong individuals, with a broad range of strengths accompanying this feeling. Some of these strengths are depicted in the discussed virtues and character strengths by Peterson and Seligman (2004), but participants put even more emphasis on other specific strengths. For instance, this positivity towards being unique was portrayed in feeling proud, creative, and openminded both because and despite of their sexuality. They see their sexuality as a source of uniqueness and personal growth, therefore challenging the way LGB young adults are generally seen (Bryan, 2017). The findings from this study reveals a gap in understanding what role sexuality plays regarding strengths and challenges SGM youth currently face. Previous literature found that non-SGM college students from England that utilise strengths use like personal growth enhance their well-being (Linley et al., 2010). Russel and Richards (2003) have studied pride of sexuality in LGB individuals, with outcomes that showed the positive effect of pride on stress-related symptoms. However, no literature focuses on personal growth or uniqueness. Even though the aim of this study was to find how (character) strengths are experienced, it did not allow for detailed research into the advantages of the latter strengths. Future research could use these insights to further knowledge on how specific strengths negotiate challenges for SGM individuals.

Secondly, the participants highlighted their pride in dealing with perceived victimisation of SGM individuals by society (Bryan, 2017), rejecting the idea of "us versus them", but rather expressing how self-confidence, pride, and acceptance helps them to not be bothered by such phenomena. Recent research found that stigmatisation and victimisation towards Dutch SGM individuals already starts at a young age in textbooks for youth. This heteronormativity can induce biases among youth towards SGM individuals (Van De Rozenberg et al., 2023). Huijnk and Beusekom (2021) also found that Dutch teenagers experience poor mental health more often than heterosexual teenagers. However, these

findings contrast with recent studies that show that The Netherlands is generally seen as (and find themselves to be) one of the most accepting countries towards homosexuality (Pousher & Kent, 2020). It sheds light on the inconsistency between the experience of SGM youth and society's view of acceptance. Even though participants experienced victimisation and stigmatisation, strengths provided the right tools to be unfazed by the impact. Hence, future research could focus on the association between the strength of pride or resilience, and victimisation among SGM young adults. This would contribute to existing literature by unravelling how positive strengths can contribute to overcoming challenges that SGM young adults face, even in a country that is considered accepting of homosexuality.

Lastly, a commonly expressed but rather unexpected aspect of the participants' well-being was the LGBTQIA+ community. Although the study aimed to gain insights about participants' individual strengths, participants collectively agreed on the importance of the LGBTQIA+ community. The community gives the participants a sense of connectedness and acceptance that is so strong, that they consider it a privilege, that cisgender-heterosexual individuals will never experience. Participants think that this deeply rooted need for acceptance can merely be found in a community with likeminded individuals. More interestingly, participants see being part of the community as a strength that stimulates them to express themselves, get out of their comfort zone, fostering positive well-being. This aligns with the concept of *Positive Institutions* by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000). According to their framework, positive institutions are social structures that promote mental well-being and foster positive emotions and personal growth. Especially personal growth was discussed among participants in this study. This raises the question to which the community can be seen as a positive institution. However, there are no accounts of previous research related to this insight, while it would be an interesting topic to explore further.

Several limitations need to be considered. First, the use of convenience sampling via online platforms and personal contacts can impact the generalisability of the results, as self-selection bias may arise. This means that individuals who are more enthusiastic about the aim of the study are more likely to participate, with a possibility of skewing the results by overemphasising on positive experiences. This could result in an overrepresentation of individuals who have positive perceptions of the community and its impact on their lives, with a possibility of overlooking challenges of participants. On top of that, participants recruited via social platforms and personal contact may want to present themselves in a more favourable light. Additionally, personal connections of the researcher with the participants can ultimately skew the results as participants may provide answers and statements that they think

the researcher would like to hear. For instance, due to the relatively positive nature of the workshops, a possible response bias occurred. The focus on strengths could have made the participants think only in terms of positive experiences, which might have affected the ability to explain negative experiences or lack of strengths; feeling there's no room to discuss different important topics.

While considering the limitations, this study contains strengths worth paying attention to. A first strength is the use of a generative aspect that stimulate participants to make a mind map. In generating these mind maps, the researchers provided the participants with papers and coloured pencils, as well as papers in shapes and stickers that could enhance the participants' own perception of their experience. This way, the participants not only talked about their experiences in the group, but they were also able to reflect on their generated mind maps, which ultimately stimulated interesting discussions and insights. On top of that, the use of GPD throughout the research played a vital role in enhancing the workshops and study methodology. Techniques like sensitisation fostered a connection between participants, encouraging an open dialogue (Vandekerckhove et al., 2020). By utilising these aspects, the study not only captured rich qualitative data, but it also ensured that the participants' voices were heard.

This study can be used to further the knowledge within the field of LGB young adults. Building upon the current study, future research could enhance by carefully considering potential biases that arise during both the recruitment and the interpretation process. For example, paying close attention to give the participants the space to talk about positive strengths, but also a lack of strengths. On top of that, future research could include both qualitative and quantitative methods, as it provides valuable insights into the depth of experiences of LGB young adults, (character) strengths, and sexuality. Future research could do this by examining the insight of feeling strong because of their sexuality, further validating the insights of this study within a larger sample of the target group, by assessing the relationship through mixed methods combining surveys or structured interviews alongside qualitative approaches. Next to that, future research could focus on strengths that participants mentioned to lack, specifically how participants mentioned to be expected to possess strengths because of their sexuality, like forgiveness and creativity. On top of that, future research could explore one of the main findings, namely how the LGBTQIA+ community might act as a positive institution for SGM individuals, building onto the concept of Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000).

To conclude, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of LGB young adults, focusing on how they experience (character) strengths in relation to their sexuality. By examining the unique strengths that participants identified with themselves and the community, this study challenges the perception that LGB young adults should be seen as victims and instead portray themselves as strong individuals, that value strengths like pride, open-mindedness, uniqueness, and personal growth. The findings highlight the significance of how (character) strengths shape their lives and experiences.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent and Information Sheet

Informed Consent Form

Information Sheet

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS SHEET

Dear reader,

The purpose of the research is to identify the participant's experiences related to positive mental health through participation in two workshops. These workshops are organized by three students at the University of Twente: Clara Odenthal, Julia Petersen, and Marieke van der Bie.

The importance of this study is related to improving mental health of Sexual and Gender Minorities (SGMs). Many studies that involve these individuals are related to their mental health problems. However, we are interested in your strengths, positive experiences, and what it means for you to feel well. This way, a more complete vision can be established, including both mental health problems, and positive well-being. Therefore, we ask from you to attend two workshops. The insights that we gain from your attendance and experiences will help shape interventions and future research.

Explanation workshop:
- University of Twente: Design Lab (we will meet you out front), 18:30-20:00.
- You are expected to bring nothing but your willingness to talk about your experiences.
- We will be going to discuss character strengths in a group after which you will make a mind map, further information will be provided during the introduction of the workshop.
- Drinks and snacks are offered.

Potential risks of participating in the study include the discussion of sensitive or triggering information. When this risk is experienced, it is advised to seek help from practitioner. Students of the UT can schedule meeting with student psychologist using the following link: https://www.utwente.nl/nl/ces/sacc/begeleiding-advies/psycholoog-voor-studenten/. Non-UT-students are advised to contact their general practitioner.

The research project has been reviewed and approved by the BMS Ethics Committee. You can withdraw from the study at any point without stating the reason. To analyse your experience, we will make audio recordings of the workshops. These recordings will be anonymized and given a number,

stored at University of Twente, but will never be made publicly. The recordings will be used for this study and possibly following studies.

We hope that we informed you well. For questions during the workshop itself, you can ask the researchers directly. For questions after the workshops, you can contact via mail (m.j.vanderbie@student.utwente.nl, j.u.petersen@student.utwente.nl, c.s.h.odenthal@student.utwente.nl) or supervisor Tessa Dekkers (t.dekkers@utwente.nl, +31534899741).

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Secretary of the Ethics Committee/domain Humanities & Social Sciences of the Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences at the University of Twente by ethicscommittee-hss@utwente.nl.

Consent Form for Study into Mental Health Experiences of SGM Young Adults

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
Taking part in the study		
I have read and understood the information dated [__/__/____], or it has been read to me. I have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.	□	□
I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and I can withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason.	□	□
I understand that taking part in the study involves being part of a focus group with two workshops of which audio recordings will be made.	□	□
Risks associated with participating in the study		
I understand that taking part in the study involves the following risks: discussing sensitive topics.	□	□
Use of the information in the study		
I understand that information I provide will be used for the reporting in thesis.	□	□
I understand that personal information collected about me that can identify me, such as [e.g., my name or where I live], will not be shared beyond the study team.	□	□
Consent to be audio/video recorded	□	□
I agree to be audio recorded.		

Future use and reuse of the information by others

I give permission for the collected data of experiences that I provide to be archived in transcripts so it can be used for future research and learning. This data will be archived anonymously.

□   □

Signatures

_____   _____   _____

Name of participant   Signature   Date

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant and, to the best of my ability, ensured that the participant understands to what they are freely consenting.

_____   _____   _____

Researcher name   Signature   Date

Study contact details for further information

Please contact the researchers via mail (m.j.vanderbie@student.utwente.nl, j.u.petersen@student.utwente.nl, c.s.h.odenthal@student.utwente.nl) or supervisor Tessa Dekkers (t.dekkers@utwente.nl, +31534899741).

Appendix B

Table of Workshop 1

Time	Action	Checklist
5 minutes	Participants fill in informed consent	Hand out written informed consent and let participants sign them + answer questions if participants have questions about it (email beforehand so they can read through it)
5 minutes	Name and pronouns round	Short introduction from both sides (researchers and participants)
10 minutes	In depth introduction	Mention SEG principles, content of the workshop, expectations (what the participants can expect and what they expect from us), end goal, + answer questions if participants have questions about it
30 minutes	Item description	Prior to the workshop participants are asked to bring any item (picture, object etc.) that represents what it means for them to feel well/better. This object could be something that makes them feel well or connects them to what makes them feel well.
10 minutes	Break	Hand out drinks and snacks.
25 minutes	Group discussion with statements	The researchers give statements, and the participants first raise their hands whether they agree or disagree, followed by explanations of their opinion of participants that feel comfortable. Repeat if needed in Dutch or German. In case of long discussions, make choices on stating less statements. Statements: - I am proud of being who I am. - Being LGBTQIA+ is a strength of mine. - As an LGBTQIA+ person I am seen as a victim.

Time	Action	Checklist
5 minutes	Participants fill in informed consent	Hand out written informed consent and let participants sign them + answer questions if participants have questions about it (email beforehand so they can read through it) • I possess strategies that help me overcome negative feelings or feeling down. • I feel happy and confident when I can express my gender identity authentically. • Being referred to by the correct pronouns is a validating and euphoric experience. • Finding a community of people who accept and support my gender identity brings me immense joy. • As an LGBTQIA+ person, I experience more depressive symptoms than cisgender heterosexual people. • Being LGBTQIA+ goes hand in hand with depressive symptoms.
10 minutes	Group discussion eHealth and GPD	Asking participants about their ideas regarding the use of participatory design approaches when developing an eHealth intervention aimed at improving mental health of LGBTQIA+ people.
5 minutes	Closing comments	Thank participants for participation. Are there any questions left? Let them know that they can always contact us researchers if questions arise after the workshop

Appendix C

Table Workshop 2

Time	Action	Checklist
5 minutes	Participants fill in informed consent	*In case of new participants only* Hand out written informed consent and let participants sign them + answer questions if participants have questions about it (email beforehand so they can read through it).
5 minutes	Name and pronouns round	*In case of new participants only* Short introduction from both sides (researchers and participants).
20 minutes	In depth introduction	1. Mention SEG principles, content of the workshop, expectations (what the participants can expect and what they expect from us), end goal, + answer questions if participants have questions about it, as well as introduction of this specific workshop. 2. Then ask the participants about what strengths they think they possess in relation to their sexuality and let them write them down. 3. Let the discussion flow by: - Does someone relate to this strength? - How does this strength relate to you? - How is this strength related to your sexuality? 4. Then explain the character strengths by Seligman. 5. Ask whether their strengths differ from Seligman and which ones they relate to. 6. Lay the strengths around the room and let the mind mapping start.
15 minutes	Individual mind mapping	The aim of this workshop is to focus specifically on character strengths, all these strengths will be visible to the participants (e.g., courage, appreciation of beauty and excellence).

Time	Action	Checklist
5 minutes	Participants fill in informed consent	*In case of new participants only* Hand out written informed consent and let participants sign them + answer questions if participants have questions about it (email beforehand so they can read through it).
		The participants have time to make an individual mind map, using cards, colours, papers, shapes (also abstract).
		As a researcher, walk through the room between participants and help without making assumptions, judgements, and/or giving ideas that could alter their opinions by stimulating why they think this way and how it influences them.
10 minutes	Break	Hand out drinks and snacks
30 minutes	Reflection through group discussion	1. Give every participant an equal amount of time to explain their mind map (2 min). 2. As a researcher, give a summary of what has been said by the participants. 3. Ask: - Do they see differences and agreements? - In what way are their findings related to their sexual preference? - Are there still any strengths that they want to develop? (Important to know because strengths might pop up of which participants would like to possess, but don't yet).
		Possible prompts: "Thank you for sharing, would someone like to explain why they agree or not?" or "How does this relate to your sexuality?".

Time	Action	Checklist
5 minutes	Participants fill in informed consent	*In case of new participants only* Hand out written informed consent and let participants sign them + answer questions if participants have questions about it (email beforehand so they can read through it).
5 minutes	Closing comments	Thank participants for participation. Are there any questions left? Let them know that they can always contact us researchers if questions arise after the workshop.

Appendix D

Transcript Workshop 1

Researcher 1: Thank you all for coming here, we would like to start with a quick name and pronouns round, just to be sure we use the right pronouns. So, I can start. My name is (1), and my pronouns are she/her.

Researcher 2: My name is (2), and my pronouns are she/her.

Researcher 3: My name is (3), and my pronouns are also she/her.

Participant S: My name is "S", I'm gender fluid so I go with any pronoun.

Participant Y: My name is "Y", ehm, he/him.

Participant J: My name is "J", I'm also genderfluid and go by all pronouns.

Participant Ry: My name is "Ry", I seem to be the third genderfluid person here, and I go by he/they.

Participant Ro: I'm "Ro", and she/her.

Participant 6: I'm "M", and she/her.

Researcher 1: Okay, thank you. I want to do a quick introduction to what we will be doing. Maybe you all read the informed consent, a lot of information is already in here. But first we would like to start with the SEG principles, which basically means that we want to treat each other with respect here because we're talking about mental health. Also, that we're open with each other to talk about stuff so with respect. Some other things are that we would like to give a voice to everyone here, listen carefully, and that there is no judgement, advice, or counselling involved. We just want to know about your experiences. Okay. The content of the workshop was also in the informed consent, we want to know about your experiences of mental health as an LGBTQIA+ person. And for that, want to do two workshops, this is the first one and about general well-being. So instead of focusing only on mental health problems,

we would also like to focus on well-being, so the positive side of psychology. And therefore, we would like to start with the item description exercise of which you probably brought a photo or object. After that we have a break with some snacks, and after that we will do two group discussions. And that's it, so the end goal for now is that you will talk about your experiences. Do you have any questions?

Researcher 2: No questions, so I think we can start with the item description then?

Researcher 1: Yes.

Researcher 2: We thought about that you can talk about what you brought with you, and what feelings or emotions come to your mind when you think about that object or photo. And how does it make you feel well, and why? Maybe someone wants to start?

Participant S: Yeah, sure I can. Well, I've got four pictures. Of my cat. So, I'm from India, and her name is Zara and she's back home. So, every time I feel low or I'm not feeling so good, I look at her pictures. These pictures are always on my wall. She means a lot to me, because she was not those planned cats I wanted to get, it was nothing like that. I was in depression for about six months and the whole time I didn't leave my room. It was very horrible and that was the time that one of my friends told me that there is a rescued cat. She was a kitten and just 25 days old when I got her. She was completely malnutritioned she did not have any fur on her body. Like when I got her, she looked like an alien. My parents they even scolded me for getting her home. But I wanted something to get out of my room, I was looking for reasons to go out. And she was the reason, and ever since I got her, I started feeding her and she used to get sick often, so I had to get her to the vet every 3 days I had to take her, and the reason I went out, so she's the reason I'm not in depression anymore and that's when I applied here for the university. So, without her, I don't think I would be here.

Researcher 2: Thanks for sharing.

Participant Y: Yes, I also brought some pictures, of me and my friends. When I think about them, I think about all the happy times we have together, all the memories we have over the years. And they help me a lot, especially my best friend here. She's always there for me when I need someone to talk to, and yeah, we are really close and that's always helping me out.

Like when I feel down, just to meet them and get out my room [laughing]. And yeah, just talk to some people, also like often when I think about stuff it's always in a spiral in my mind and other people when help to break out of the cycle and helps to get a new view.

Researcher 1 and 2: Thank you.

Participant J: Ehm, I brought "R". Because for feelings and emotions, especially when looking at "R", who is my partner, I feel like it's with a lot of things in life when I really don't want to do something or when I don't want to take care of myself when I feel worse, then I always have a second reason to also do well because I want to do well in supporting another person. And to have a happy life and everything and to try my best to also do well mentally, and to achieve what I want to achieve. To kind of have a steady line to follow, that's always helpful. [laughing] yeah, I couldn't come with the lighter because I love smoking [laughing].

Participant Ry: Well, that caught me off guard. When I think of something that brings me joy, it's less heartfelt. It's books. I really love reading, and no matter if it's fiction or non-fiction it's always an opportunity to take a break from the real world and then recharge and then come back. And just this like availability of having a way out that's not too harmful, might see something, read some nice stories, it helps me a lot.

Participant Ro: Actually, for me it's this necklace, because I grew up in a very Christian conservative village, and back in middle school I always knew I liked girls, I wasn't so sure about the boys' part. But there were only a few other queer people I knew there, and the thing is, the one person that was out got beaten up one time that went to a club so after that I was just scared as f*k. For me, being able to walk around and wear a pride symbol, still doesn't stop straight guys to hit on me, but regardless, I'm still quite proud to wear it and I just don't feel like I have to hide here anymore. And it still happens that whenever I walk in the city and hold the hand of a woman or a non-binary person or whatever that guys ask "Mag ik meedoen" or something, but generally I feel safer and feel better here. And that's why this (necklace) makes me feel very happy.

Participant S: That actually reminds me, like this is the locket, or I made this locket, with my cat's fur inside the locket. Because I can't physically feel her, so I wear this all the time (necklace).

Participant M: I brought my ring. I bought it at an island I went to together with my mom. Because my mom is my biggest support ever. She was also one of the first people I came out to, and she was so supportive, and she didn't even have like these weird questions that parents have. She's always there for me and I can always call her. She's one of my best friends, I really like it and I always look at it.

Researcher 1, 2, and 3: Thank you. The next thing we're going to do it the break already.

Break 15 MIN.

Researcher 3: So, in the following we're going to show you some statements. If you agree with them, we can ask you to raise your hands and maybe if you want to share something about it and elaborate on that we would be very happy. Yes, and they are sometimes a little bit triggering, we wanted to integrate that just to see some different opinions.

Researcher 1: And also make sure that we don't necessarily agree with the statements, because they can be triggering.

Researcher 3: Yes, so the first one is "I'm proud of being who I am". Who agrees?

Everyone agrees.

Participant J: When I walk through the city, I mean hard to miss because I'm very tall and I have very big eyeliner, so I have a lot of people looking at me all the time. That can be anxiety inducing, but just through stupid confidence and pride that I project outwards that helps me just to kind of live my life. Being very proud outwards helps because there's always someone saying that I shouldn't be.

Researcher 3: Thank you, anybody else that wants to share?

Participant S: Okay, so like four years ago I was totally not okay being gay. I kept rejecting, I didn't accept myself, I couldn't do it. That was before I started my bachelors, I was very unhappy with who I am. I was unhappy with my femininity. I was used to curse myself for

being who I am, but when I started my bachelor, especially back in India it's a very homophobic country. It's almost impossible to be openly gay in India. You know you hear a lot of things, I heard all my childhood for being feminine. But when doing my bachelor I met people, a new crowd of people, these people who accepted me the way I am, I did not have to hide myself anymore. That's when I realised there are also people who will accept you for who I am. That's when I started coming out to people. And, it just went on and on and on, and I'm just really proud of what and who I am. I'm really happy that I'm not straight, and I'm gay [laughing].

Participant Ry: Yeah, I find the pride of who I am in that no one can take that away from me. I've had some serious missteps with drugs that messed with my mental state a little bit. But in the end, I kind of noticed that the essence of me, I always have it with me like the one thing, and because nobody can take that away from me, I get to shape that, and I get to choose who I want to be. And just because that's kind of like my identity is my creation and that's why I find a lot of pride in it because I put a lot of work into it.

Researcher 3: So, we can continue with the second one, "Being LGBTQIA+ is a strength of mine.".

Everyone agrees.

Researcher 3: anybody wants to explain why it is a strength of yours or how it is a strength of yours?

Participant Y: I feel like, because we have like such a nice community, obviously we had some ups and downs but it's like you have a sense of community, coming together, activities together. Have some deeper connection, like sometimes when you meet straight people it's a bit different. Like usually with a straight. I feel like it's something nice and it's a strength that you can easily connect with, with people from the community.

Participant S: I feel the same, because especially the community it's way easier to make friends, to connect with people. Because when I was in my "straight phase," it was so difficult to make new friends. Or get to know people, get you know, do the activities and stuff. It is not so easy, but ever since I was happy with who I am and since I started communicating with

people from the LGBTQIA+ community, I made a lot of friends, like a lot. And it is a strength because it gives a social confidence, that I always wanted. Even now, even here at university. A few of my straight friends, they're like: I wish I was gay so I could make so many friends.

Participant J: Ehm, I feel like a lot of times when I think about queerness, especially when I have little opportunities to activity explore with queerness. It's a very radical form of just pure self-expression. You have this rejection of hetero cis normality, that is just embedded in the culture that we live in, like it's simply you see everywhere that a man, woman have like two children like the nuclear family, that's how it's supposed to be. And for me queerness for me is then breaking fully away from anything prescribed and focusing on myself and exploring myself and expressing that as well, to the world. I feel like a lot of people who say like "Oh yeah, I'm straight cisgender" and they don't ever reflect on it. Like they haven't really, like they're in an environment where they are able to really think about it or where they are challenged to questions their gender and sexual identity, even if you come to the conclusion that you're cishead. Still, I think that exploration and identity expression is central which I why I think that it's a big strength that we can live very authentically as ourselves as queer people.

Researcher 3: So, yeah. The third statement "As an LGBTQIA+ person I am seen as a victim".

No one agrees.

Participant J: I think that a lot of LGBTQIA+ persons would like to see themselves as victims. Because it's just an association with any stigmatized group. It's easy to forego dealing with your own problems. But I don't think that. I don't think the queer community is seen as a victim. If anything, it's insane how confident queer people are, and that's more impressive than anything else.

Participant Ro: I would also say like, just with the phrasing seen as a victim, because sometimes you are just a victim of a hate crime. But like, it's, is that more about like the perception of others on it?

Researcher 3: Yeah, also like, how, how you perceive yourself. Yeah, also of the perception of others. But whether you perceive that.

Participant Ro: Not really, like usually when I explain about okay, I, this thing happened to me that was kind of homophobic and usually I just get more of a response of like a victim blaming rather than, Oh, yeah, that was actually not what was supposed to happen if we treat each other with respect or whatever.

Researcher 3: Yeah.

Participant Ro: So that's, I would say, no, most people don't like that.

Researcher 1: Okay, I think I can explain this quote, maybe, because, in research, a lot of LGBTQIA people are researched on specific subjects that are related to being affected a victim instead of what their strengths are. So a lot of research is done into, ehm, stigmatisation, for example, or violence against queer people. So, ehm, but less research is focused on what the strengths are of queer people, what they benefit from, and what they can actually bring to the table. So that's why, do you now have a different opinion maybe?

Participant J: I feel like that's when people do see queer people as victims. That's to me very patronising. I like, and also in connection with assumptions like, oh, you're doing they're doing so poorly. They don't fit in, that's so bad for them. Ehm, or in general, like, oh, yeah, they're mentally ill. But I don't know if victim, maybe I'm just not confronted with that, personally. I consume a very big amount of positive queer content on the internet. So I'm, like, trained to be very proud.

Researcher 1: Mhm okay.

Participant Y: I agree, also. I don't see too much negative content. I mean, just recently more in the US like how the ship goes down there. And I guess there like, it's worse. But here, I feel like we are still like, ehm, I feel safe when I go outside, I don't feel like that I'm getting attacked or whatever. Ehm, and therefore, I don't know, I don't feel myself or I don't see myself as a victim.

Participant J: I think in the US, it's more that queer people are actually like villainized. And they're like, seen as like, like unnatural or new to be like, largely eradicated, but the political consensus seems to be in the US. But I don't think there even victim is appropriate to use, because it's just one, like, the whole political pushback against trans people and the drag ban, for example. That's all just hate coming from one side, I don't think that queer people see themselves or that many people see queer people as the victims there, more the other side as kind of cringe.

Researcher 1: Yeah, but I hear a lot of positivity. So that's nice. So I secondly want to focus on.

Participant S: Okay, but yeah, like, for me, it's a very different situation. The main reason I left India was because of the whole homophobic people around me, it's, I never felt safe there. So like, every time like I, like, you know, I couldn't put on makeup or you know, put on eyeliner or nail paint. Anytime I want. I couldn't do that. I would only do that if I'm going out with a bunch of my queer friends, I would do it only then, I would never do it without them. So I never felt safe there. And a lot of hate crime and like, last year 2022, there was a pride walk in my city. And during the pride walk as well, like we're done with the pride walk and to, it was pretty late at night, after the party, we were trying to get cabs back home, and me and three of my friends, we were waiting for a cab, and a few policemen came and they will be verbally started, you know, harassing us. Police men. It's that awful to be there. So right now in India, they are fighting for same sex marriage rights. The case has been in court for like three times now. In Supreme Court of India. And all the times the case has been rejected. So even this time, like a few days ago, the case was turned down. They just did not legalise same sex marriage. I don't think they will. And even if they do, nobody will accept it will be only you know, as for the Constitution or something. But you know, the people, the population of India they would It would probably take like, I don't know, 200 300 years for them to accept. So in India, I guess I was seen as a victim, but not anymore. I just want to leave all that behind.

Researcher 1: Yeah. Okay, thank you. I think we can go to the next

Researcher 3: so I possess strategies that help me overcome negative feelings or feeling down.

Researcher 2: Yeah, maybe if you have any sort of things in mind, you can share them.

Participant M: I love to dance. Ehm, especially when I'm feeling stressed or feeling really sad. I am lucky that I have five housemates. And most of the time, I can just go to one of their rooms, start some music and then we'll just dance together. And it really lifts my day up. It makes me feel happy. I can laugh and we can just share that nice moment. I also love calling people when I feel sad. I love calling my friends, my family. That it always helps me to talk about my feelings and to just get off of the thing I want to say get it out and then I'll feel better.

Researcher 1: So social aspect.

Participant M: Yeah, yeah.

Researcher 1: Okay, nice. Anyone else?

Participant Y: I have a similar thing like when I feel sad or so I usually call my best friend. And yeah, she helps me to get through this and we just talk about it and then, ehm, yeah, often then we start talking about other stuff, and then I get, have like some, focus my mind on other stuff and then it´s already better. Or sometimes I just think about hey, maybe it's just like a bad day and tomorrow, everything is better. And then when it's already like later, that night and I just go to bed and often in the morning, it's surprisingly better. That had something to think like, okay, well, maybe it's just in the past, well, new day new start.

Participant J: Ehm, through years of intensive introspection, I have trained myself to take a step back from my, from, like any situation and like a meta sense. So I can kind of reflect more or less objectively at least evaluate situations and my own behaviour. It's more difficult to then act in positive ways, given that evaluation with the evaluation. And like, yes, taking that step back, step back in any situation usually works really well. So that is one of the strategies whenever I feel bad, ehm, or, yeah, when I'm depressed, I can usually take a step back and be like, okay, I feel like shit, but what's actually something I can do rather than just sitting here and mulling it over?

Researcher 3: Ja.

Participant Ry: I do a similar thing with the Meta, like, like going meta on the whole situation, but I journal, and then I like, kind of just like start writing down, because my thoughts tend to get extremely jumbled when I'm upset. So then I am just sitting there, and I am like, well, cool, I have this like, static in my brain, what the fuck do I do now? So I just like start writing. And at some point, it becomes like structured. And then I can like, read what I wrote, ehm, like, oh, yeah, this is what happened. I understand now and then I can move on. Like, just close the notebook, put it away, and then I can just move on with my life.

Participant J: Also, talking about stuff helps a lot, just actually talking. When you speak out loud about your issues, you're forced to structure your thoughts, rather than just thinking about it, where everything is more an abstract or an impression and kind of an idea. But you never really have to fully structure any thoughts when, you, it's just in your head when you talk to people about it, which is why therapy helps, you have a whole, yeah, you are kind of forced to properly think about it and you're able to process a lot of information better when you speak about problems.

Researcher 3: Yeah. Okay. So talking about it, writing down, journaling. Anyone else wants to share?

Participant Ro: I go bouldering.

Researcher 3: go bouldering? Nice.

Participant Ro: no, I have tried to do sports, trying to drop the not so healthy coping mechanisms and replace them with more healthy ones. So I go skating, or I go bouldering, or paint, or do whatever, or actually talk to a friend if I want to share but not always. Because like, I'm that cliche where I'm the mommy friend, where everyone comes to me, but I don't go to people when I have stuff. Except for a few selected. So, yes, so yeah, that's kind of what I do.

Participant J: One strategy I possess is smoking marijuana.
[inaudible]

Researcher 3: Okay, nice. We have a lot of coping mechanisms. The fifth statement "I feel happy and confident when I can express my gender identity authentically." Do you agree or disagree?

Everyone agrees.

Researcher 3: Any elaborations? Or, ehm.

Researcher 1: Or maybe if anyone feels comfortable talking about it, why maybe not, this is not the case?

Researcher 3: Yeah.

Researcher 1: If there is anyone.

Participant J: It entirely depends on the environment. Like if the, if the social context is right, if the, if I'm around people that I know won't become aggressive, for example, or if it's not a country, that's super homophobic, for example, but if it's, if I feel very confident or confident and comfortable, if I'm around people that are at least likeminded, then usually extremely. In response to the statement extremely, yes.

Participant S: Oh, yeah, that helps remind me something so yeah, I do. Like I do feel comfortable being with my gender identity, especially in the recent years. I feel really happy and like you mentioned, happy and confident, mentioning it even when the crowd when even when I know that the crowd is not going to accept me, I still do that because I have this thing. I like making, I like making homophobic people feel uncomfortable because of my identity. I feel like I'm just, I'm just who I am, I'm not even doing anything to you. And that is still causing you, you know, some trouble, you know, like, you're feeling uncomfortable just because of who I am. So, I feel like, I know sometimes I even asked, like, I feel like I have a superpower. You know, just because of who I am, you're just, you're already feeling uncomfortable. And I kinda like the fact that these people get very uncomfortable because of who I am. Like, especially in India, especially, like I said, when, when I go out with my queer friends, and then we dress super feminine, or like when we put on makeup and everything.

And then we are walking down the streets, like you know, there will be all these very typical Indian people judging us, you know, looking at us or, you know, they like, when the past by you can actually feel the uncomfortableness in their face. And that makes me happy. For some reason. Yeah, so, so, in recent years, I really don't feel uncomfortable sharing my gender identity, almost anywhere. So [inaudible].

Researcher 3: Nice. Okay. So we're all agreeing on that one. "Being referred to by the correct pronouns is a validating and euphoric experience."

[inaudible]

Researcher 3: Yeah, I know. I know. I know. Yeah. So you all disagree? And how does it make you feel, yeah, when the incorrect pronouns are used, when you're, yeah.

Participant S: For me, incorrect pronouns cannot be used because I go with everthing, so I am cool with anything.

Participant Ry: I am actually really chill about it, because I know that I am not the most passing trans mask person out there. So I don't expect anyone because I also don't want to, like if somebody misgendered me, I want to sculpt the situation first, if I can come to that person and be like, hey, actually, my pronouns are not she/her, but he/they. But when somebody does it, it's like, yeah, that's cool. It's like a little creepy moment. But misgendering is, then in turn, surprisingly, not that invalidating. I mean, it's like when some people do it, for example, my mom, cuz like, it's my mom, she is the person who like misgendered me the most. And also that names me it's really fun. That kind of hits home a little bit for like, like a day or two. But if it's strangers, then I really don't care.

Researcher 3: Yeah, so it depends also on the person you are talking to.

Participant J: I have, yeah, being having the wrong pronouns used, of course, kind of difficult for me. But being misgendered still, that I just have such a strong disdain for, ehm, when people are like, gender is binary, you are a man. Then it's like, you know, no. And there is plenty of explanation out there. But it's not my duty to educate anyone either. So I won't go into like a long monologue about how my gender identity is actually valid. That's not I don't

have time for that. But it stinks. Because it's not even just for me personally, where I'm like, oh, I was misgendered, I feel bad now, that for sure. Absolutely. But also more in a larger societal context where it's like, there is still a lot of people out there who more or less deny our existence as queer people and that is just not the move and that makes me sad.

Researcher 3: Yeah. Okay, thank you for sharing. The seven statement. "Finding a community of people who accept and support my gender identity brings me immense joy." I mean, we already discussed it a bit in the previous segments, do you have anything to add?

Participant J: Exaltio is a great organisation.

Participant Ry: Come to the gala. Everyone.

Researcher 3: it's a Friday, right?

Participant Ro: Yes.

Researcher 3: I wanted to.

Participant Ro: okay, but no worries like anyway, what I wanted to say, back in my hometown before I moved here, I really didn't know any other queer people that didn't live like half an hour train ride, at least away from me. Ehm, and the first like two years that I was here, I also kind of isolated myself. And when I then finally, I think it was over [inaudible] actually that we got to the first like, Exaltio, like, almost a year ago, actually. And it was like, like, such a whole new world of just like being able to express myself and not like having this constant fear of like, oh, can I say that? Or is this gonna, Is this gonna tip the situation into like, the bad area? Ehm, and it's been like, it's brought me so much joy that I've actually joined committee work. Which I still can't believe, I am normally not that proactive. But apparently, I'm so happy that I started working there. So it's cool. It's good.

Researcher 3: Do you have like, you're all members of the Exaltio? Do you have like, Is it like the weekly

Participant Ro: we have different activities. So we have also different committees that organise different things. So for example, we have the Accie that organises drinks and sports activities and anything fun and active you want to do together.

Participant S: That was it was yesterday, right? The egg hunt?

Participant Ro: Yeah, for example. We went, ehm, looked for chocolate, vegan chocolate eggs around campus and had a picnic afterwards like, who cares. You have like Relaxie, they organise laid back events, movie nights, we're just crafting, chill together.

Participant J: Think with pride is also great. Tessa Dekkers does [inaudible].

Researcher 3: We are gonna quote that.

Participant Ro: And then the GalaCie, for example, that organises a gay [inaudible], because a lot of people don't feel comfortable bringing their gay date to their Gala, so we are hosting our own Gala.

Participant Ry: Yeah, we are hosting a closed queer gala, to make it safe and fun. And I'm hyped.

Participant S: Yeah, me too.

Participant Ro: Yeah, et cetera, et cetera. There's a lot of things going on.

Participant S: For me too, because like, no matter how many parties that I attend, or like, how many events that I go to, or with my straight friends who are really close to me, no matter how good that is, when I attend, you know, like activities or events, like she said, from events from Exaltio or other stuffs, when I attend those, the feeling is completely different. And that's something I would always choose over anything else. Because I feel very comfortable around people, you know, who can actually get me, so that does really bring me immense joy.

Participant Y: You can also talk about some stuff you usually don't talk about with straights.

Participant S: Oh my god. Yes. That's very true.

Participant Ro: I love my straight friends. But there are certain things like if I talk about certain things, you don't have that overlap in experience.

Participant S: Exactly.

Participant Ro: You have to explain a lot. Yeah, same way like okay, ehm, I am cis, so I can talk for hours with a trans/non-binary or gender fluid person and then they will still not 100% grasp what it means. But I can still, like listen, or whatever, but I feel sometimes like that straight people can't even listen. They just have an idea.

Participant S: Yeah.

Participant Ro: They look at me and they are like, you're lesbian, ah, sure like, you're gonna marry a man in the end anyways. Then I'm like, yeah, ehm, nah. And then they look at me because at the gas station, I have to exchange a tire, do you need help with that?, no, I can do that myself. Thank you. Like, I don't know, man. It just kind of sucks sometimes. Yeah.

Researcher 3: Okay, I think is it the last one?

Researcher 1: Actually, this one and another one.

Researcher 3: Okay. Then the eighth statement "As an LGBTQIA+ person, I experience more depressive symptoms than cisgender heterosexual people." What do you think? Do you agree? Do you disagree?

Participant J: I very much agree. The reason that I personally do is from external influences that are implicit and explicit forms of discrimination in the environment both things like getting called the * in like randomly to things like toilets being or a lot of toilets being separated by men and women. And clothing stores the same, ehm, like very, a very wide range of spectrum on microaggressions to actual aggression, that hamper my mental health.

And it's buffered by community resilience from the environment that I have with queer people.

Researcher 3: Anybody else wants to share some thoughts on that?

Participant Y: I mean, me personally, I think I don't. But I mean, I mean, I don't know how much depression people feel. Ehm, I mean, I feel like it's, it's been a while since I've been depressed, and it's better now. Ehm, but yeah, I don't have, I don't get too triggered, thankfully, by my daily environment. Ehm, so that helps. I'm sorry for you. Ehm, so I think therefore, I guess I mean, usually, a big trigger for me is just like, relationships often. But then, ehm, it's, I don't know, I mean, I guess also, straight people have that sometimes. So, yeah, for me, it's not really I don't, I wouldn't say it's not, yeah maybe a little bit more. But not too much difference.

Participant J: You said it changed at some point, like, was it worse and then, like, at one point got better? Or what?

Participant Y: Yeah.

Participant J: Okay fair.

Participant Y: Yeah, yeah, sometimes, I mean, I have sometimes some more depression phases, where I have more dark. And then at some point it's changed. And then I don't. Sometimes wild.

Participant S: It was very wild. For me, when I was in India. The depression, I mentioned, that I was in my room for six months didn't leave it was because of all of the trauma that I had faced, in my early age, or due to some of physical abuse. So that, that was triggered again. And that was what led me to depression. Also, the fact that the only reason I went through depression was because like I said, I started doing my bachelor's. And that's when, you know, I met those queer friendly people who helped me come out. Like those people were, I felt they were my actual family, you know, because they actually helped me come out. And they always accepted me for who I was. So I was very comfortable with them. But then, because of my dad, we had to move to a different city. So had to leave all those friends back there. So

that was also another reason that in this place, I basically had no friends. And the city where we moved to was way more homophobic than the city we used to live in. So everything just got into me, and that what led me to depression. But also, before that, whenever, you know, people used to call me out names, especially during my child, right? I hate my childhood. Like, I hate it so much, because I don't remember a day going to school and not crying. So it was that horrible. So for me, yeah, being being gay did give me a lot of depression back then, back when I was in India, but then, after I moved here, after living here for a while, you know, going out with my friends, or just going me going alone outside. Here, I feel like, I feel like, I feel so happy for people who are like, born here. And I'm also so jealous of them. Because, you know, like, they don't exactly get it. Because they're born in a country where, you know, people, most of the people automatically mostly accept you. It's not like how back in my country. So sometimes I feel like people who are, you know, who are born here. I feel like they sometimes they do not appreciate the privilege they've got. But I really appreciate it because I know how hard it was back then. So ever since I came here, I feel like okay, this is where I belong, and I just don't want to leave.

Researcher 2: So back in India, you would say, ehm, that you experienced more depressive symptoms?

Participant S: Yeah.

Researcher 2: It changed when you came here.

Participant S: Yeah. It mostly changed when I came. Yes.

Participant Ro: So I've had that as soon as I return, I still work in that village, sometimes where I grew up in and it was more Christian conservative. I mentioned that my friend got beaten up and I'm not, it's not as traumatic as what you went through but I still felt very unsafe there and I still in the beginning going back, I took my pride symbols off for work. Because I work often also at events in Germany and in the Netherlands that are like Schützenfest or Oktoberfest like these very cishet drunk guys in their 40s type of crowd that you bartending. I mean, I get a lot of tips money because they have no clue I'm gay. Lovely, but, ehm, besides that, it's not really safe because you know, they are gross, nowadays, I still wear them. But it took me a long time to get that comfortable and be like, okay, I'm gonna put that target on my

back. Because, yeah, I'm a feminist. I have straight person privilege. I mean, by far, I don't know why, but I do. So me, I still sometimes get very, like, yeah, down when I go home home to visit the German part of my family. Because I'm like, always like, yeah, my girlfriends are my acquaintances, apparently, if someone asks, okay, yeah, it is kind of like expecially when I go back, I'm more depressed and here like here, I'm fine. Because I can be myself in relation to the statement. [inaudible] environment does a lot about it.

Researcher 2: Thanks for sharing.

Researcher 1: Then the last one, yeah.

Researcher 3: The last one is a bit more [inaudible].

Researcher 1: By the way, I'm gonna make a picture for our thing. I'm gonna blur everyone's faces. So don't worry about it. But, is everyone okay with that? That I will blur everyone, but I just have to make a picture of what we're doing here.

Participants agree.

Participant J: Don't blur me.

Participant S: Yeah, you don't have to blur me too.

Researcher 1: Just don´t look.

Researcher 3: Okay, okay, we are just going to go on with the last statement.

Researcher 2: Do you agree with this one? Or disagree?

Participant J: Yeah, Oh wait, no.

Participant Ry: No, definitely no. I, this kind of reminds me of this, like, really old claim in psychology that being LGBTQIA is a mental illness, because it was classified in the in the

DSM five for a long time. And it's, it's, I don't, I don't know how it is at the moment. But I surely hope it's not so.

Participant J: Being trans in the DSM five is still a mental illness. But being gay was taken out in the DSM three, I think.

Participant Ry: So, like, being LGBTQIA is not a mental illness, it's literally just like, same as gender, it's a cultural thing. These depressive symptoms that LGBTQIA people experience only comes from these like, implicit and explicit forms of discrimination and microaggressions that they face with in their daily life. I mean, we've seen that when you're in a community where you accept it and where you don't get called slurs or you don't get like belittled for your lifestyle choices, as they call it. Ehm, that you can be queer and perfectly mentally healthy. And yeah, I don't think that you can equate that.

Participant J: Yeah, I agree, ehm, with Participant Ry.

Participant Y: Yeah, also when I think about like, queer people, I´m not thinking about like, oh, we are depressed, yay. I don't think about like depressed people, I usually think about like happy people. Ehm, yeah.

Participant M: I think that if you would have a environment or community where everyone was in the LGBTQIA+ community, that everyone would be like, happy and fine. And I think if you had a statement that said being LGBTQIA+ goes hand in hand with the environment that you're in, and how accepted that environment is, that would be statement I would agree to.

Researcher 1: Yeah.

Researcher 3: Okay, then we all statements. Thank you very much for all your input.

Researcher 1: Yes, by the way, you didn't hear us asking much, many questions, but that's because we wanted to let you all do the talking. And it's not for us to give advice or say anything like this in response to it. So that's why. Next, we would like just quickly to get your insights on some ideas for an eHealth intervention. Do you guys know what that might be is

or? A digital intervention for mental health problems of LGBTQIA people that, for example, Tessa, our supervisor might be able to develop. And she'd like some insights into your ideas about how to develop something like that. So, for example, if you make an app or something else or a website, ehm, what might be relevant for you to use it to overcome mental health problems? Or what for other workshops maybe like this, something like this? Because this is called the generative participatory design workshop. What would it make for you to use it actually? I don't know if I explained that well, you guys can add.

Researcher 2: Yeah, maybe also, what is your opinion about participatory approaches, and that means that we include the potential users but in general, all stakeholders, so if like this eHealth intervention is developed, during the development process, all stakeholders or potential users would be included. So, they can actually design the app or whatever. So yeah, it's about your like, opinion. What do you think about that?

Researcher 1: Yeah. For example, in second workshop for me, that one that I want to do, you as well, yeah, you as well. I wanted to make a mind map together. So something like that. So do you have any ideas?

Researcher 2: Do you think it's a good idea to like include all stakeholders?

Participant J: In general, yes. Because it's nice. If I am the target audience to use an app, then, of course, I would love if the things that I'm worried about are in the app. And that that's that the things that I care about are taken into account. Very difficult to say anything specific. But in general, yes. Very, very positive feeling about being included no idea of what an app might need, what my needs are for that, though, ehm, especially, yeah.

Participant Ro: Ehm, I think what would be nice is that often people don't know what is in the area for support things that you already have. So also to just have an overview, okay, okay, based on your location, or whatever, I'm here suggesting you 10 places of LGBTQ friendly places where you for sure know that you can go, or places that you can go to for I don't know, for hormones, voice training, all the things that you people in the community might need, or whether there are certain, I don't know, pride things happening or something like that, like so. So just so that you can see what help is available to you. And which pride organisations or which communities you could maybe access because if you are feeling

depressed, it's like likely that you may be a bit isolated from the community. And that could help you a lot. Not saying that the community is going to be equal to therapy, and because of that you are not going to be depressed all of the sudden. But it does help a lot to have people like you around you. Or to know where you can get help. So I would like to have an app especially, yeah, if it's Netherlands, like, oh, I don't know what your exact target group is, except for young, gay and depressed. Yeah, but maybe something like that, where you can see that. There are a lot of cute mental health apps like Finch, love it. You have little wellbeing birdie, and you do the task for your wellbeing for the birdie. And because it's externally motivated, of course you do it. Yeah. Because you can find a little like, shit for the bird.

Participant Ry: It's worked on me. Yeah, I am a slave to the Finch.

Participant S: But what she mentioned, if those things are there in the app, I wouldn't even mind paying how much of the app is asking. It's what she mentioned those in associations or you know, the places, the queer friendly places in the app. I would definitely use that. Definitely, 100%.

Researcher 1: So connecting it to the community or to other like-minded people.

Participant S: And also like she said, so you know, like queer friendly places. This, like, let's say, a salon, or, you know, a queer friendly salon. So something like that would be actually really nice.

Researcher 2: But that means that like content should be included, especially for queer people.

Participant S: Yeah.

Researcher 2: because it's often found that like eHealth interventions that are aimed at improving mental health are not really tailored to LGBTQIA+ people. And that's why also the participatory approach should help with that, so feedback provided by queer people should be included.

Participant Y: Yeah, maybe also include some events, like when there's like a queer movie night or whatever, that's when you need something like, when you are bored and want to do something, and then there's like something going on, then you just don't know all the queer places, but also maybe some events and stuff.

Participant S: like all-in-one announcements.

Researcher 1: So social aspects is the most important part. Is that looking at you, is that good?

Researcher 2: Yeah.

Participant S: Because like, like, you mentioned, in all the, all these events, or all the details of the events, by date, or by time in the app, that could be very much related to the mental health, because for a lot of people, including me, when you know that when I'm feeling low or something, or I just want to take my mind off of something that's triggering me or something, I want to do something I want to distract myself, then you know, or I always prefer going to, you know, queer friendly events. So I think that's very much helpful for a lot of people.

Participant J: I think also be when you have events like that, when you meet like-minded people, you're able to, like, cope with everything so much better, because you have that connectedness with other people. And also, like I said earlier with talking about your problems, is so good, and helps organise everything. So, well.

Participant S: Yeah.

Participant J: And then a third thing I forgot. Ah *. Oh, right. Thank you. What I also think, be going to events like that, especially queer events, helps so much, because a lot of queer people through being closeted, like to think about their problems really, really, really hard. And thinking about your problems really, really, really hard when your problems or the way you think about your problems, then you can´t make any progress and actually doing something about it and going out and confronting maybe anxiety by just actually going to an event. And having fun is so much more valuable than any other mental health stuff that's just

"reflect on this and think real hard again, about the same thing". You know, that doesn't lead anywhere I feel.

Participant S: Yeah, true, because I was, I've been to therapy as well. But even if I have to choose between a queer friendly event, or my therapist, I would obviously choose the event, because that makes me feel way better than talking to my therapist.

Researcher 2: Thank you.

Researcher 3: Yeah. Thank you.

Researcher 1: You had another question.

Researcher 2: What do you think then is the value of the participatory approach? So like during the developmental process to include the like, actually include you, for example, like this?

Participant J: Oh, if you're trying to develop an app you want it to be working for you want to be working. And if you only have people kind of checking off requirements, what the app needs to do, if the only people who are looking at that are wanting to or their priorities making a profit maybe? Or having like efficiency in the design, you know, if it's the if it's people who finance the project, or if it's the people who develop like, who actually code the app, do they have different wants and needs than the in your case psychologists wanting to develop a mental health app, but even you guys then have that aim of "Oh, improving health" and queer people if it's for queer people are the only people who can give genuine insight on what yeah, the people who you're trying to help need.

Researcher 3: Yeah. That's it. that's what we wanted to hear.

Researcher 1: I wanted to thank all of you for coming and making time for us because it took your free time. And yeah, we're very happy also that you talked a lot about it and gave extensive answers. That's really helpful for us. We will be doing three separate second workshops with all of our different, we all have different focus. So gender euphoria, strengths, depressive symptoms. So we might ask you to join again, if you are available. And we also

might try to find also other people for even more insights. So if you, I think we will do that within one or two or three weeks, the second one. So we might contact you, again, if you'd like. You can come again, it will be a bit like this, but then more really making something. So for example, make a mind map and talking about it. And we will provide you with stuff to make it. So yeah, thank you. Do you have any questions?

Participant J: Can we invite friends to those workshops?

Researcher 3: Yes.

Researcher 2: Yes, of course.

Researcher 1: Just they have to be queer within the age limit of 18 to 27, then it's all fine.

Participant J: Sure.

Researcher 1: Yeah. Okay, thank you very much.

Appendix E

Transcript Workshop 2

Researcher: Thank you all for coming, we would like to start with a quick name and pronouns round, So, we know how to call each other. I can start. My name is (researcher), and my pronouns are she/her.

Participant Y: My name is "Y", my pronouns are he/him.

Participant A: I'm "A" and my pronouns are she/her.

Participant M: I'm "M" and my pronouns are she/her.

Participant T: I'm "T", he/him.

Researcher: Okay, so I quickly want to state the SEG principles, that we want to keep. So treating each other with respect, listening to each other, openly, no judgement to wards each other because we are talking about mental health here. So, I think that's all clear. The goal of this workshop is for me to find out about your strengths in relation to your sexuality, so that's what we're going to do today. Before we start, I would like you to write down some strengths that you think you possess that are related to your sexual identity. And on the screen is an example.

Participants write strengths down for 5 minutes.

Researcher: Is anyone open to talk about what they wrote down?

Participant M: Yeah sure. So, the first thing I wrote down is being proud as well. I feel proud to be bisexual, I feel proud to be in this community. And that's another point I had. It's a community that you know you can rely on, a community that respects each other. It's a really, I see it as a really energetic environment, where everyone is really happy and always ready to support each other or hype each other up. And that's why I feel very free and openminded, and that's something I really like.

Researcher: Okay thank you, is there anyone that agrees with M or some additions.

Participant Y: I mean yeah, I also wrote down being proud myself. Same reason as yours, also, that I'm being openminded for like different kinds of relationships, different sexualities, different lifestyles, and how people live. And one more funny aspect, we know how to party [laughing] so, yeah.

Participant A: Yeah, I definitely agree with both of them, but I feel like I'm confident and I should be myself. You can do that in the community, so.

Participant T: I also had confidence, I think kind of growing up and always being different. I kind of learned early on to not give a damn about what people do. And I see with other friends around me having a much harder time with standing out. And I think I've always kind of stood out, so I don't really care anymore. I also had resilient. Because growing up and being bullied and that stuff kind of gave me a thick skin. And I've become a funnier person because of it, and knowing how to deal with that, with more hardships in a better way.

Researcher: Okay, the reason why I asked you to write this down is because I'm basing my thesis off Seligman's Character Strengths. Maybe you (Y) know this from psychology. So, Seligman has six bigger traits that you can possess and having multiple of these traits will make your well-being better. That's their findings. As you can see there are multiple traits here, forgiveness, also humour, what T said as well. Bravery, and a few more traits explained here because when I read this the first time, I was like I don't know what this means. So gave an extra explanation over there. I would like for you to think about these traits, and think about similarities with what you wrote down, or differences, or additions. You can think about it and add them to your list, I will give you five minutes.

Participants write strengths down for 5 minutes.

Researcher: Okay, would anyone like to explain again?

Participant Y: Yeah, at first I included like the perspective part to being openminded. And I added "Love". I feel like when you love the same sex. Or a same sex person, it's a bit of different love than a heterosexual love. It's a bit like, I mean I didn't experience it, but I feel

like you learn that it's maybe a bit stronger. But yeah. Then I also added kindness, because I feel like you learn in the community how to be kind to other people, because we are all minorities and all a bit different. And you learn how to deal with like, be with trans people, people who feel different, and who are not maybe the same sexual orientation as yourself. And I also added self-regulation, because when you are not out yet you learn how to adapt to the heterosexual world around you.

Participant M: I added creativity, because I feel like, not just me but the whole community, is really creative with everything they do and everything that they create. And that they wear and how they express themselves, it's always really creative form. I also added, it's not one of the small words, but humanity. I thought that was related to the community and how everyone accepts another. There's also a bit of transcendence, because you try to understand or you learn to understand things that you yourself don't really get, like you learn to become friends with trans people and you learn how they are and think from them and you just get a bigger perspective on the world. And one thing that also reminded me was that since ive openly come out as bisexual, I feel more connected with myself. I don't know if that's for you guys as well, but you feel like you're a bit closer to yourself like you were before.

Researcher: Is there a specific word on the screen that reflects that feeling?

Participant M: Ehm, well honesty I think and courage, because you're being honest with yourself.

Researcher: And anyone else, do you maybe also have specific examples from your life?

Participant T: Well, all six parts, I kind of see a lot more with my gay/bisexual/trans friends. I have the feeling that because we had to learn more and think more, because a big part of our lives was not normal, I think there's a lot of barriers we have to break. Because we have a lot of other people, I had it a lot more with my LGBTQIA+ friends than with straight friends, maybe because we already had to break so many barriers it's much easier for us to be more emotionally open and more available to others. The only thing I don't see for myself is temperance because I can be a little yeah, I don't really see that. I miss being more emotionally open with my straight friends, not all though.

Researcher: Yes, I do hear you all talking about the community a lot. I do want to stress that I want to focus on your specific own strengths, so do you have any additions, specifically to yourself?

Participant A: I do have since I came out, I know how to communicate with other people, and how to treat them, and I think that's a part of the wisdom and knowledge, I think. So that's something I've learned by myself, because I didn't have a lot of out-friends, and yeah so, I think that.

Participant M: I wanted to add one more thing. Since coming out, I feel like I'm more confident in things that I see to other people and things that I do. Sometimes I would be a little insecure, like "Oh, what if I do this, isn't this weird or won't find people this a bit strange?". And now, I just don't think about it anymore.

Participant T: I have a quick question for the others, because I have been out since I was 14, which is now 10 years ago. I've heard that you came out quite recently, so for me it's hard to think about these things because for me it's kind of always been there, I can't really imagine myself being any different, so maybe for you guys like how a recent change like happened?

Participant M: Well, I was always a bit like I was curious towards the community, like oh it seems so fun, isn't there something going on and Ive always known that I was more attracted to girls than most of my friends. And then I just made the decision, like you know what, I think I am and since then it all came together or something, so everything made sense.

Participant T: Do you feel more confident, more piece of mind recently?

Participant M: Both of those things actually.

Researcher: This was an introduction, now I want you to make a mindmap. For about 15 minutes you have the time to write down what makes you strong. And I would like this to be very specific to yourself, and also to your sexuality. So, you can be creative, use abstract shapes, colours, there's even more there, you can get everything you need. There are some guiding questions on the screen and I can also show you the slide with the Character Strengths. If you have questions you can ask.

Participants make mind map for 15 minutes.

Researcher: Okay, so now that you have made a mind map I would like to give everyone an equal amount of time to talk about what they wrote down. Because for me it's not the mind maps that important, it's how you talk about it. So, everything you say is important for me and my thesis. Can you start (M)?

Participant M: I drew a tree, because I love trees, I think they're great. What I like about trees is that they're always growing. I feel like I am too. I added a lot of colours because one of the things that I wrote down is that I'm, I think, I find myself a colourful person, I love colours and I'm adding them to my life, to clothes, to my room, to everything really. And I made like a, some swirls around the trees because I feel like the colours just give life to the tree. And oh yeah, I love to cheer people up and I feel like this mind map would cheer people up as well. And I made a tree out of the different branches and then my strengths and there are all different branches of my strength. One of them is like, growth, and respect for myself and feeling a connection. And the second one is more of like a celebration branch, a more colourfulness support, supporting each other, celebration, and hyping each other up. Then I have a strength of being confident and being proud. And the last one was being curious and openminded to new things because I love hearing stories from others and learning from them and talking about each other's lives, that's it.

Participant A: Well, I wrote some words down and drew some pictures by it. First one, I made a bonsai tree. Because I feel like a bonsai tree gives calming vibes, and I think because of knowing who I am and what I want to be it makes me calmers and it makes me a better person at school, at being a friend, and that stuff. So I think that's because of when I came out it made me realise that it's all okay and I can be who I want and that's why I drew a bonsai tree. Also, you have to take care of a tree and you put a lot of time in it and because of knowing who I am I can take better care of myself and also of others. It also made me a lot stronger; I have more courage to say no and other things to people that I don't like, or that don't treat me well. So that made me stronger too and yeah, I am more creative and openminded. And not only because of my sexuality, but also more openminded with what other people think and why they think it and I want to know that; what's going on there. Because I'm not really good at expressing myself, but I'm better at learning from others, so

that's why I'm more creative in that way. Also, I'm happier with who I am so I feel like I can make other people more happy about it, yeah. That's it.

Participant Y: Ehm, yeah. I first wrote down that being confident with my sexuality makes me strong. I mean, as an example, toxic masculinity is not really affecting me, like it's easier to integrate more feminine and more masculine parts into like my lifestyle and how I present myself, without questioning myself all the time. Also, being open to other people makes me strong, include everyone, trying to see everyone in the group. If someone's not talking too much, like well encourage them to talk more. Also, taking other's perspectives and seeing the world from their eyes. And generally being empathetic. Also, being kind makes me strong. Accepting everyone around me. And I feel like that when I can control myself around others also makes me strong. Because then you can adapt to, sometimes maybe necessary if it's like a bad situation or whatever. Also being curious about new experiences makes me strong because then I go and for example and travel around and meeting new people and that also makes me strong.

Participant T: I kind of just first wrote down what I think my strengths were. And I have like confident, resilient, funny, creative, and openminded. And then I started to really think why I think I have those qualities. And yeah, like how specifically relating to sexuality like how it would've been different. Because I always think I would have been creative I don't think my sexuality had that much influence on it. And then I started thinking more about it, and I just wrote down that; growing up being and feeling works different kind of when you walk a different path. Other things that were normal, were not normal to me and vice versa. And it gave me different perspectives on things, and it made me unique in a way. And I think that's, for a long time, feeling different things, I had to deal with things earlier than other people, I guess? And just kind of gave me a different perspective on things, made me more open, confident with my choices because I always had that doubt that people will have later in life, I had that earlier. And I'm kind of just not really bothers by those things anymore. And that a different perspective makes me more openminded. Because I tend to think other things and accept things more quickly because yeah, of that look at things differently, if that makes sense. I hope I can explain it well. I had a hard time trying to reason it in my mind, but I think that that's the one thing that truly made me different, relating to my sexuality.

Researcher: Okay, I heard a lot so far and summarizing, I think that you both made a tree (participant A and M) which stands for growing and, the way you said it was more calming, right? Yes. And you're (participant Y and T) talking more about perspective and being openminded and accepting. Did you, when hearing the other stories, think about any differences between all of you? Do you see things differently than another?

Participant Y: For me, the most different part is that I'm not really creative [laughing]. I mean I know that lots of people in the community are creative. And that's really nice, and I've always been like "Oh well I'm not really one of those persons!".

Researcher: Okay. Anyone else?

Participant A: I think I can relate to everyone, mostly, but think of it in a different way.

Researcher: Can you explain?

Participant A: Well, you (M) said about the tree that's growing all the time. And I have a tree to but I'm growing all the time too so in that way it's kind of the same, but I didn't realise it was like that.

Participant T: I also as I maybe said before, I also notice a difference in age and how long out of the closet. Because of myself, what I enjoy about you two specifically, is that you have a big, optimistic view, much more about a tree and growing. The premises of a new journey. I can kind of remember when I came out also finally understanding and for me those feelings, I gave them a place. I'm just very comfortable and nice where I am, and it's really nice hearing from you, very nice and optimistic like yeah, I'm still growing and I'm still learning and it's really good and I'm happy to hear that you've found that comfort with yourself. I think that's the big different for me as well, because it's just, I found it funny that I wrote down that I wrote down that I'm creative and couldn't draw more than this [laughing]. Yeah, I just think I'm very set and comfortable where I am. A lot of these feelings I've already dealt with them a long time ago, and they feel more part of me, where for maybe you guys it's more of a new feeling. I don't know, I'm the one filling in this for you guys but –

Participant M: No, I think it's sums it up pretty well. It's like the different stages that you get in from coming out, and for you it's been a long time and for us, I don't know for you (A), for me it's pretty new, so.

Participant T: Well, I know what you're saying but I have been out for a long time too, but I'm still growing in more ways and finding out that there's more to it that I can experience, so.

Researcher: Did you both (A and M) write down "Love of Learning"?

Participant A and M: No, actually, I didn't write it down, but it could, yeah.

Researcher: I think that sums up what you just told me, yeah. What I also hear is that what you're saying (T and A) is also a bit in the wisdom and knowledge trait, but yours is more on perspective (Y) and you (A and M) are more on the curiosity and love of learning.

Participant T: Can I also ask about your sexuality? You're both bisexual?

Participant A and M: Yes.

Participant T: Because when I grew up, I knew I was gay and I knew pretty early on that girls weren't my thing and I pretty early I got kind of had to reflect of the fact that girls were not cutting it for me and it had to be guys. For me, I couldn't get around it *(meaning that it was inevitable).* This is what I hear from friends from my side, I don't know if you guys can relate but I think, for a lot of people from what I've heard are bisexual. It is also a big process of growing, and there is also a lot more to it, than guys and girls. I cannot relate so I don't want to fill in anything, what about dating the other sex, or just sexuality with other people. I think that's also a big part of exploration and discoveries, that is very different.

Researcher: Do you think there's a difference in being attracted to one sex or instead of more?

Participant A: I think it does make it a little bit easier, because you know it's one way. In my experience, I know I like girls, but I also like guys, so I'm not sure. And when they ask, are

you gay, and I have to say "No", but I do like, in my case I like girls more than guys. I never had a relationship with a guy that serious. I can be attracted to guys, so that's a little complicated, so it's, for you (Y and T) it's complicated too. In that way, it's the same, but I think it's a longer process to come out because you don't know what you like.

Participant T: Yeah, that's also like, two of my best friends, most of my friends are bisexual actually so I kind of feel like I'm missing out [laughing]. A lot of my friends discovered in a later age, because well to quote a friend of mine he always thought he was being normal and horny at puberty, and at a certain point he was like, oh, yeah, I still look at guys, maybe that's something I have to deal with. Whereas I was like yeah girls are not cutting it. So, I think that's also interesting. And as you said it's very nice you also said you tend to date more girls, that's also an example of how sexuality can be very fluid, instead of being 50/50. I think that I'm fully gay, I'm fully open to any girl, I haven't really met anyone that does that for me. But you know what I'm still open for it. It's also a part of the growing process.

Participant M: I don't know, I'm not sure yet whether I like girls more than guys or the other way around. Because I've always felt normal as well, because I always been attracted to guys. I always thought it was normal to look at girls like that, and then the older I got, the more I talked about it with my other girlfriends and said: "Oh don't you see this" and they're like "No" and I'm like "Oh" [laughing]. So that's why a reason for a difference for when you come out and how you just go in life and how you find yourself.

Researcher: And are there any strengths that helped you with this process, specifically?

Participant M: I'm always really open with my conversations. I talk a lot about sex with my friends and just what's attractive to them, what's not. And then we also kind of got to the subject of same sex and what you see and what's normal to see from the same sex to the other sex if someone's gay. We just talked about it and the more we talked about the more I got to think of myself that they don't have that, I do, what does that mean?

Researcher: Okay, so openness, maybe honesty?

Participant M: Yes.

Researcher: Okay so for all, how do the strengths fit your personality and ideas. In your mind maps you already explained it. Would anyone like to add something about this? How does it fit your personality? I know that you (T) don't see being gay as your personality.

Participant T: Yeah, at least I don't try to make it personality anymore. Because that's also not the world we want to go to. Not every sexuality has been accepted. I think it's still unfortunate that we are being seen as a minority. It's also important to not keep thinking about ourselves as a minority. Instead think of us versus them, about thinking it's just us. Everybody can be a little different. And that doesn't matter, that's why I also don't try to make it my personality. Of course, I make jokes about it because it's funny as f*k [laughing]. I don't try to think as myself of that part of me. If you look at straight people, like being straight is not a core personality type. Definitely, my strengths got stronger because of growing up different and having to accept those things more. I think strengths are what make me, not the gay part. So, it made me more creative, because my way of life was never seen as normal by some people. Because of that it's easier to accept other things that are not seen as typically normal. And that way it made me more openminded, it made me more creative, it made me funnier. And then I tried to focus more on those parts of me, because I think that that's what really shows my personality.
Researcher: Yes, anyone else?

Participant Y: I mean I would just agree. I mean I feel like being gay is not my personality. It's part of me, yes, but it's not my personality. It kind of makes me what I am but it's not the only thing that makes me what I am.

Participant A: I guess, that as well.

Researcher: Lastly, are there any strengths that you do not possess, that you would like to have?

Participants T: I think it's really funny the temperance one; humanity, prudence, forgiveness, self-regulation. I can be very petty. And I don't know if it's because I just I don't want to be too negative about it, I grew up being bullied and stuff like that. I still feel like I can hold grudges. And I can be petty. And I try to be more loving, and kind, because I know

how it feels. That's the one thing I can still feel like, I can hold grudges. I don't know, I feel that. I don't know if people can relate with that, or that I'm just a hateful b*tch [laughing].

Participant Y: I mean I would say I'm personally quite forgiving, like even in childhood. I forgive everyone like, in an hour [laughing]. Honestly, I'm not sure if this has to do with that I'm gay or not, but I feel like I guess it's just me that I don't like generally, that everyone is nice to each other, and peaceful, and there's no bad vibes around. So I try not to create one. But being, holding grudges to another, it's not too connected to being gay. Yeah the thing is, I would like to be creative because it's fun [laughing], but well… I'm just quite boring in that way.

Participant T: I think that being creative is more than just being artful. Creativity is also like, just looking at things in a different way, and finding different ways to do math, or languages, being able to write different things. I feel like you're more creative than you think you are. I think you're very, creativity is always seen as a very art-focused things [laughing].

Participant A: I can relate to both of you guys because you're saying that you can be very hateful, you're saying you can be very forgiving. But because I came out I can relate to people and I'm going to be if you get mad at me because I'm saying something wrong, and I will get mad at you and be like "oh, I forgive you" because we weren't on the same side, okay, but when people don't treat someone else right, in my eyes, how I want people to be treated, I can be really hateful and I don't want to forgive them. It keeps spinning in my head, and I think that's something you both are saying, so I guess I could work on that and make that stronger, self-control.

Participant M: I think that's really well-spoken [laughing]. It's like, sometimes you see different types of communities that are not officially a community, but a really specific example would be some of those groups that walk around the street at night and they have these really big black clothes and they always wear their hoodie over their head even when it's not raining and they're like "I'm so tough". I find it difficult to live, to understand why and how they do that. Even though in my eyes I also need to, because that's also a way of living, and that's also, we need to accept their way of living but I'm not really good at. Well, I am really good at accepting the way that people in the LGBTQ community live. Even though they are both just a different way from the standard.

Participant T: I was also just thinking like one more thing that was related to my pettiness, is that I'm kind of tired of always having to be a better person. Because growing up, being bullied and that stuff, I was always like they are the problem, they are being mean, and I was taught to be the better person. I'm tired of that, bit that's like one part of being LGBTQ is that, because of being a minority, you always have to be a better person. Because the moment you do something wrong, it's kind of in some people's eyes a justification of like "look at that relnicht". That's something I find annoying, and I have to be more nice to people and have to be more accepting in a way. Because some people just don't care. Again, my pettiness is just a normal reaction sometimes. Sometimes I am grumpy, then just having to be nice or else I'm shady and stuff like that. I just think you're always being seen as very openminded and being very generous and nice and that's tiring being that. But also, being nice is a good thing to have in life I suppose.

Researcher: That's actually very fitting to my thesis.

Participant T: Really, nice. You're having to be like the virtue. And having to be the representative of the community. Every time, everywhere you go. I just want to be normal, I'm not special, I don't want to be seen as gay or the representative of the community and I will always fight for everyone's-, because I know how it sucks to be excluded, I will always fight and try to include people. But sometimes I don't want to. I don't want to be seen as the person who always has to come up for the people, because we shouldn't be doing that in the first place; that's the annoying thing. I don't know if people agree with that but that's kind of what I just think.

Participant Y: For me, I mean I see your point, but for me, I just want to be nice. And therefore, I don't think I get tired of it because I want to be seen as a nice person, like generally, and I don't always think about like "oh I'm representing the community". I mean, I guess I am, but I barely ever think about that. It's not really crossing my mind that often. It's more like oh yeah I want to be nice and I want that everyone around me is happy and I guess when I'm happy I can make them happy around me and that, nice, yeah.

Appendix F

Workshop 2 Mind Maps

Figure 1 (tree diagram)

My strengths

celebration
energetic
hyping eachother up
creativity
colourful
support
confidence ↑
Proud
connection to myself
Respect
growth
curiosity
open minded

- I'm an energetic person who likes to cheer people up
- I love colours, adding them to my life.
- Painting, drawing, clothes
- Love the stories ... learning from them

Figure 2 (mind map)

My Strengths

Confident
Openminded
resilient
Funny
Creative

Different Perspectives

- growing up being & feeling "different" kinda made me walk a different Path. a lot of things that were normal went to me and vice versa. It gave me a different view on things and made me

Unique