A DIFFICULT LINE TO WALK: NGO AND LGBTQ+ REFUGEE EXPERIENCES
WITH INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT) IN
CANADA

by

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<u>Dedication Page</u>

This thesis project is dedicated to the memory of the Egyptian Queer activist, and fierce human rights defender, Sarah Hegazi, who took her own life in Toronto on June 13th, 2020. She was arrested in Egypt for raising the rainbow flag at a concert in 2017. She was imprisoned and tortured for three months before she was released on bail, then came to Canada as a refugee in exile. Before her death, Sarah wrote a letter to her friends and family, asking their forgiveness;

"To my siblings: I have tried to find salvation and I failed, forgive me. To my friends: The journey was cruel and I am too weak to resist, forgive me. To the world: You were horrifically cruel, but I forgive."

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations Used

CBSA   Canadian Border Services Agency

ICT   Information and Communications Technology

ISANS   Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia

IRB   Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

IRCC   Immigration, Refugees, Citizenship Canada

LGBTQ+   Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Plus (other sexual identities)

NGO   Non-governmental organization

SOGIE or (SOGI) Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and/or Expression

UNHCR   United Nations High Commisioner for Refugees

Abstract

This thesis project explores the uses of Information and Communications Technology (ICTs) between SOGIE asylum seekers and refugees in Canada and Canadian NGOs who work with these populations. Based on interviews, this project explores both benefits and challenges of using ICTs, specifically social media, in communication between these groups, especially throughout the asylum and initial settlement periods for LGBTQ+ refugees in Canada. Interviews found that ICTs are instrumental for both LGBTQ+ refugees and Canadian NGOs at all stages of the asylum and resettlement process, as these technologies greatly impact the ability to quickly research, contact, and disseminate resources. However, there are often challenges for LGBTQ+ refugees accessing Information and Communications Technology, typically based on their social location.

<u>Chapter 1: Introduction</u>

This Masters' thesis explores the relationship between refugees who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and "plus" (LGBTQ+), Canadian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who support them, and modern Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), specifically that of social media such as Instagram, Facebook, and email.

The main objective of this study is to understand how LGBTQ+ refugees and Canadian NGOs interact with ICTs, and their views on how ICTs are used in their immigration process or in finding and/or supporting LGBTQ+ refugees. I look at both how these technologies are used in accessing asylum, and how these technologies are used after refugees have relocated in Canada, including the ways they can access further supports and resources.

Often, the terms "refugee" and "asylum seeker" are used interchangedly, however there are some key differences between these two terms. A refugee is a person who has to flee their country based on a well-founded fear of persecution, based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Refugee status offers humanitarian protection for those who meet this definition. An asylum seeker is known as a person who is pursuing sanctuary, but their request for status has yet to be processed (Phillips 2015). For this reason, asylum seekers may experience various restrictions and obstacles to services, or may even be detained (Kirkwood and McNeill 2015). Not all asylum seekers will become refugees, as others may take different routes to immigration, depending on what they are eligible for, and what streams of

immigration are available in the destination country. Some asylum seekers may be denied status altogether; these asylum seekers are sometimes referred to as "failed asylum seekers" (Innes 2014). LGBTQ+ aslyum seekers are also known, and referred to in this thesis, as SOGIE asylum seekers, which refers to asylym seekers who are forced to flee based on their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) refers to systems of digital informations technology, including the internet and telephone networks, and all digital technologies and programs that exist on these platforms (Huarng 2011). While ICTs are not exclusively internet based, examples of ICTs have increased exponentially increased since the use of internet technology worldwide (Huarng 2011; Yu 2011). ICT is an umbrella term for these technologies, as digital and communications technology is still quickly evolving. ICT and IT (Information Technology) are sometimes used interchangedly, however, ICT is a more specific term that stresses the role of unified communications within the technology (Bandyopadhyay 2016). I use the term ICT in this thesis because it specifically includes email and social media, as these both play a large role in the ICT usage for Canadian NGOs and LGBTQ+ refugees interviewed.

The central research questions for this thesis are: How have recent developments in information and communications technology (ICTs) affected LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and refugees and Canadian NGOs in finding routes to their new destinations? And what other ways are ICTs used by LGBTQ+ refugees and Canadian NGOs in order to communicate with each other, and provide/access services and supports?

The study consists of eleven semi-structured interviews with refugees in Halifax and Toronto, and staff working at Canadian NGOs in the same two cities who have direct

contact with these refugees using ICTs. I interviewed staff who worked at the following

NGOs: Rainbow Railroad (Toronto), Rainbow Refugee (Halifax), The 519 (Toronto),

The Halifax Refugee Clinic (Halifax) and ISANS (Halifax).

Throughout this thesis, I use a variety of terms, such as LGBTQ+, queer, gay,

lesbian, and SOGIE. These terms are chosen based on the respective term that was used

in the conversations had with interview participants, or, the terms chosen by the authors

in the relevant literature that is referenced. This was done deliberately to respect people's

choice of self-identification.

1.1 Significance of Study

This study addresses the gaps in current literature and aims to explore the

relationships between ICTs and LGBTQ+ refugees by learning from refugees and NGO

workers about how ICTs may impact refugee journeys to and within Canada. Current

research on queer asylum seekers refugees in Canada has largely focused on the

"verification process" of queer identity through the refugee confirmation hearings by the

Canadian government (S. R. Jordan 2009; laViolette 2010; Murray 2014, 2016). In

addition, some researchers have concluded that information and communication

technologies can further complicate this verification process, through the requirement of

online media/photo evidence of queer identity in refugee hearings (Kahn et al. 2017)

The global asylum process is an imperfect system, with particular challenges for

LGBTQ+ refugees, as partaking in this process requires the refugees to disclose an often

traumatic and stigmatized identity; additionally, their identity is consistently scrutinized

throughout the process as federal courts attempt to determine "real" or "genuine" SOGIE

3

refugee claims from those who are not truly LGBTQ+, or do not fit within the definition of a refugee (Jordan 2009; laViolette 2010; Murray 2014, 2016). Information and communication technologies have been noted to further complicate this verification process, through the requirement of online media/photo evidence of LGBTQ+ identity in refugee hearings (Kahn et al. 2017). While there is a large focus in migration studies on ICTs and their impacts on diaspora communities, there are fewer studies on how these technologies impact refugee populations, and a notable gap in academic literature regarding how ICTs impact the asylum process for LGBTQ+ refugees outside of this verification process. Additionally, it is important to explore how LGBTQ+ refugees use ICTs because these technologies can be instrumental in creating communities for migrant and refugee populations as they navigate their journey to new homes, including the heteronormativity of the asylum system. Heteronormativity is defined as an ideology or set of assumptions that heterosexuality is natural and a desired social norm.

It is also important to examine how ICTs are used by Canadian organizations and LGBTQ+ refugees in Canada, as Canadians rely on ICTs and technology for a multiplicity of uses. In 2018, Statistics Canada reported that 94% of Canadians have internet in their homes (Government of Canada 2019). The Ryerson University Social Media Lab reported that 84% of Canadians had a Facebook account in 2018, and that Canadians are twice as likely to have Twitter and LinkedIn accounts compared to Americans (Gruzd et al. 2018). For this reason it is important to understand how these ICTs are used in a Canadian context with refugees and organizations within the country, as it can impact our understanding of how LGBTQ+ refugees resettle in Canada, and what tools are available which may aid throughout this process.

Many refugees experience a variety of barriers in reaching safety throughout the duration of their journey, including physical barriers of distance to travel, danger including human trafficking risk and other forms of exploitation (Castles et al. 2012). In addition to these barriers, once the asylum seeker has reached their destination, they may also experience difficulty navigating the complex legal process of obtaining status. For refugees with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity or expression (SOGIE), this process becomes even more difficult to navigate, as there are further barriers to safety and status that risk causing both psychological and physical harm for SOGIE asylum seekers. The dangers for refugees and asylum seekers are different depending on a variety of factors, including their home country and destination, as well as the immigration stream they are in. In general, asylum seekers face threats of human trafficking, sexual assault, robbery, as well as the physical tolls of travelling across land and sea (Castles et al. 2012).

Communications technology has advanced in recent years at an enormous rate, which has given people the potential and accessibility to connect unlike ever before. As communications technology changes, so does the way in which people migrate around the world, particularly the ways in which they find and negotiate safety and identity in migration (Alonso and Oiarzabal 2010).

1.2 Summary of Major Findings

My interviews found that ICTs are instrumental for both LGBTQ+ refugees and Canadian NGOs at all stages of the asylym and resettlement process, as these

5

technologies greatly impact the ability to research and contact resources quickly. That being said, this study also finds that there are still various barriers to accessing these resources with the use of ICTs.

I argue that ICTs are essential for providing communication and dissemination of resources throughout all stages of the asylum and settlement process for LGBTQ+ refugees. At the same time, despite the usefulness and importance of these ICTs, there are a variety of barriers within ICT usage that prevent these technologies from being completely accessible to all.

My research also found that ICTs facilitate access to resources and information for both LGBTQ refugees and Canadian NGOs. These technologies are essential to the work that Canadian NGOs do in interacting with LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and refugees both during the asylum process internationally, and also when refugees are relocated to Canada. ICTs are also helpful for NGOs to connect with other service providers, particularly with funding and raising awareness about their work through activism and advocacy. I also found that ICTs were essential for LGBTQ+ asylum seekers in finding support organizations in Canada via email, and other forms of social media; to communicate with these organizations and to find access to services or information about their options in their situation.

In all the 11 interviews I conducted, ICTs and communications technology played a large role in the experiences of the participants. The main source of communication for participants was through email, especially for NGO participants, who explained that email constituted a large part of their work. Other forms of communication were Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and in some cases, WhatsApp, Signal, dating sites,

Facetime, Skype, Slack, and Jitsi. In general, ICTs opened up streams of communication for all parties involved.

In general, most NGOs used Facebook, Twitter and email for their day to day communication with the public, clients, and other organizations. In communication with refugees and asylum seekers, organizations sometimes use more unique methods of communication, depending on what the client may or may not have access to. In a similar way, NGOs may use different ICTs when communicating with refugee clients compared to when they communicate with other service providers, sponsors, or activists. Refugee participants may use different types of ICTs for different purposes, such as apps, social media, email, and internet. They also cited using the internet in a variety of ways to learn about life in Canada prior to their arrival. The study also found that while ICTs offer more access than ever before to communication, services, and information, there are still barriers to access the communication benefits that ICTs bring. The main barriers that were mentioned by NGO staff and with refugees were: language, finances, and gender based barriers.

Finally, keeping information secure presents a challenge for both service providers and refugees who use these ICTs, and is an especially difficult topic to navigate because cybersecurity practices are constantly evolving, as are ICT and social media platforms.

1.3 Methods

This study is a qualitative approach to better understanding the relationships between LGBTQ+ refugees, Canadian NGOs, and Information and Communication Technologies. The study is based on 11 interviews in total; seven interviews with representatives from NGOs in Canada who work directly with LBGTQ+ refugees, and four interviews with LGBTQ+ refugees or asylum seekers who have previously arrived in Canada and used a Canadian NGO in a part of their refugee journey. Interview participants took part in a digitally recorded, semi-structured interviews that lasted approximately 30-60 minutes in length, depending on the participants' answers. The set of interview questions were different for refugee participants and for NGO employee participants. The interview questions for both types of participants were based on how they used ICTs, how ICTs are useful, and any barriers that may occur while using these ICTs. The interview guides for interviews with both groups are attached in Appendix B.

Refugee interview participants were given a $15 gift card for their participation in the study and were reimbursed for any travel expenses they incurred for travelling to the location of the interview. NGO staff participants were not compensated for their participation as they were speaking in their official capacities.

All LGBTQ+ refugees included in the study were recruited using the support of the NGO Rainbow Railroad in Toronto. Rainbow Railroad assisted in recruiting these participants by emailing potential participants from their newcomer clients. Devon Matthews, the program manager at Rainbow Railroad, sent an email to potential participants, with program information and my contact information. The email script that Rainbow Refugee sent to their clients is attached in Appendix C. Refugees who were interested in participating contacted me directly to schedule interviews in a semi-public

location. Any refugees who volunteered for the study were able to participate, granted that they met the criteria of being a refugee in Canada, and that they read and signed the project consent forms. Refugee participants were required to speak and read English well enough to understand recruitment documents such as consent forms, in order to minimize risk of miscommunication during the consent process.

Ensuring participant confidentiality for refugee participants was important, especially given the nature of this study. Refugee participants, though they are settled in Canada, must be ensured confidentiality when discussing their stories, for their safety and the safety of their families in their home countries. As this study works with the vulnerable population of LGBTQ+ refugees, confidentiality and privacy was a priority. Interviews with refugees were held in a semi-public location outside of the NGO offices. All names of refugee participants were changed in notes as well as in this final thesis document. Refugee participants had the option to choose their pseudonym, or to have it chosen for them. Participants also were informed of their ability to skip any questions they would not like to answer, as well as the ability to end the interview at any time without penalty of losing any interview incentives.

I chose to interview staff from five different organizations because this was a manageable size considering the time limitations of an MA thesis, and I wanted to capture a basic level of diversity of Canadian NGOs, to highlight the variety of work these organizations do throughout the asylum and settlement process for refugees. The selection of NGOs for this study have been described in detail below. NGOs were selected based on their work with LGBTQ+ specific migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers. Organizations were selected from Toronto and Halifax to compare the use of

ICTs between organizations in a larger city center (Toronto), and a smaller city (Halifax), and to examine if there were any differences in the ICT needs from organizations based on their geographic location in Canada.

This research is informed by the theoretical framework of Queer Legal Theory, which critiques how legal structures unequally disadvantage sexual and gender minorities, and force LGBTQ+ bodies to adapt and assimilate to these legal systems (Valdes 1997). QLT is an essential framework for this study, as it demands that these structures are examined with an intersectional lens (Harding 2013; Valdes 1997). Intersectional access and barriers are very key themes drawn from this study, so these framework is important to keep in mind. Using QLT to examine the experiences of LGBTQ+ refugees and Canadian NGOs and their interactions with ICTs is an important part of this research project, as it provides a unique and critical perspective of these relationships. Queer legal theory and it's relevance to this project will be further detailed in Chapter 2 during the Literature Review.

1.4 List of Organizations

Rainbow Railroad: Rainbow Railroad is a Toronto based organization that works in emergency removals of LGBTQ+ refugees from dangerous situations. Through donations and non-governmental funding, Rainbow Railroad assists LGBTQ people around the world by providing asylum information, legal support, and safe transportation to those who seek safety from state-enabled violence, murder or persecution. In 2017, the organization had 1151 requests for help, and assisted 206 people from 18 different

countries to find safety. Since 2006, Rainbow Railroad has helped over 800 persecuted LGBTQ people from 38 countries travel to safety. Rainbow Railroad works by verifying cases, assessing their most secure routes to safety with the help of local contacts, and provides the client with safe travel to their new destination. Rainbow Railroad does not work in settlement services once their client has arrived to their new destination.

Rainbow Refugee: Rainbow Refugee is a non-governmental Canadian organization based out of Vancouver, with additional chapters, including the Rainbow Refugee Association of Nova Scotia, located in Halifax. Rainbow Refugee was founded in 2000, in order to help people seeking refugee protection in Canada because of persecution based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression (SOGIE) or HIV status. According to the Rainbow Refugee Website, the organization entered into a partnership with the Canadian Federal government in 2011 to facilitate a blended sponsorship program called the Rainbow Refugee Assistance Project (RRAP). Through this program, Rainbow Refugee works closely with both private sponsorship and government assisted sponsorship to relocate LGBTQ+ refugees across Canada with the help of other community based LGBTQ+ organizations. While the program is called a "blended sponsorship" as the government funds a portion of the sponsorship, the RRAP is a part of the private sponsorship stream. As Canada has a unique position as the only country that offers private sponsorship as an option, it is important to gain insight from Rainbow Refugee on how this pathway interacts with information and communication technology, and if there is a difference in the technology used for different streams of asylum.

The 519: The 519 is a Toronto based organization that works with LGBTQ+ refugees, offering a variety of services and supports, from counselling to assistance finding affordable housing. Their pillars of work are defined as "Service, Space, and Leadership," as they provide a multitude of programming and resources for all ages, from LGBTQ+ youth to seniors. They also provide free space for individuals, organizations, and non-profit groups to meet, and finally, they offer training, knowledge and insight, research, and public engagement campaigns promoting the rights and inclusion of the LGBTQ2 community. This organization was selected for participation in the project in order to examine what capacity information and communication technology impacts relationships between LGBTQ+ refugees and the organization. As The 519 works to provide a variety of services for LGBTQ2 newcomers and the community as a whole, this organization can provide insight on how ICTs can be used by NGOs which provide a variety of services to LGBTQ+ communities in a large city such as Toronto.

ISANS (Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia): ISANS is a Nova Scotia based organization that works closely with newcomers, including refugees, and immigrants, to provide a variety of services. ISANS is the largest immigrant-serving organization in Atlantic Canada, with over 270 staff members, working to help integrate and empower immigrants in Canadian society, with services such as counselling, training, professional programs, language courses, etc. While this organization works primarily with immigrants, it is important to include their perspective in this study as they have piloted programs for technology and communications including phone apps to help immigrants access services and provide information on resources. ISANS has recently created a new

program for clients called Project Beacon using the program called Slack. This app can be used online or on mobile phones and is designed to provide a platform for communication between private sponsors in Nova Scotia, so they can communicate with each other, ask questions, and access resources throughout the sponsorship and integration processes. Although this program does not link refugees and NGOs, which is the main topic of my research, it nevertheless remains important to explore how NGOs who work with LGBTQ+ in Canada may use ICTs in order to adapt to their clients' needs.

Halifax Refugee Clinic: The Halifax Refugee Clinic is an organization that works with refugees, offering legal representation for refugees in Nova Scotia, and for those who are claiming refugee status in the province. They also support refugees by connecting them with essential services such as employment resources and housing assistance. The Halifax Refugee Clinic is a small NGO in Halifax, with only 3 full time staff members, and a large team of volunteers who help support the work of the organization. They are funded by the Law Foundation of Nova Scotia and through private donations. The Halifax Refugee Clinic is an important organization to include in this research because, as previously mentioned, the legal process for asylum and refugee status is complicated and convoluted, especially for LGBTQ+ asylum seekers, and this organization can help explain how ICTs may play a role in these legal processes.

1.5 List of Interview Participants

Devon, Manager of Programs, Rainbow Railroad
Meryl, Manager of Operations, Rainbow Railroad
Summer, Program Officer, Rainbow Railroad
Emma, Communications and Marketing, Rainbow Refugee Association of Nova Scotia (RRANS)
Yolanda, Project Manager, ISANS,
Julie, Executive Director, Halifax Refugee Clinic
Soofia, Director of Strategic Communications and Executive Planning, The 519

Refugee Participant Interviews (All names are psedonyms for privacy)
Sandra
Michael
Sam
Rachel

<u>Chapter 2: Literature Review</u>

The following chapter will outline the pertinent literature for this research study; first, I discuss Queer Legal Theory (QLT), as it is the theoretical framework which informs this research. Next, I examine the definition of a refugee and asylum seeker in international law, and the process of becoming a refugee in Canada. The chapter then discusses Canada's history with LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers, and the "verification" of SOGIE asylum seekers in the refugee process. Finally, the chapter explores the existing literature on ICT technology and migrant populations, and what it says about how these technologies are used by these groups.

<u>2.1 Queer Legal Theory</u>

The main theoretical framework that informed this study was queer legal theory (QLT). At its core, QLT examines and critiques the ways law and legislative frameworks treat sexual minorities (Harding 2013; Valdes 1997). QLT also identifies how queer bodies are forced to change, assimilate, or hide altogether in order to fit legal requirements, which is known as passing. Passing exposes queer people to discrimination and does not transform the structures of inequality which cause this discrimination in the first place. My research explores some of the structural inequalities for queer asylum seekers in the refugee regime, and QLT helps expose how traditional pathways to asylum were not designed for queer people, and how queer people are put in danger or forced to assimilate their identities in order to fit into the current systems in place.

Queer legal theory is composed of a collection of different theoretical approaches, including feminist legal theory, critical race theory, critical legal studies and gay and lesbian legal theory. This approach uses these different perspectives to counter many socially normative structures, including patriarchy, white supremacy, heteronormativity, etc., to acknowledge that there are many different identities and ways to be queer. QLT uses the concept of "multidimensionality," for the inclusivity of diverse identities within the framework. While "intersectionality" identifies how people can live at the intersections of privileges and marginalization, "multidimensionality" takes this concept even further, and identifies that the word (or identifier) "queer" can have multiple meanings for different people, and furthermore, people can also have multiple layers of their identity, which can be incredibly diverse, or may express commonalities (Kepros 1999; Valdes 1997).

QLT is a helpful lens to use for this research, as it examines queer people's experiences with human rights and legal systems, which relates directly to how queer refugees are disadvantaged by asylum law, despite the fact that the UNHCR specifically defines SOGIE refugees as having equal rights with other types refugees.

The QLT framework is essential for this study as it provides insight into how and why Canadian NGOs offer support and alternatives to SOGIE refugees, and the ways these organizations lend legal advice and financial support to queer refugee claimants in order to help them achieve safety. The current global asylum system has specific challenges and risks for SOGIE claimants, that make these pathways unattainable or unsafe to use. QLT is helpful for understanding that current legal systems do not serve

SOGIE claimants, as the UNHCR refugee system was not built with queer people in mind.

QLT also acknowledges that there are different realities for queer people, who like everyone, have multiple layers to their identities, and these layers are not fixed or static. Identity is not a simple term to define, however, the term usually refers to the ways in which people see themselves, and how they are seen by others (Vertovec 2001). Identity is fluid, and can change and evolve as people feel different connections to communities and places, and can be constructed and reconstructed throughout one's life (Alexander 2006). For example, racial and ethnic identities may play a role in one's queer identity, but this is also dependent on environmental and societal influences. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall points out that identity is an "constant process of becoming… It is never complete, but always temporarily positioned within a particular context that needs to be imaginatively and adaptively interpreted… it belongs to the future as much as the past." (Hall 1990, 222). Identity is also constructed and maintained between generations, and across international borders. This is sometimes referred to as "collective identity", which appears heavily in studies on transnationalism (Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt 1999; Schiller and Frykman 2018; Vertovec 2001). Transnationalism and transnational linkages will be further discussed in section 2.6.

Just as the concept of identity is seen as fluid and evolving, queer identity is also often defined as such, as it does not fall into specific boxes or roles, but instead exists on a spectrum and with infinite expressions (Khayatt 2002). Furthermore, queer identity is not homogenous, as there are many other intersecting factors of a person's identity that may impact a queer person's life experiences, including their sexual orientation and/or

gender identity (Valdes 1997). This is helpful for understanding discussions on the problems with the queer "verification" process through refugee confirmation hearings in Canada, as SOGIE claimants are forced to prove their queer identity to a courtroom in order to attain refugee status.

Because QLT emerged from activism, there is a large social justice component to the framework. The core motivation in QLT is social change, and QLT is dedicated to identifying and changing the structures which perpetuate discrimination and heteronormativity; it seeks legal justice for non-heteronormative identifying people and broader social change. The researchers who use QLT in their work are not necessarily neutral in their writing, as this motivation for social change inspires an activist's stance (Anfara and Mertz 2014; Harding 2013; Valdes 1997).

Finally, QLT has also influenced the research questions of this study by examining how ICTs have shaped the process for SOGIE asylum seekers in the Canadian refugee system, since as QLT explains, these systems are not designed for sexual and gender minorities. As a result, this framework helps to explore how these technologies help NGOs and refugees alike to adapt to these systems with unequal power structures.

2.2 Who is a refugee?

The definition of a refugee was developed in the 1951 Geneva Convention, which states that a refugee is a person who:

> [has a] well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such

events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (UNHCR 1951).

The key aspects of this definition are that the refugee has a "well-founded" fear of persecution based on reasons for membership to a particular social group, religion, or political opinion; and that because of this fear, they cannot return to their home country. Despite the fact that the UNHCR developed the definition of a refugee in 1951, the use of the term is still muddled both in policy and academia today, especially for what constitutes a refugee. The terms, refugee, asylum seeker, and forced migrant, are often used interchangedly, despite many differences within these terms. There is also on-going debate today about whether environmental factors should be legitimate reasons for granting refugee status. People who are forced to flee their homes as a result of climate change are often referred to as "climate refugees" or "environmental refugees," however, they do not receive the same legal protection as political refugees, as the plight of environmental refugees is not recognized by the UNHCR (Farbotko and Lazrus 2012).

SOGIE asylum seekers or asylum seekers with a diverse gender orientation or sexual identity are protected in refugee law, as they have the potential to be a displaced person who has a "well-founded" fear of persecution because of their membership in a particular social group (that is, for their LGBTQ+ identity or perceived LGBTQ+ identity or behaviour), or sometimes for religious reasons. In countries where same sexual acts are criminalized by imprisonment or even death, LGBTQ+ people cannot rely on protection from the governments in their home countries. As explained in the Introduction, asylum seekers are individuals who are seeking international protection and whose refugee claims have yet to be processed, meaning they have not yet been granted refugee status (Austin, Johnson, and Wojcik 2010).

SOGIE asylum seekers' right to safety are clearly defined in many aspects of the UNHCR's Age, Gender, Diversity Mainstreaming (AGDM) program, which requires any UNHCR plans to place specific attention on how their programs impact people with minority and vulnerable identities, including sexual orientation and gender identity (UNHCR 2007). Despite these steps taken by the UNHCR, queer asylum seekers experience systemic challenges through the refugee process that put them at great risk of further danger or even death (laViolette 2010; Liew 2017). For example, asylum seekers who look for safety in spaces such as refugee camps, find that they are often fraught with homophobia and violence, and in some cases, are unsafe for LGBTQ+ people (Kahn et al. 2017). Because of this, SOGIE asylum seekers cannot trust that claiming asylum can offer them safety from the persecution they face based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

In Canada, once an asylum seeker has proven that they fit the definition of a refugee (that is, with a well-founded fear of persecution, and that they cannot return to their home country) in a refugee hearing, they are granted refugee status, which gives them greater protections and access to governmental support. Gaining refugee status in Canada does not however, grant permanent residency, but refugees can then appy for residency after their status is confirmed.

2.3 History of Canada's interactions with SOGIE Asylum seekers

Canada was one of the first Western nations to outwardly declare protection to SOGIE refugees in 1992-1993, giving it a reputation as an ally country to queer refugees (Jordan, Morrissey 2013).

Canada is also a unique case to examine, as it is the only country with a private

sponsorship program, through which citizens can assist fully or partially in privately

sponsoring new refugees. The Private Sponsorship program in Canada was established in

1978, and has since become an integral part of welcoming more new Canadians to

Canada than could resettle with government sponsored settlements alone. The program

also gives Canadians a more active role within refugee communities (Treviranus,

Casasola 2003). In this stream, private sponsors are responsible for funding the first year

of the refugee's resettlement, and the government covers certain expenses such as health

care and children's education (Hyndman, Payne, Jimenez 2017). Since its inception in

1978, the private sponsorship program has evolved, incorporating recommendations from

sponsorship groups, and recognizing that sponsorship is a partnership between

newcomers and their sponsors, and that resettlement entails maintaining transnational

linkages for newcomers (Beiser 2003; Hyndman, Payne, and Jimenez 2017; Treviranus

and Casasola 2003).

Despite media rhetoric on refugees and asylum seekers as "queue jumpers" or

"security threats", private sponsorship has remained popular with the Canadian public,

allowing Canadian citizens to have influence over immigration and settlement decisions

(Hyndman, Payne, Jimenez 2017). Furthermore, this gives Canadian NGOs, as well as

the private sector as a whole, the opportunity to play a much larger role in the asylum

process, and as a result, Canadian NGOs have been influential in responding to the

challenges for queer refugees in very different ways from other countries that also

adjudicate in SOGIE refugee claims. On the Canadian government's webpage for

LGBTQ2 refugees, it states that one of the ways the Canadian government supports

SOGIE asylum seekers is by helping fund the sponsorship work of the Rainbow Refugee Society, by supporting the organization through funding (Government of Canada 2007). This partnership between the Canadian government and a non-profit sector organization illustrates how connected the government and NGOs are, especially when it comes to the asylum and resettlement processes for LGBTQ+ refugees.

Canada is viewed globally as a leader in promoting LGBTQ+ rights through refugee claims, but it is important to know what Canada does in their actions to help protect queer refugees, in addition to how they advocate for them on a global level.

2.4 Claiming Asylum and Safety Concerns

Claiming asylum in Canada is a labour intensive, lengthy, bureaucratic process. Three government agencies, which consist of the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB); Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC); and the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), all take partial responsibility for overseeing the asylum process. It is important to note that asylum seekers experience a different process from resettled refugees, as their refugee status is not predetermined before their arrival. Instead, asylum seekers typically claim asylum once they have arrived in Canada, and therefore must go through the legal process of confirming refugee status on Canadian soil.

The first step when an asylum seeker arrives at a port of entry is to state their claim of asylum to a Canadian Border Services Agent, who will then review their claim for eligibility (Falconer 2019). If the asylum seeker is deemed eligible to claim asylum, the second step of this process is fulfilling the Basis of Claim form and submitting

evidence. The asylum seeker is given an application package to complete, including the Basis of Claim form which is due within 15 days of their arrival at the border. Once this form is completed, it is submitted to the IRCC office first, then Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB), then to the Canadian Boarder Services Agency (CBSA) office. According to Falconer (2019), the questions asked of the claimant on this form relate to their identifying information, risk of harm, alternatives to seeking asylum, flight timeline, other details pertaining to their claim, family information, immigration history in Canada, contact address and legal counsel information, if any (Falconer 2019; Satzewich 2015).

The third step in the process is waiting for a hearing and gathering evidence which will support a claimant's story and their claim for this hearing. Those who reach this step are granted temporary legal status in Canada while in this waiting period; this status allows asylum claimants to apply for work permits and access to some government services such as healthcare and provincially funded social assistance (Falconer 2019).

The fourth step in the process is the claim hearing itself and the subsequent decision that arises from this hearing. Hearings take about half a day on average. If a positive decision is reached in the hearing, the asylum seeker is given "protected-person" status, which allows them to apply for permanent residency through IRCC.

In some cases, refugees will be granted status outside of Canada by the UNHCR, and resettled in Canada. In this process, an asylum seeker approaches a UNHCR office and claims asylum, makes their case, and is channeled through the system, until a sponsor country is selected. In these cases, refugees often go through a lengthy waiting period, often in refugee camps, as claims are backlogged. The waiting time is often unpredictable and dependent on location. For those who became refugees at the end of 2015, refugees

have been in exile for an average of 10.3 years, and a median wait time of 4 years, and for the 6.6 million people in protracted refugee situations (waiting for over 5 years), the average exile duration is 21.1 years (Devictor and Do, 2018). In 2018, the UNHRC reported that 1.4 million refugees were in need of resettlement; 92 400 of those refugees were settled worldwide, with Canada taking in 28 100 refugee claimaints (UNHCR 2018).

For many asylum claimants, even once they claim asylum, it is hard to find safety from the discrimination they face, as the discrimination they flee from runs rampant in spaces that are supposed to be safe. For SOGIE asylum seekers, this process is incredibly dangerous, as they often experience the same types of violence and discrimination they did in the home country, from which they are trying to flee, as this discrimination can come from other refugees in the camps, host communities, and even employees. For example, Gessen (2018) describes the difficult experiences of LGBTQ2 in refugee towns in Turkey. Gessen reports that nothing was altered in these towns to make them safer spaces for SOGIE refugees, and as a result of the overcrowding, all refugees are placed in small towns and communities as temporary residences. As of 2018 there were an estimated 800 refugees in Turkish towns for extended periods of time. After their arrival in Turkey, claimants may be stuck in these towns for up to five years, living in conditions where they may face consistent persecution, and without accountability from International organizations to keep them safe (Gessen 2018). Additionally, many of these refugees live in despair as they deal with long waiting times for relocation. Evidence shows that the protracted delays can be damaging and even fatal; there are increasing rates of suicide among queers in Turkish refugee camps (Hopkinson et al. 2017).

Attacks on LGBTQ+ people in refugee camps are also reportedly common. For example, there have been reports of violence against these groups in refugee camps located in places like Kenya and South Africa, two of the few countries on the continent where protection is offered on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity (Hylton and Politzer 2019). Despite the fact that protection is offered in these places, many LGBTQ+ people still experience persecution and oppression. A 2019 article from the New York Times, focuses on the experiences of "Amobi," a Nigerian man, who fled to South Africa in search of safety.

> "Amobi fled to South Africa, one of the few countries on the continent to offer constitutional protection on the basis of sex, gender and sexual orientation. But he soon found that even asylum centers were not safe. In Johannesburg, while he was waiting in line to renew a temporary permit, another asylum seeker approached. "I've been watching you," he said. "I can see you are gay; I will kill you" (Hylton and Politzer 2019).

The act of claiming asylum is complicated and lengthy in the best of circumstances, and for SOGIE asylum seekers who are in immediate danger, the process can be even more dangerous. As previously mentioned, refugee camps rarely have accommodations for LGBTQ+ refugees, resulting in instances of homophobia, transphobia, sexual and physical violence, and a general lack of understanding of queer identities (Fobear 2015; Shidlo and Ahola 2013). Despite the outlined rights of safety for SOGIE asylum seekers, their safety is consistently threatened by this process and by the lack of implementation of these UNHCR agendas.

In addition to these issues of safety, it is important to understand how the refugee and asylum system is designed in Canada, particularly how unclear and demanding the process can be on LGBTQ+ asylum seekers.

2.5 Discussion of Queer Verification Through the Canadian Asylum System

The process of finding asylum as a general refugee is laborious for everyone, but process becomes much more complicated for those who identify as LGBTQ+. An asylum seeker that aims to claim refugee status must prove that they face persecution based on a variety of criteria, including "membership to a specific social group". When an asylum seeker is seeking refuge based on violence or threat as a result of their gender identity or sexual orientation, they must prove to the courts that the identity they claim is legitimate, and demonstrate how they have been persecuted based on this identity. For those fleeing danger due to ethnicity, religion, or war, this task is more straightforward, as there is often evidence of this wide spread violence through reporting and documentation. As anthropologist David Murray explains, "individuals who are claiming protection as a refugee on the basis of sexual orientation or gendered identity persecution face the daunting double challenge of proving that their sexual orientation or gendered identity is 'credible' … This challenge led more than one claimant to ask at the peer support group meetings, 'How do I prove that I'm gay/lesbian/bisexual and that I have been persecuted?'" (2014, 22). While countries with anti-LGBTQ laws and policies are recognized in the courts as such, asylum seekers must still prove that they have been impacted by these policies. As a result of this requirement, asylum seekers are forced to navigate a dichotomy of "real/fake," in addition to the other bureaucratic barriers that exist for gaining refugee status.

The "verification" of queer identity is arguably the most discussed topic in academic literature on SOGIE asylum seekers and the refugee process. The global

asylum process is an problematic system for LGBTQ+ refugees, as partaking in this process requires the queer asylum seeker to disclose an often traumatic and stigmatized identity, and furthermore, their identity is consistently scrutinized throughout the process as federal courts attempt to determine "real" or "genuine" SOGIE refugee claims from those who are not truly LGBTQ+, or do not fit within the definition of a refugee (Jordan 2009; laViolette 2010; Murray 2014, 2016). This requirement of proving "genuine" LGBTQ+ identity brings up issues about what preconceived notions of queer identity exist in Western societies. If applicants' proof of their identity does not conform with a societal expectation of how a LGBTQ+ person *should* act in a Canadian context, they risk being labeled as "inauthentic" or "fake" (Murray 2014, 26). This process also makes it difficult for bisexual, non-binary, or fluid people to verify their claim, and many bisexual refugee claimaints are viewed with further skepticism by refugee adjudicators (Rehaag 2009).

As refugee claimants come from all over the world, there must also be consideration given to the possibilities of cross-cultural misinterpretations and understandings of identity; that is some claimants provide proof of their identities that does not align with a Western understanding of what a LGBTQ+ can be expected to have experienced in their life, or what they are supposed to look, talk, or act like. Murray specifically examines how this requirement is permeated with intersectional discrimination, especially for racial minorities. As many scholars and activists point out, Black bodies are often viewed with less trust and higher scrutiny in legal processes; refugee hearings may not be any different (2014, 8).

"Macho" Black masculinity is often characterized as "homophobic", and cross-cultural misinterpretations based on racial stereotypes can undermine a person's refugee claim, as it may not fit within the parameters of a western, white, interpretation of LGBTQ+ identity (Murray 2014, 8). As a result, LGBTQ+ refugee and asylum claimants are forced to navigate the already challenging legal system, while being subjected to questions about their authenticity and scrutinized for their appearance, actions, and narratives in order to ensure it conforms with a Western interpretation of sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Queer legal theory makes similar points about how LGBTQ+ often must assimilate to heteronormative narratives in legal processes (Valdes 1997).

Researchers who examine the SOGIE asylum process also question whether or not there are appropriate support systems in place for claimants, especially given the psychological trauma of "proving" their identity or orientation within a very short time frame when filing claims and attending hearings (Kahn and Alessi 2018). Yoshino argues that LGBTQ+ refugee claimants are forced to do something called "reverse covering", which entails coming out quickly in their host country as LGBTQ+ in order to file for refugee status in the short time frame required (Yoshino 2007).

Furthermore, due to increased uses of ICTs, the presence of photos and social media are sometimes used to further scrutinize queer identity in the refugee process (Kahn and Alessi 2018). As both photos and conversations are logged through social media and instant messaging, asylum seekers who identify as LGBTQ+ may be required to submit "proof" of relationships that would support their claim of their sexual orientation. By requiring "digital evidence" or photo/social media, SOGIE claimants are

required to put themselves at risk of violence from their families from home, or from members of their diaspora communities by revealing their identity. This aspect of using ICTs as a tool for verification is discussed briefly in some of the literature, but it is not often the focus. In constrast, this thesis examines how ICTs are used by LGBTQ+ refugees, and Canadian NGOs, because it is not examined in the larger literature about this asylum or refugee process.

2.6 Information and Communications Technology in Migrant Populations

Communications technology has greatly shifted over recent decades, especially through the introduction and dispersion of the internet. Information and communication technologies have had a huge impact in creating communities in cyberspace in which transnational communities can exist and transcend geographical boundaries (Hafkin 2006). Recent studies in ICT use also show that those who use social media and communications technology see the virtual and physical world as an intertwined reality, including the opportunity and space for connection and interaction, while the virtual world is physically separated (Veronis, Tabler, and Ahmed 2018). As a result, there is a budding literature on the topic of ICTs, and how they can empower users through knowledge sharing and expressions of identity. Online spaces are unique in the fact that they engage debate and conversation from people of different classes, backgrounds, and religions in order to talk about politics and power, in a type of "democratic dialogue" (Bernal 2013).

At the same time, digital technology and ICTs are not always accessible for all parties. The "digital divide" refers to the gap between people who have access to

technology, namely computers and internet, and those who do not, which could be for a number of reasons, including and not limited to age, gender, financial standing, education, etc (van Dijk 2006). The digital divide comes up frequently in this study, as interviews illustrated that access to ICTs for LGBTQ+ refugees is dependent on factors that in turn represent other aspects of a person's social location. Social location refers to how various factors can impact a person's lived experiences. These factors can include cultural difference, class, age, geographic location, urban vs rural setting, gender, sexuality, mental health, physical ability, etc. These factors heavily impact how queer asylum seekers and refugees may uuse ICTs. This will be discussed further in the findings and discussion chapters.

ICTs have been explored in migration research in different ways. Alonso and Oiarzabal (2010) argue that the internet has become "the new harbor" for migrants, as cyberspace provides the first point of "informational entry", which happens prior to their physical arrival. ICTs, and social media specifically, have been deemed essential tools for migrants while travelling because having internet access can reduce their vulnerabilities by making them less dependent on smugglers or trafficking (Dekker et al. 2018). ICTs have been examined particularly in studies of diaspora communities and transnational care. The concept of transnationalism refers to the growth of interconnectivity between people economically, socially, and culturally, regardless of their original nation states; these transnational connections are ever growing alongside globalization (Basch, Schiller, and Blanc 2005; Glick Schiller 2015; Lem and Barber 2010; Schiller and Frykman 2018).

Transnationalism has been essential in influencing migration studies as a whole, as this perspective highlights the way that people maintain social and cultural connections

with their home countries after migrating from one place to another, proving that the concept of "belonging" is not tied entirely tied to citizenship (Basch, Schiller, and Blanc 2005). Class, gender, race, and ethnicity, and self-identification are only some of the categories can influence one's interpretation of identity and belonging alongside citizenship (Lem and Barber 2010). Transnational connections may include economic, social, and cultural exchanges, and can have significant impacts on migrants, their families, and their broader communities in both their home countries and new residence (Vertovec 2001). Transnationalism can also take many forms, and may look different depending on the environment, country, and setting, and may even vary over time, depending on the frequency of communication and exchanges (Itzigsohn et al. 1999). Transnational flows can also reflect unequal power structures and resource flows within our global economy, typically providing further access to those from the global north, (Hayes and Pérez-Gañán 2016). While the study of transnationalism emphasizes how economies, culture, and social interactions can transcend political borders, it also identifies the impacts and importance of these political borders, and does not discount the role they play in migration and our globalized world.

Forms of care and connection can be transferred over communication technologies, such as phone, fax, e-mail, SMS texts, websites, and video cameras, or any other technologies that provide bridging of geographical distance to provide personal contact and connection (Basch, Schiller, and Blanc 2005). ICTs have also been especially helpful for migrant communities including asylum seekers and refugees, as they can, using smartphones and internet, navigate their safety by confirming information and avoiding scams or smugglers (Dekker et al. 2018). ICTs are a very important part of

creating and supporting social movements and change (Chang, Ren, and Yang 2018; Ma and Yuen 2011; Rae, Holman, and Nethery 2018), and are being harnessed by migrants and NGOs alike in order to tell stories and gain support and understanding from the international community, which can positively impact these migrant communities (Hafkin 2006; Rae, Holman, and Nethery 2018; Rodriguez 2016).

Refugee populations are also heavily reliant on information and communication technology past their initial asylum process and throughout their settlement process. Beyond connecting with family and friends from home, social media can help refugees (especially youth) create space to combine their past and future, and can help also help promote understanding about refugees and newcomers (Gifford and Wilding 2013). Canadian lifestyle is especially reliant on technology usage for accessing services, especially for transportation, banking, finding affordable rent, etc (Sabie and Ahmed 2019). As refugees do not have to submit a language proficiency test, language skills for refugees may be less advanced than for other migrants. As a result, translation services are essential to navigating in Canadian society. Applications that assist with Canadian lifestyle (such as those already mentioned, such as transportation and banking) usually do not have translations built in. As a result, refugees may have a more difficult time accessing these services, even while using relevant apps.

There are many themes of connection and transnationalism that are relevant when discussing migrant usage of ICTs, as these technologies allow for "hybridization" of culture and allows the creation of transnational space for newcomers (Veronis, Tabler, and Ahmed 2018). An example of this is in Veronis et al's (2018) study on how Syrian refugee youth in Canada use ICTs to create spaces for navigation of change and identity,

and can help youth emote a virtual space of belonging, while they may feel they belong to multiple places. This study found that social media helps young people find connections in a new homeland as it can be used to create a "virtual contact zone" where there can be learning and sharing of cultures and the youth can find connections in a new homeland (Veronis, Tabler, and Ahmed 2018). For this reason, ICTs are essential to the settlement period for newcomers. ICTs were also cited by this study to help newcomers learn hard skills such as language. Many refugee youths who were interviewed in the focus group discussion cited that Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram all were instrumental in helping them acquire English language skills (Veronis, Tabler, and Ahmed 2018).

Similarly, thave also been some introductory discussions on how LGBTQ+ communities can be positively impacted by the connections and knowledge sharing of social media and technology, especially since they can use ICTs and social media specifically to create community and navigate their identity (Hswen et al. 2018). However, there is a gap in academic literature regarding how ICTs specifically affect queer refugees and asylum seekers, and how inability to access ICTs disadvantages some asylum seekers. This thesis helps to fill this gap in the literature by specifically examining how LGBTQ+ refugees interact and use ICT, as their technological needs will be differing throughout the refugee and asylum process.

While ICTs do have impacts on aspects of migration, they do not necessarily have impacts on the motivations for migration, or the drive to migrate. In a study by Thulin and Vilhelmsen on virtual practices and migration plans, Vilhelmsen argues that the

Internet acts as a catalyst for change, and that migration is still primarily driven by needs

relative to each individual. Their study found:

> …the Internet is not a driving force per se that directly causes one to migrate; instead, it is perceived more as an enabler or supportive agent. Some also maintain that Internet use can sometimes encourage interest in moving elsewhere. Internet-based information and social media are also said to provide images of other places that evoke thoughts of migration. The opportunity to virtually visit new and unfamiliar places fuels interest, not least by reducing feelings of uncertainty and insecurity. In addition, the anticipated possibility of maintaining everyday and convenient contact with close friends and family via ICTs (e.g. email, social media, and Skype) mitigates worries of losing social contacts and disrupting one's social network when leaving one place for another (2014, 399).

When discussing ICTs and their impacts on the migration of LGBTQ+ refugees, it is

important to clarify that ICTs do not cause an LGBTQ+ person's need to move, but may

impact how this migration is facilitated.

2.7 NGOs and LGBTQ+ refugees

As mentioned above, NGOs are extremely important for SOGIE refugees coming

to Canada, as they provide support systems for these groups, and in some cases, NGOs

establish pathways for the refugees to arrive in the country. Many LGBTQ+ asylum

seekers are fleeing violence from their own community members, family, and police,

which means they often arrive to their new homes without family members or friends,

and may not want to seek out relationships with new people from their home countries

(Rodriguez 2016). In the absence of friends and family, NGOs play an incredibly crucial

role in supporting these refugees and assisting them through the legal and social

processes of settling in their new country. As a result of the private sponsorship program,

Canada has a unique perspective on this topic, and Canadian organizations are very involved in the asylum process for refugees as a result of this private sponsorship stream.

Khan (2017) argues that LGBTQ+ refugees must overcome preconceived notions about being rejected by others on the grounds of being LGBTQ+, especially when asking for help from service providers in Canada. Khan's study found that the providers they interviewed often reported that some of their clients were so used to receiving rejection because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, that they would assume they would be rejected for services in Canada as well. One forced migrant said, "I was surprised how come a straight person can help a gay. I said, 'no, it's not real. I cannot believe it. I cannot believe a straight person can accept a gay person.'" (Kahn et al. 2017, 1170). It is important to keep in mind this expectation of rejection for LGBTQ+ refugees, as it may shape the ways that refugees feel comfortable accessing help from Canadian service providers, through ICTs, or otherwise.

3.1 ICTs used

In all 11 interviews, ICTs and communications technology played a large role in the experiences of the participants. Interviewees frequently mentioned platforms, such as email, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and in some cases, WhatsApp and Signal, as well as dating sites such as Grindr and Planet Romeo. Other types of ICTs used for communication were Facetime, Skype, Slack, and Jitsi. ICTs regularly opened up streams of communication for all parties involved; however, in their interactions with refugees and asylum seekers, NGOs may have to use more unique methods of communication on ICTs, depending on what the client may or may not have access to. In a similar fashion, NGOs may use different ICTs when communicating with refugee clients than with other service providers, sponsors, or activists. This section will outline the ICTs that NGO and refugee study participants discussed during interviews.

3.1.1 Email

Email was the most frequently cited ICT platform by both refugee interviewees and both NGO employees. NGO staff in Halifax and Toronto referred to email as a huge part of their work, and that email was used constantly to communicate with refugees, other organizations, and within their own organization.

Julie, the Executive Director of the Halifax Refugee Clinic in Nova Scotia, stated that the majority of their referrals for clients come to them via email, both from local clients in Halifax, and from people internationally who inquire about how they can come to Canada as refugees (Julie, Halifax Refugee Clinic, January 29th, 2020). Similarly,

Similarly, Emma from the Rainbow Refugee Association of Nova Scotia also explained

that many of their clients reach out to them via email, which is how they usually come

into contact with them (November 12, 2019). Summer, a Program Officer from Rainbow

Railroad in Toronto, who works primarily with organizing their client intake, explained

how essential email is to her casework, as she responds to each email and turns each

email into a case file. Devon, the Program Manager at Rainbow Railroad also explained

how if possible, they try to direct any and all requests that come in on any platform to

email, because email is the most secure platform to use, and it is easy to keep track of

communications with clients, as well as maintain any documents if they are all sent in

one place (November 20th, 2019).

Rachel, a refugee interview participant, explained that she originally contacted

Rainbow Railroad via email and continued to communicate with them over email

throughout the long process of coming to Canada, asking questions regarding both

asylum and settlement (November 21, 2019). Sam, another interviewee, also explained

that he spoke with Rainbow Railroad over email until he needed to communicate with

them on a more regular, back to back basis, when they would make phone calls

(November 19, 2019).

3.1.2 Social Media: Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc.

Most NGOs I talked to use Facebook and Twitter for their day to day, quick

communication with clients, and for outreach to a public audience and other

organizations in the community. Facebook was the most frequently cited social media

platform in interviews, followed by WhatsApp, Jitsi, Twitter and Instagram. Facebook is

an online social networking website where users can instant message, post photos, content, links, and businesses can also create pages that are followed by individual users. Facebook is also known for its scandal with Cambridge Analytica, when the company sold users' personal information without consent. Facebook's cybersecurity concerns will be discussed in more detail in the Discussion chapter. WhatsApp is a messaging app for voice and text conversations and has over 1.5 billion active users worldwide, exchanging over 60 billion messages a day, according to a study from 2018 (Gil de Zúñiga, Ardèvol-Abreu, and Casero-Ripollés 2019). Jitsi is another messaging platform, that supports voice, text, and video conference messaging. Twitter is an online social networking site, which allows users to "tweet", or microblog, which allows posts to be up to 140 characters in length only. Instagram is another social networking site and app that allows users to post photos, videos, and instant message.

Facebook was cited by many interview participants as the most accessible platform to connect with. Rachel emphasized that for NGOs working with LGBTQ+ refugees, having more posts on Facebook to share their resources, as she knows there are many resources available, but it is difficult to find them. Rachel thinks that posting on Facebook would be the easiest way to learn about these resources, as many people scroll through Facebook in the morning, and could find these resources quickly (November 21, 2019). Sandra, another refugee interview participant, also said that Facebook has been helpful in the settlement process, as certain Facebook groups such as "Homes for Queers" is a place where refugees can find safe housing (November 18, 2019). Michael explained that emailing and Facebook was an essential way to connect with his friends, and his

friends actually started to notice his depression in his home country through his

Facebook:

> I would say I was lucky because I had that connection through e-mails, sending e-mails to my friends, you know, through Facebook, and my friends [who] would know my situation, they would check in. They saw that the way I was communicating via social media was so different compared to the activist who was so vibrant and talking about different issues that had gone on. I had changed, let go. (November 19, 2019).

In general, email is used as the primary and most basic form of communication for many of the respondents, as a result of its security, stability, and ability to access and store information. It is therefore generally used in the initial contact process between NGOs and claimants. However, email is not the number one choice for consistent communication and wider support for claimaints, where specific information is being passed between the two parties frequently; usually once a relationship has been established. Four out of the five NGOs interviewed in this project discussed Facebook as a primary way in which clients initially contact them.

Julie from the Halifax Refugee Clinic said that many of their clients follow them on Facebook and inquire directly through Facebook about their services and how to seek asylum or how to claim refugee status (January 29, 2020). Julie also discussed how Facebook and other social media profiles are important for LGBTQ+ refugee claimants for supporting their "verification" of identity.

Emma from Rainbow Refugee also discussed Facebook as a more accessible way for communication for refugees, as an alternative to emailing (November 12, 2019), as it is quicker to find information, accessible easily on a phone, and you can rapidly send messages to a variety of people and organizations. Soofia from The 519 also stated that Facebook is the primary platform that The 519 uses for engagement and information

dispersement purposes (December 5, 2019). In general, Facebook is a popular platform to use for communication because it is accessed by so many, and you can usually get quick replies, as the platform is so incredibly widespread.

Twitter was also a commonly cited platform from both refugee and NGO interview participants, with all five organizations utilizing the platform. Soofia from The 519 explained that Twitter is more of a tool for advocacy work, news, and media engagement (December 5, 2019). Emma from RRANS explained that she uses Twitter frequently but noted that there is a great deal of negative information on Twitter from online trolls and bullies (November 12, 2019).

Another tool used by different organizations is WhatsApp. WhatsApp is described as a helpful tool in communicating with refugee clients, as well as with activists, and other NGOs and civil society organizations both nationally and internationally, when they need to communicate more closely or rapidly. Julie, from the Halifax Refugee Clinic mentioned that WhatsApp is probably more helpful throughout the sponsorship process between a sponsorship group and refugee, in order to prepare them for arrival, when there may be a lot of questions or information (January 29, 2020).

Slack was also mentioned during interviews as a way to communicate with coworkers. In the case of interviewing Yolanda from ISANS in Halifax, their private sponsorship pilot program was all conducted on the Slack platform. The people working on this project designed the program on Slack to be a platform for private sponsors in Nova Scotia to be able to contact and ask questions of ISANS employees, as well as for sponsors to talk to each other and share information and tips on the process of private sponsorship. ISANS has set up different threads on Slack, to tailor the conversations

based on theme. Slack is also used by Rainbow Railroad between staff members as the primary way to quickly communicate within the office (November 20, 2019).

Other forms of social media that were discussed in interviews were dating apps, such as Grindr and Planet Romeo, as ways for people to reach out for help to members of the LGBTQ+ community both in their home countries and internationally. In interviews with both NGO staff and refugees, these dating apps were used to "call for help" to others, which will be discussed further below in the Accessibility section.

Signal and Jitsi are also two messaging apps that came up in conversations; they are apps that are used by activists because they are considered more secure with stronger levels of encryption. Sandra, a refugee participant, and NGO staff use the program Signal to communicate, as they feel it is safer than other programs. Sandra explained that she trusts Signal more than WhatsApp, because the encryption of messages and personal data is better (November 18, 2019). Devon explains that a useful thing about Signal is that it deletes messages after a certain period of time:

> And so with Signal, at least as far as the general activist community is concerned…it automatically it like cycles through deletions... If you don't save [messages] within a certain amount of time, it just deletes all of your conversations, which is very useful because for us, a lot of the security threats that we have are like someone's phone is stolen or taken, and they have everything we've said to them on their phone or sometimes our identification or our names or email addresses or address (November 20, 2019).

Programs are chosen to be used by NGOs and by refugees from a variety of criteria, based on the programs' accessibility and security features, and that many of the messaging tools are somewhere on the spectrum of accessibility and security, depending on the individual need.

3.1.3 Videos

Video calling programs such as Facetime or Skype were also discussed as a way for people to communicate, often if there is a literacy or language barrier. In cases where refugee clients are not able to read or write in English, or another working language that the organization uses, they use video calling to talk over the phone. Rainbow Railroad staff Devon and Summer discussed using these programs especially to verify cases. The challenge with this form of communication is that it is certainly more resource exhaustive, and it can make completing immigration forms and documents difficult (Devon and Summer, November 20, 2019).

Devon also emphasized the importance of these ICT programs being accessible on cell phones in order to send videos and to communicate quickly and efficiently to transfer information, especially with people overseas (November 20, 2019). Besides the ICT programs themselves, Devon emphasizes that devices such as cell phones are especially important to send information quickly and consistently, as you do not have to rely on a laptop or strong internet connection.

3.2 Activism, Funding, and Advocacy

One of the most important uses for ICTs, and social media in particular, that was mentioned by NGO and refugee participants, was advocacy and activism work. NGOs utilize social media technology in order to raise money for their own organizations, as ICTs have a broad span of who they can reach. Emma, the communication coordinator with Rainbow Refugee in Halifax, states that ICT technology is integral to seeking

donations that they receive, especially since they do not receive any government funding.

She explains:

> We receive donations on our website, we have the donate button, which is how we get a lot of our donations, otherwise it would be really hard, people would have to mail a cheque. I think in that respect, technology has been really helpful saving peoples' time. You can click a button and send 50 bucks. We don't really push a lot of fundraising, but every once in a while, we'll send out an email (November 12, 2019).

Similarly, neither the Halifax Refugee Clinic in Halifax nor the Rainbow Railroad in Toronto receive set funding from government and are both reliant on donations for their funding and programming. These organizations rely on outside donor funding to do the work they do. Although The 519 in Toronto is a municipal agency, it also relies heavily on donor contribution for their programming. Soofia, from The 519, explains how social media plays a role in donor engagement, and that there are other aspects to consider for this type of engagement:

> I would say social media on a daily basis plays an important role in terms of highlighting impact and showcasing stories. But again, that can't be the only thing done for relationship building… And it's a significant piece of their work as donor's stewardship, to a more personalized communications, whether it's through e-mail, direct mail or in-person relationship building… Social media is certainly a part of that and an important one at that, but not the only piece (December 5, 2019).

In this sense, ICTs are used regularly as an integral part of the functioning of these NGOs, as they do not have set funding sources, and rely on the sharing of impact stories and outreach about their work as a whole in order to support their organizations.

Aside from fundraising, many of these organizations are leaders in advocacy in LGBTQ+ issues and news, so these ICTs, specifically social media, can be used to spread awareness on current events in order to gain support. By using platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, organizations can challenge misconceptions about migration,

spread awareness of current situations, and raise support for causes. Emma, from

Rainbow Refugee, stated that their social media presence is essential for contributing to

global conversations and promoting advocacy. She explains, "Social media is a huge part

of what I do, and that can be talking about things happening in the news, what's

happening locally especially, adding commentary to other refugee sponsorship groups,

engagement with the UNHCR." (November 19th, 2019). Beyond commenting on news

stories, Emma also explained that a great deal of the posting they do on social media is to

challenge misconceptions about newcomers and refugees, LGBTQ+ communities, and

about immigration in general (November 19th, 2019). Summer, from Rainbow Railroad in

Toronto, argues that as a result of social media and technology, she can access news in

real time, allowing for quick action on arising situations. ICTs are instrumental in

spreading news, especially in situations of humanitarian crises, which can lead to quick

action. For example, when Uganda recently re-introduced a bill to impose the death

penalty for same-sex sex acts and to criminalize the "recruitment of homosexuality,"

ICTs were a key tool for activists and organizations to protest this bill. Summer from

Rainbow Railroad explains how important ICTs are in order to act quickly in times of

crisis:

> We wouldn't know about [the 'kill the gays' bill in Uganda] until the bill
> is passed. But once the news is broken, then it spreads like wildfire
> because it is social media and once it starts spreading and then people
> forms groups of advocacy support, and then the government will listen
> (Summer, November 20, 2019).

Summer also discussed the importance of the near-instant reaction time of ICTs

for the work that Rainbow Railroad does. As an organization that helps with emergency

removals of LGBTQ+ people in dangerous situations to assist them to find pathways to

asylum and safety, their work is incredibly time sensitive. She explained:

> Our work is about urgency, we have the resources and information, but it's not like you can sit and think about it. If somebody tells you today that they're dying, there's a police arrest for them, you act quickly so that you can save that person's life; so time is important. Technology helps us to zero in on reaching that person before it's too late, you know. There are many persons, unfortunately, who have been in our system, we go into the process and then they die so it's really important (Summer, November 20th, 2019).

In addition to helping react quickly to international humanitarian crises, interview

participants also argued that ICTs are extremely useful for mental/emotional health

support and resources, especially for the LGBTQ+ community. Summer, from Rainbow

Railroad, explained how influential these services and connections are.

> There is great support that people have got through social media. I mean, for every advantage, it has a disadvantage. But for many, it saves lives… People with mental health problems have someone to talk with, we have language. And somebody will be there to talk with you but for many persons in world, I mean, they can't move from the phone. So, it is something to talk about. There are so many I like to call upon them - the millennial it is a source of support for many. To talk about stuff that many persons would not talk about face to face and to join groups and to support each other. And I think for the older folks we tend to think of social media is just for kids, but it has its advantages, and it's saving a lot of peoples' lives (November 20, 2019).

Refugee participants also stated that ICTs were helpful or crucial in their own

activism. The majority of refugee participants stated that during their activism both in

their home country and after asylum, they rely on social media in order to spread

awareness of LBGT issues and news. Sam, a refugee participant who lived in Kenya,

worked in LGBT activism for three years, helping people from East Africa and elsewhere

travel to Kenya to seek asylum. When asked if social media was helpful for this work,

Sam stated,

…it was social media [that was helpful] actually, because it's happened that people out there don't know what's happening. So, there's no easy way to reach people who don't know what's happening on the ground other than social media. So for projects we used to do, of course, social media helped communication, fundraising. So we need it for everything (November 19th, 2019).

Sam explained that social media was especially important for his work by sharing information with outside sources in order to gather support financially, but to share information.

Another refugee interviewee, Sandra, also explained how impactful the activist community is on social media in the Middle East. As a LGBT and activist, she experienced the power of these communities on social media compared to the government. She said,

> [the LGBT and communist activist communities] have more impact on social media. So, no, [the government] doesn't have this impact. For example, if me or other activists in the Middle East or in Egypt or in our community, if we post about anything that happens, to us we will get many shares, a thousand shares. On the other hand, if the regime, even if the president [posts,] they will not (Sandra, November 18th, 2019).

Sandra also explains some of the risk involved with social media activism. As posts on social media have the potential for a large outreach, public posting opens up risk of bullying, harassment, and even physical threats as public posts can garner comments and posts from all over the world, from many different people. Sandra warns,

> When you are an activist, and a little bit like the famous in some of the communities and groups, it's dangerous. Even if people think it's cool, I got many threats. Like every day. And when I came here, the conservative view and right wing, you can just imagine how they are, with hate speech, a lot of a hate. So social media, this is kind of a good tool, to fight the system but on the other hand, they use their hate and bully or ostracize people" (November 18, 2019).

Bullying and harassment over LGBTQ+ issues is easy to find on social media; NGO staff also navigate this. Emma from Rainbow Refugee states that she witnesses a great deal of bullying from online "trolls" regarding LGBTQ+ people and issues, especially on twitter. Internet "trolling" is defined as when an individual deliberately attempts to create conflict and harm by creating menacing, threatening, or inflammatory comments towards a person. However, Emma says that she tries to stay away from the negativity, and focuses on posting more about positive stories and local support.

NGO staff also commented on the risk of sharing information about their clients on social media as success stories or anything that could offer information about their identity. Soofia from The 519 explains that in communications, it is difficult to know how much reach a post may have, and the spread of identity and information can pose risks to the client or their family in some cases, as they are essentially outing themselves (December 5, 2019).

Many refugee clients become involved in LGBTQ activism once they arrive in Canada; and in doing so, can offer "proof" of their queer identity during their refugee status hearings. This will be further explained in the verification section.

3.3 Accessibility

Both refugees and NGO staff said that ICTs open up a variety of avenues for sharing and accessing information by providing a wealth of information available online, and quick access to news, resources, and connection to others.

ICTs enable a great amount of access to information for those who use them. For NGOs, many of them would be unable to do the work that they do without the help of information and communications technology, especially internet usage. As Yolanda from ISANS explains, having their Slack program for private sponsors opened up a great deal of accessibility for asking questions and having conversations pertaining to private sponsorship. She explains, "I think the biggest benefit is that you can use it on a browser, you can also use it on a phone app, it looks pretty much the same, so you can get notifications and ask questions, the idea is that you can get instant support" (Yolanda, November 4, 2019).

Rainbow Railroad, Rainbow Refugee, and The 519 also get requests from LGBTQ+ people all over the world, on all different types of ICT platforms, asking for help and advice about their situations. Many interviews with NGO employees also identified that these messages are often sent out on a massive scale, to as many organizations or as possible.

A lot of the "access" that ICTs bring to LGBTQ+ individuals is the opportunity to reach out and ask for help, as well as to look for information regarding their options. Four out of five NGOs interviewed discussed the large number of requests for help they get on a daily basis, the fifth organization being ISANS, where the topic was not discussed, as we only focused the interview on their Slack program for private sponsors. And many organizations that communicate with LGBTQ+ people internationally would not be able to have this level of communication, without ICTs.

In addition to reaching out to organizations that work with LGBTQ+ refugees, messages are sometimes sent to individuals, asking for help. Meryl, from Rainbow

Railroad, discussed a story about how her friend was using the dating app Grindr, and came across a message one day that said "I'm in Syria. I need help." Meryl's friend continued chatting with this person, and helped them get into contact with Rainbow Railroad and eventually come to Canada as a refugee. She said that this person was able to change his IP address, so that it looked like he was located in Toronto, and then sent out a massive number of calls for help to people on the app (Meryl, November 20, 2020). From these accounts, it is interesting to see how ICTs have impacted the way many people ask for help, as social media, email, and even dating sites provide LGBTQ+ people the chance to reach out to allies or allied organizations who may be able to assist with their situation.

While ICTs open up a great deal of access for LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers by the increased access of information and access to contacts for organizations and services worldwide, there are many barriers to this access as well. At the same time, while ICTs open up streams of access for finding resources, in Canada, these technologies are often a requirement to find resources.

3.3.1 Technological Literacy Barriers

There are many organizations offering services to LGBTQ+ refugees in Canada, and many for resources available for these refugees, but navigating these resources can be incredibly complex and requires a certain level of literacy and technological proficiency. For example, one refugee participant, Sam, discussed how having a certain level of technological and language-based literacy is important for finding resources, but also for maintaining one's mental health:

I haven't faced any significant difficulties in terms of [accessing] organizations and providers. Yeah, but think people who get a little bit behind with technology, might… So, you have to be up to date with the technology, so if you're illiterate or something, I know those folks struggle a lot. Actually, I have a friend who's been here for like two years, he doesn't know what Etransfer is and that's an everyday thing. So, his point was that sometimes he feels inferior. Because someone would be like, how come you don't know that thing? So you find yourself feeling down (November 19, 2019).

Sam explains how having lower literacy skills, whether in terms of technology or language, affects a refugee's feelings of inferiority in Canada. Michael, another refugee participant, explains, that the need to have a level of technological competency is especially complicated for refugees who have never developed these skills:

You have to have at least a higher level of intelligence when it comes to online using gadgets and exploring everything online… But then there are the refugees who first and foremost they are learning the language. Secondly, they come from places whereby they never have been set in front of a computer… So, the transition becomes so difficult for them, you know where that if they can't use a computer. How would they find what you need to know or how do they find the services that they need? (Michael, November 19, 2019).

Michael explains that even with his previous experience with computers, he struggled immensely with the resources he needed, such as the subway system and GPS navigation, and relied on help from friends in order to gain familiarity with these tools. Even with a level of technological literacy, some ICTs are complex and difficult to use making them less accessible for those refugees who have not speak English or French, read or write well in those lanugaes, or have familiarity with computers. Furthermore, some of the resources within ICTs are inaccessible and overly complex. Julie from the Halifax Refugee Clinic mentioned the IRCC website, which she finds difficult to navigate, even after working through it regularly for over ten years of experience. She says, "here is the IRCC website, but that is just woeful… like I can barely understand it. Literally what I've

spent my days doing for over a decade. And I know it's not just me. I guess my first

thought is it would be good to have some pretty plain language resources available…”

(Julie, January 29th, 2020). Julie also noted that it would be difficult to make the site very

accessible because of how many options for immigration streams there are available, but

she says that the resources need to be clearer.

ICTs are not always accessible for the people helping refugees either. Yolanda,

for example, explains that some of the sponsors she works with through ISANS are

retired, and do not have the same level of interest or computer skills needed to access the

platform ISANS set up on Slack:

> Another challenge we've had with the people that maybe don't have the
> knowledge when it comes to using digital platforms [is with the] internet.
> We do have a lot of sponsors who are retired volunteers, so they are
> people that are not interested in anything digital, so that' been a challenge
> as well. And some people they come if they were refugees they lived in
> refugee camps, they didn't have access to internet, so sometimes they do
> not have the knowledge as well. Also, Slack is a newer platform, so
> sometimes people do have the digital knowledge, but they aren't familiar
> with it, so they don't want to give it a try because of that (Yolanda,
> November 4, 2019).

Older generations having difficulties with ICTs is a frequently cited challenge in current

literature on ICTs, and is often referred to as "the digital divide", since there is a certain

level of technological literacy required in order to access the benefits of these

technologies, otherwise these ICTs can actually isolate those without these literacy skills

and keep them from accessing benefits such as benefit programs (Gifford, Wilding 2013).

Across the board, there are many who do not have the access to ICT platforms,

regardless of what stage they are in in the asylum process. Along similar lines, Devon

emphasized the challenges for clients who may not have high digital literacy skills with

filling out resettlement forms for the UNHCR or the Canadian government:

If we have to write applications for resettlement, either to the UNHCR or to the Canadian government or to any other government on behalf of people as supports for people, it is an absolute nightmare. It would take me, if I was helping you fill out your application, it would probably take us three hours to sit down and go through the whole thing and get you to answer the questions properly and for me to help me fill it out and then to get all the stuff. And if we could do that sitting together, it probably takes three hours. If we were on the phone or on WhatsApp, whatever with your literacy in both categories [digital and linguistic], we would probably be able to do it within five [hours]. It's just like takes longer when you're online, then we add in that this person has never filled out an online form. They don't have Adobe on their computer. They don't have any of these documents backed up. Everything is on their phone, saved half of their documents, they don't like they don't even know how to upload a document. So, then we're extending eons of time coaching them online (Devon, November 20, 2019).

When working with asylum claimants, being able to respond quickly is crucial. It is important that these cases are handled expeditiously; claimants' unfamiliarity with technology or the complexity of the technology can slow the process immensely.

Furthermore, certain ICT based programs are just not accessible for those fleeing from danger. As Devon from Rainbow Railroad explains below, an update from Canadian government (Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada) requires refugee applicants to submit an application on a more secure system, but this program is expensive to download, can only be used on a computer, and also requires a level of technological literacy to use properly, making it inaccessible for many people. Devon argues that because of the Canadian government's increased need for security in their applications, they have blocked applications and access for the people who need help the most, instead of making the process possible from a refugee camp. Devon argues that the securitization of this application process is really only to benefit the government employee reading the application, rather than the applicant. As a result, there is increased

pressure on NGOs and other service providers to make up for this gap in accessibility. (Devon, November 20, 2019).

3.3.2 Language Accessibility

One of the most common accessibility obstacles mentioned by interview participants was the lack of language accessibility within ICTs. Often ICTs do not have robust translation services, and the use of ICTs and technology requires a certain level of written literacy capacity. Summer from Rainbow Railroad explains that reaching Rainbow Railroad by email is not the most accessible process for everyone.

> So, our main source of contact is through email. It kind of puts some people at a disadvantage because not many persons who are in situations of need our help can read or write. It's all e-mail. So they're forced to do e-mail and find a lot of times it's because they don't know how to express themselves, so what we have done is once you start over the phone and talk with people to WhatsApp. We do interviews to get a feel of the story. To tell it versus write. Or, voice note it so that you can help person (Summer, November 20, 2019).

Summer states that by using voice notes, people are not required to write or read in English, however, this is a longer process of communicating. Soofia from The 519 also explained how language barriers are one of the biggest concerns when discussing ICT based communications from The 519.

> It's sort of paradoxical that even though social media and digital technology have improved access, but it can also be a barrier, especially when we think in the context of language, you know, auto translations, are poor, we have so many languages are not just all the world in Toronto itself. And so, I feel it's still a barrier even I mean, you know, not just French and English, but how are we communicating to the diverse communities we serve. We shouldn't assume… Translation services are not always possible for certain resources. We do translate select resources into languages that our program participants speak. But on a daily basis,

especially for social media, that's not possible for us. (Soofia, December 5, 2019).

Soofia explains how with improved access from ICTs, other barriers emerge, such as language. Because of this, The 519 consistently tries to respond to these challenges in whatever way they can, but as Soofia notes, making their resources fully accessible to all languages is not possible.

3.3.3 Financial and Resource Access

In addition to having strong literacy both technological and language, the use of ICTs requires a certain level of access to resources. Financial and resources barriers are another important reason why ICTs are not universally accessible. There are two main types of resources needed to utilize technology. The first is the physical technology device, such as cell phones, laptops, computers, etc. That physical piece of technology is obviously crucial to the use of any ICTs. These devices can be expensive to purchase and are sometimes unattainable. The second type is the software, programming, platforms, apps, data plans, etc., which make up the ICTs.

Many refugees, and especially those in refugee camps, or fleeing from their countries, may not have access to cell phones, computers, or other technology such as the internet in order to use these ICT platforms in the first place, even if they have the technological and language literacy to use these ICTs. Cell phones are more widespread than other forms of technology, and are usually far less expensive, so refugee claimants may be much more likely to have only a cell phone, and not any other form of technology. Having a cell phone, especially a smart phone with a data plan, opens access

to social media and other forms of communication, however, there are certain softwares and programs that are only able to be used on a computer.

As Summer from Rainbow Railroad explains, it is important to realize even with all the work that her organization is doing, there are those claimants who simply do not have access to their services because of a lack of financial or resource privilege. (Summer, November 20, 2019).

Furthermore, as men usually have greater financial resources and the language skills to access to ICTs, they are more likely to have the resources to reach out for help, according to staff at Rainbow Railroad. This does not mean that there are not women identified LGBTQ+ refugees in need of help, but simply that they cannot access the same resources to reach out for help as cis gendered gay men may be able to. Devon also explained how cis gendered gay men also have the financial resources necessary in order to acquire the technology they need to reach out:

> The vast majority of the people that we work with are cis gendered gay men, mostly, we think, at least, because of their resources and literacy available to like access assistance. And so that's a big thing when it comes to talking with us is literacy and access to information like access to information or access to actual technology to do that or the money to buy the data card in order to do that. So yeah, but we do assist like a very large number of lesbians and trans women and men and then like a much lesser population of bi pan, Queer, unidentified and non-binary (November 20, 2019).

Devon notes that it is important to recognize the structural barriers that are in place that impact who does and does not have access to ICTs, and therefore is able to contact their organization for help.

These statements echo current research on ICT accessibility, as this research often focuses on the financial requirements required in order to benefit from ICTs and to

participate in digital spaces, such as cost of devices. As Devon explains, financial access

is an important part of accessing ICT technology, and financial access can be impacted

by other intersections of privledge, including gender.

3.4 Security

Another recurrent topic that was raised by nine interviewees was the issue of online

security and the security of personal information. When the interviews focused on the use

of ICTs in communication between NGOs and refugees, conversations mainly centered

around cybersecurity. Cybersecurity is about the reduction of risk to persons and ICTs

systems involved. ICT cybersecurity is not a topic discussed in literature surrounding

LGBTQ+ refugee relations with NGOs, or discussed independently within research on

LGBTQ+ refugees or about organizations who work with these groups. However, I found

that cybersecurity was a key concern and major element of working with ICTs for NGOs

and refugees.

3.4.1 Cybersecurity Learning Curve

The NGO staff interviewed expressed how important ICTs were in the basic

functioning of their organizations. Rainbow Railroad in Toronto takes extra cyber

security precautions in their communications with international clients. Their

communications with clients often need to be very private as they try to help the client

relocate away from danger. Devon, the program manager of Rainbow Railroad, states

that as a result of their reliance on technology to communicate with clients all over the

world while being located in Toronto, they have had to learn and adjust to technology,

and to the subsequent risks that arise. ICT literacy and digital knowledge is quickly

becoming an essential part of working with LGBTQ+ refugees, as with many other

professions.

Another challenge for NGOs when dealing with ICTs and social media is how fast

platforms change, adapt, and are introduced. This not only makes it difficult to learn, but

also it is challenging to understand the security levels of each platform when they are

consistently changing. Meryl, from Rainbow Railroad, says that she learns about the

cybersecurity risks on new platforms and technology on the website Reddit. She says:

> I've been going down deep, dark holes on Reddit. You can Google what
> messaging tools Edward Snowden uses; people that face high risk to their own
> persons and what tools they would be using. It's really interesting. But definitely
> as someone who knows nothing about Internet technology, it's a big learning
> curve (Meryl, November 20, 2019).

The website Reddit is a collection of forums and questions where people can discuss

news and information. Reddit has even branded itself as "the front page of the internet",

as it highlights the latest news and discussions (Sjoberg 2013) Users can comment and

add to threads or "subreddits" on certain topics. While Reddit is very accessible, (anyone

with an account can contribute to threads) it is also not heavily moderated, so there is the

risk of outdated and misinformation being spread, and as users can be anonymous, there

may be less incentive for users to censor their language, which can lead to cyberbullying

and hate speech (Buyukozturk, Gaulden, and Dowd-Arrow 2018; Leung 2013). Learning

information on Reddit points to the fact that there currently are no governing bodies

available that can quickly report on how reliable these ICT platforms are for

communication.

Program Manager at Rainbow Railroad, Devon Matthews, also emphasized that it is difficult to find and determine what information to trust when researching cybersecurity techniques, specifically with bigger companies. She says,

> It's just difficult to actually glean what information is legitimate or not… governments aren't going to tell people what they're doing in terms of monitoring, and Apple is not going to tell you what they're selling to who. We are basing our decisions on a whole lot of assumptions, everything from activist Reddit to people who we're meeting at conferences who are saying 'okay, here is the best practice right now'. But those things shift so fast. Then there's a hack, if that happens, then it's like, 'OK, now we're all moving to this other platform' then obviously once they know that everyone's on the other platform, it's kind of a constant game (Devon, November 20, 2019).

Beyond finding information on cybersecurity techniques for maintaining safety of their own clients and organizations' information, Devon explains how it is a challenge to figure out what information is trustworthy, as well as keeping up to date with changes and adaptations in this field. There is a lot of information sharing between organizations working with ICTs in order to find solutions for secure ways to communicate. While there may be many different organizations which are currently struggling with keeping their information secure, this is a topic that is especially important for organizations like Rainbow Railroad, as they work with incredibly vulnerable populations, who are often in situations of emergency.

The speed at which cybersecurity information changes and adapts could be a potential reason why there is a lack literature examining this. As cybersecurity is still so new, and the challenges and adaptations change so quickly, this could result in its absence from academic literature, similarly to how it is difficult for laws and restrictions to be put on cybersecurity in the first place.

Privacy and security on social media were strong concerns among interviewees. Emma, the communications coordinator at Rainbow Refugee Association of Nova Scotia, says that one of her biggest challenges in working with ICTs is protecting people's privacy when sharing stories or photos in order to protect the safety of refugees and of their families. She says, the struggle is "trying to maintain people's privacy. They've left for a reason; is their family back home in danger [by posting]? Any time they put pictures online, or any printing material, we always ask permission before we do that. Just because we never know" (Emma, November 12, 2019). The difficult part is that it is not easy to anticipate how much traction or spread a post may receive, and even hiding identifiers (such as names, ages, and home countries) of these individuals may not completely shield them from being identified either in Canada or in their home communities.

Soofia from The 519 in Toronto also brought up the challenge of The 519 being a public city agency, which has obligations under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, meaning that the majority of their work is classified as public property. In this field where people are sometimes desperate for help, they may reach out to The 519 by posting on their social media and sharing very private and personal information in order to get their story across. She says that all types of information are shared on these public platforms, which could lead to privacy risks:

> So there is a risk of privacy if you're posting your address on our wall. This sometimes happens or tweeting at us. So that's a big consideration for us. The maximum we can do is train our staff and also have the relevant information in our on our profile that whatever you post here can be a public record. So please don't share personal information on this public forum. Don't share any personal information that you might not need. Don't send us information about your address, SIN or other identifiable information on social media. (Soofia, December 5, 2019).

There is a risk that that sensitive information could be made public, with exceptions to private information. She says that legal protections have not yet evolved to adapt to these kinds of situations, so there it is a challenge for organizations working with ICTs to maintain people's security when working as a city agency. It is difficult for NGOs and non-profit organizations to navigate their communications platforms while policies regarding privacy and security are still emerging, and the risks are high for the refugees involved if that privacy is broken, both for their own personal safety in their new communities and their communities at home, and for their family's protection and privacy. This puts an enormous amount of pressure on the NGOs involved to make sure they do their due diligence to protect their clients as privacy protection laws evolve.

Furthermore, while it wasn't explicitly discussed in interviews, security concerns that were discussed throughout the interviews relate to the potential for government surveillance using ICTs, especially social media platforms. In places where LGBTQ+ identity is criminalized, sexuality can be used in addition to other factors as an excuse for repressive governments to surveil ICT users through these platforms. In this sense, digital footprints of LGBTQ+ people on ICT platforms can have very dangerous risks, if governments decide to use these technologies to monitor citizen's lives.

3.4.2 Safety and Cyberbullying

Many refugee participants explained some of the safety risks that they experienced as a result of cybersecurity risks. Sam discussed how when he was trying to leave Kenya, he needed to find other forms of communication, as he suspected that his

phone was being tracked. He says that communicating with organizations in Canada became difficult, as they were not sure how secure his devices were. In trying to leave Kenya, Sam was attacked, and his flight boarding passes inexplicably denied multiple times. Sam stated, "We had to find other means of communication that were more secure. Because in that time… I suspect our phones were being tracked, because a lot of incidents happened, and we thought 'how did this person know that I'm here?'" (November 19, 2019).

The tracking, stealing, losing, and hacking of phones is also a cybersecurity issue, and as Sam experienced, this can be very dangerous in situations where LGBTQ people are using ICTs, specifically on cell phones in efforts to escape from danger.

Sam also discussed how in Kenya, using LGBT dating sites was also a risk because the site was sometimes used by groups to lure LGBT people and assault them.

> At home in Kenya [dating sites] are used to exploit people; trick questions, go to the site, sign up, schedule meetings. You find a group of five, 10 people in the house. They beat you up… you never know who's on the other end. You can never be sure of the intentions of the person you are talking to. Some can be nice, as nice as they can just to get your information. I don't know if there's anything that can be done about that. So, you only talk and share with people you have already met. Because you're afraid of strangers (Sam, November 19, 2019).

Sam discusses how ICT platforms such as dating sites are used by people to trick and lure LGBTQ+ people into revealing their identities or other identifying information about themselves, in order to physically harass or attack that person. This issue of dating sites and apps being dangerous appears in some LGBTQ+ literature on ICT governance and LGBTQ+ people. DeNardis and Hackle (2016) explain how dating apps that use location services actually have posed serious threats to those who use them, such as in Egypt when police used Grindr's location services to locate LGBTQ+ people, by "triangulating"

to find their exact location, which became such a large issue that Grindr made a statement (DeNardis and Hackl 2016). As these dating apps are created to connect and support LGBTQ+ people in a safe way, it is unsettleing that these digital spaces are used as a tool by those who intend to harm them.

Security of ICT applications or apps was another common topic that came up when discussing cybersecurity. Sandra explained how her community would use the app Signal, as it was the most secure messaging app available, with end to end encryption, so that the application cannot be hacked or accessed by others (Sandra, November 18, 2019). Devon, the program manager at Rainbow Railroad, also mentioned how important cybersecurity is for the work that their organization does. Using platforms like Signal or Jitsi, which cycle through deletions, or do not need accounts in order to be used, are more secure for working with activists, as well as with vulnerable people such as LGBTQ+ asylum seekers who are in danger (Devon, November 20, 2019). As Devon explains, the security of platforms is greatly important to the work that they do, however, security often comes with a caveat to accessibility, as the most accessible an application, program, or device may be, there could be increased security risks as a result.

Furthermore, it is not only the applications used that are the cause for security risks, as being in possession of a physical device like a cell phone is also a risk. As Devon explains, they have had cases when a client's phone was lost or stolen, which raised concerns about client safety and privacy of information for both the client and the NGO with which the client had been communicating:

> …a lot of the security threats that we have are like someone's phone is
> stolen or taken, and they have everything we've said to them on their
> phone or sometimes our identification or our names or email addresses or
> address. And so, we're really concerned and we're trying to figure out a

software such as a remote wipe for our agents' phones in other countries because if they're kidnaped or jailed or just go MIA… then it's too much of a risk. We had a situation where an agent that I hired was working with in Tanzania right after the last crackdown, he had everything of mine personally because he had to give them my ID at one point to verify documents to the immigration authorities. He had all of our office information, everything on his phone. And then he was arrested and detained and they took his phone. And then they were talking to me as if they were him for three days. So, then I was feeding that information because I thought it was him and it was just a cop on the other end of it in Tanzania. And they're taking everything. And then they ended up like interrogating him about us and getting our information (Devon, November 20, 2019).

As Devon explains, using ICTs and digital technology has risks that information can be lost or fall into the wrong hands, especially if it is kept all on one device or application. While cell phones can offer a level of accessibility and convenience for communicating, especially internationally, the use of these technologies comes with a certain level of cybersecurity risk, as the information that is shared on the devices can be lost either as a result of the device being lost or stolen, but also the information being leaked through hacking or insecure applications and data security policies.

Another aspect of security and safety challenges as a result of ICT usage is the presence of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is defined as a form of bullying or harassment that uses electronic means and in online spaces, such as on social media (Smith et al. 2008). Sandra, a refugee interview respondent, describes how, as an activist in the LGBTQ community, she has experienced cyberbullying both from her home community and even today, living in Canada. She said that while social media is used to empower people, it can also be used to spread hate and harassment.

Yes, when you are an activist, and a little bit like the famous in some of the communities and groups for it's dangerous. Even if people think it's cool, I got many threats. Even when I was in Egypt. Like every day. And

when I came here, [the] conservative view and right wing, you can just imagine how they are, with hate speech, a lot of a hate. So social media, this kind of a good tool, to fight the system but on the other hand, they use their hate and bully or ostracize people (Sandra, November 18, 2019).

Sharing stories online can serve to be empowering, but it can also lead to risk for LGBTQ+ people involved. While there is some literature on how LGBTQ+ people experience risks on these apps, current literature does not factor in how these risks impact refugees and asylum seekers.

3.5 Verification process

Another aspect of ICTs that are specific to LGBTQ+ refugees and Canadian NGOs was the use of ICTs and specifically social media throughout the verification process. ICTs are also used as a tool through the verification process of SOGI refugees in Canada, as refugee claimants may show proof of their LGBTQ+ identity by showing online or recorded "proof" of their identity through the use of saved text or messaging conversations with romantic partners, friends who know their identity, or even threats against them due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Once they arrive in Canada, many SOGI refugee claimants also volunteer at organizations that support LGBTQ+ rights or with the organizations that support them. They can submit photos of their support for these organizations as well as for LGBTQ+ rights at pride, volunteering at events, etc., and use these photos as evidence at their refugee hearing. Julie, the Executive Director of the Halifax Refugee Clinic, works with many refugee claimants to help them find asylum and safety, and the organization works regularly with SOGI claimants to help them with this process. Julie states that social

media plays a big role in many refugees claims today, but she believes the requirement

for social media evidence is disproportionately required for SOGI refugee claims, as

there can be information used to "certify" a person's sexual orientation or gender identity,

in the absence of other verifying documents (Julie, January 29th, 2020). Julie discussed

how as the Halifax Refugee Clinic provides legal support through volunteer lawyers and

staff, they must ask very invasive questions to their clients. She explained that while

these questions are invasive, they are necessary to present their case and to show "proof"

of their claim, as there is no document that certifies sexual orientation or gender identity:

> [There have been] really intrusive questions we've had before in the hearings. But still, having said that, it's still up to the claimant to establish certain facts and to put forward everything that they can to be credible and to show that they meet the definition. And that's what we do here. Representation with volunteer lawyers from the community and in house staff. And so social media is huge on that. Like you could have someone come in today and I would tell them I need - like it's really intrusive - but like, I need it like all of your Grindr conversations. Every conversation you had with a lover, and, you know, maybe your profile, your Facebook profile, your Instagram profile shows you with people or has messaging on it. That's important. Certainly dating apps. That's something that I always disclose to show. Even membership and other kind of queer organizations, you know, we've submitted photos of people on the Facebook page of like menswear or something like that before. Or maybe a photo somebody posted of pride. Like all of those things or social medias is really kind of in the absence of other documents certifying your sexual orientation really important in showing a person's sexual orientation or gender identity expression. So that would be where it figures really prominently. I can't think of a single claim where we haven't been able to harvest at least something. So, whether it's even people threatening you on social media. And social media plays a big part in many refugees claims right now (Julie, January 29th, 2020).

Julie commented on how intrusive some of the questions in the refugee hearings can

be for LGBTQ+ claimants, but also notes that in place of other evidence of their

situation, they must prove that they fit the definition of a refugee, which is why social

media "evidence" is often used.

　　Soofia, from the 519 also commented on how providing "proof" of identity using

social media or other forms of online support is not an essential requirement for SOGI

refugee claimants, however it is often used as it can be helpful to their cases, and it is a

large part of how they use social media, as being active and having records of support on

these platforms are often used to provide support to their claim. She identifies that this is

a complex process, especially for LGBTQ+ people who may not be comfortable publicly

sharing their identity. Julie explains further:

> There is an additional layer when they have to prove the legitimacy of
> their claim based on sexual orientation or gender identity. You have to
> prove that they're queer or trans and often more often than not, a lot of
> these folks come from countries where they couldn't live an out life or
> even an underground life just for safety. Many of them never even said it
> out loud that I'm a lesbian or I'm gay. They've never had partners or any
> documentation of a relationship. If they were attacked or if there's any
> violence, there's no police reports because often the police are often
> involved in that violence. So, proving their sexual orientation and gender
> identity is an additional complexity for LGBTQ refugee claimants.
> (Soofia, December 5th, 2019).

Julie from the Halifax Refugee Clinic also echoed these concerns of how being "out and

proud" on social media is not always possible for SOGIE claimants, and this pressure to

be out on social media is a hard thing to negotiate, especially when it means balancing

personal safety with acceptance in one's family or culture, religion, or other groups.

> Something that comes up a lot in our representation and our support and
> advocacy for LGBTQ plus refugee claimants for refugee persons status, is
> this notion that you have to be or you should be "proud and out". Because
> it's a lot more complicated for people than that. You know, it means
> maybe putting your family in danger, means maybe losing your family.
> Maybe you want to negotiate those things differently. It means maybe
> losing your community, your religious community or ethnic community.
> And so that makes it more difficult to prove - if you're not out on social

media, if you're not out sure there are pictures of you at pride… it's quite a bit more difficult to prove to the refugee board as well. But it's really something that a lot of our clients deal with in different ways, some people are just like, OK, cutting ties. And I'm here. I'm here. I'm queer. And that's it. So, some people live their sexual orientation differently and more discretely (Julie, January 29th, 2020).

Summer, a program officer for Rainbow Railroad in Toronto goes through a similar type of verification process internally at their organization when people reach out for help. Social media support can be important for verifying claims, especially in places where there are no LGBTQ+ organizations to participate in. Further, Summer clarified that one of the reasons why social media is used as a tool to verify LGBTQ+ identity is that associating with LGBTQ+ groups can be dangerous, so people who are not LGBTQ+ would not associate with these groups.

She explains:

Another creative way that we use is using social media organizations say, for instance, in sub-Saharan Africa, there are no LGBTQ organizations out there on the ground. So, what they do is to create social media support. One of the things that we do, what I do is to use those routes to verify, you know. I've been a member of this school. How long can you say that you have? Because if you're not LGBTQ identifying you're not going to associate yourself, with a group that is supporting LGBTQ [people]. This means that if you're out, that means homelessness, or death or imprisonment, you do not want to associate with something that would be a disadvantage to you. I use that online presence to help verify people who are LGBTQ. Social media, for the work that we do, is the most important thing. (November 20th, 2019).

On a related issue, Soofia described how this pressure from the asylum process to prove identity can have further consequences for refugees after their hearing, and the pressure on NGO staff who circulate this information to protect refugee clients, as well as to inform them of the security risks that exist when sharing these images and stories. It is a difficult line to walk, and as Soofia described, it is still a decision that the refugee must make for themselves (Soofia, December 5, 2019).

The information gathered from interviews reflected much of what the current literature discusses about the verification process in Canada for SOGIE asylum seekers. The research on this topic is robust, particularly around the impacts of this verification process. There is less of a focus, however, on the role of social media in this verification process, which is what I focused on in my interviews. The verification process discussed in my interviews also relates directly to the theoretical framework of QLT, as it highlights the requirements of queer people to fit certain requirements in order to navigate throughout the legal process of refugee confirmation.

<u>Chapter 4: Discussion</u>

The interviews clearly demonstrate that ICTs are essential for both LGBTQ+ refugees as well as Canadian NGOs who work with these groups at all stages of the asylum process, from the initial call for help to the verification process in status hearings in Canada. I argue that while ICTs are essential for communication, the obstacles in accessing these tools need to be examined. This discussion section will outline and re-emhasize some of the major themes that emerged from the interviews. These themes are broken down as: ICT importance for both groups, security and accessibility dilemmas, accessibility concerns, ICT adaptation and legal restrictions, ICTs and asylum (verification and calls for help), and ICTs impact on support and resources.

<u>4.1 ICT Importance</u>

ICTs are essential for both NGO and refugee interview participants, especially for quick communication and information dissemination. This is especially helpful for finding and contact resources, as well as spreading awareness on LGBTQ+ news and activism. ICTs also are essential because of their variety in types of use. In the interviews as a whole, a total of number of 12 different platforms were cited by participants. In general, email was discussed as the primary and most basic form of communication for many of the respondents, due to its security, stability, and ability to access and store information. At the same time, however, email was not the first choice of ICT for consistent communication. The interviews demonstrate that there is a variety of services being used for different reasons. In other words, refugees and service providers may use a few different platforms to communicate with each other, rather than just relying on one.

While there is variety in the number of platforms, there is no single platform that is perfectly suited to communication between refugees, sponsors, and service providers.

Similarly, LGBTQ+ support and informational messages are spread through a variety of platforms, as previously discussed in the Activism section, NGOs can use ICTs to reach potential donors thorugh multiple platforms including email, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, in order to garner support for their organizations. As there are many platforms to choose from, posting on a variety of platforms has the potential to reach broader audiences. Similarly, LGBTQ+ refugees can use a variety of ICT platforms in order to reach out to many different resources.

While there is academic literature exploring the uses of social media and ICTs, it does not often identify or examine individual platforms, with the exception of Facebook. Facebook is discussed at length in some research, but newer platforms such as WhatsApp, Signal, and Jitsi are not. My research was unique in that it asked about all types of ICTs used by both refugee and NGO participants, instead of focusing on a predetermined platform or device.

While ICTs are clearly a vital mode of communication for interviewees, they do not replace in person communication, but instead complement in-person interactions. For example, in the case of ISANS, Yolanda explains how for their organization, the Slack sponsorship program is helpful as a complement to their regular services, but not instead of them. These findings are similar to current research on ICT use, which often argues that social media does not necessarily provide substitutes for other, more traditional types of communication such as in person conversations, or phone calls, but can be complementary to them, especially for migrants (Dekker et al. 2018).

While the importance of ICTs are discussed in the research on LGBTQ+ refugees and organizations, the variety of platforms and uses for these ICTs are not discussed at length. While some research reflects how NGOs utilize social media to garner support (Rodriguez 2016), current literature does not examine how LGBTQ+ refugees use this technology, nor the different platforms that they use.

4.2 Security and the Accessibility Dilemma

The balance between security and accessibility came up regularly in the interviews, particularly for the NGO staff interviewed. As security measures for protecting personal information and data of ICT users increase, there is an accompanying decrease in accessibility for refugees to access that platform. As security increases, this typically means that ICT users may experience barriers to accessing these platforms, either as they may need more complex technology, either in hardware or software. These programs can be costly, and claimants may not have the technological literacy (or language skills) to use them effectively. Rainbow Railroad commented on aspects of security and accessibility through the work that they do, communicating with people in danger. Their conversations need to be secure, on the one hand, and available through accessible technology on the other. Devon emphasized how at times the NGO service providers were required to work on less secure platforms in order to access individuals who may not have the ability to use more secure platforms. She says,

> "we get a lot of people requesting help from us through Facebook, we don't process casework through Facebook because it's not secure, so any time someone requests help, we just send them like a canvas sponsor. That's like, 'thank you for contacting us, we don't do this work over Facebook, send us an email.' Occasionally we have to use Facebook for casework because it's the only thing that someone will have access to. So a

lot of our clients don't have email addresses or like specifically in the Caribbean" (Devon, November 20, 2019).

Devon explains how as an organization, they need to be flexible in order to make sure that people who need help still can contact them, even if this means they sometimes need to use less secure platforms such as Facebook. These decisions are a calculation of risk between what is going to get the person to safety, and how to protect their personal information in the best possible way.

In several interviews, both NGO staff and refugees commented on the accessibility of Facebook. Rachel commented that Facebook is the first platform that people look at scrolling on their phones in the morning, so she argued that Facebook is the best place to put resources (Rachel, November 21, 2019). Facebook does not require a fee to set up an account and is free to use to connect with others. This makes it much more financially accessible, compared to other platforms that require fees or use on a computer instead of a phone. With over 2 billion active users monthly it is one of the platforms that provides the broadest reach to the public (Fatehkia, Kashyap, and Weber 2018). That being said, Facebook has faced criticism or a number of issues, the most noteworthy of which as the Cambridge Analytica scandal of 2018, when Facebook passed user information for over 50 million users to Cambridge Analytica, for the use of political profiling for advertising (Isaak and Hanna 2018). Some of the information leaked in this breach of privacy included names, dates of birth, city location, friends list, and messages. Before the Cambridge Analytica data scandal, Facebook had long been criticized in ICT literature in terms of privacy concerns. A study from 2006 examining "imagined communities" within social media platforms, identified that Facebook is

noteworthy for the vast membership it has, and how easily it is to seek out a user's personal data, even if the person looking for this information does not have their own Facebook account (Acquisti and Gross 2006).

For organizations that work to protect LGBTQ+ refugees, the use of Facebook is a balancing act of weighing the benefits of its user friendliness and wide reach with the risks of privacy breaches and personal data collection. For vulnerable populations such as LGBTQ+ refugees, it is of the utmost importance that their information is protected, especially during the asylum process. This requires a balance and calculated risk assessment, if clients are not able to use platforms other than Facebook.

The dilemma of security versus accessibility was also raised in an interview in relation to the Canadian government form overhaul. As the Canadian government tightens security on their application, these measures simultaneously exclude those who do not have financial access to the program. To use this program, the claimant must pay for the program, have access to a computer, and must be able to read and write in English or French. This begs the question, who is the increased security measures of this application form for? By Devon's description, this does not secure the wellbeing or information of refugee applicants as much as it tailors the form submission process for the government officials reading the form. As Devon explains, this change in application process puts undue pressure on the NGO sector, lawyers, and other professionals working directly with refugees, as they are essential for helping claimants through this lengthy procedure. While these policies impact all refugees, it is important to note how they impact especially vulnerable populations such as SOGIE asylum seekers, who are often in very sensitive situations with a high risk of danger in their current environments.

Queer legal theory argues that legal processes, built on the basis of heteronormativity, tend to overlook, exclude, and even, in some cases, exacerbate injustice for sexual minorities (Valdes 1997). While this change of ICT requirements for refuge applications impacts all refugees hoping to stay in Canada, particularly those who have limited financial or technological access, it has the potential to seriously harm SOGIE asylum seekers as even more vulnerable populations. Queer legal theory forces us to recognize these systems that inadvertently or purposefully oppress sexual minorities, by excluding them from gaining safety through the legal process of becoming a refugee.

ICT and migration literature does not address the potentially exclusionary aspect of increased cybersecurity, nor how heightened cybersecurity may impact NGOs and LGBTQ+ refugees in particular. There is, however, research on the digital divide, the distancing between people who have financial and educational access to ICTs, from those who do not. Cybersecurity requirements can provide roadblocks to users who do not have the financial means to access ICTs, nor technological know how. In this sense, there is some relevant research on the how cybersecurity measures may unintentionally exclude potential ICT users, though the research does not look at cybersecurity and access directly.

Some recent research also examines how ICTs can both expand and repress the rights of LGBTQ+ people, especially when governments and corporations are involved in controlling and censoring platforms (Karimi 2020; Lewis and Mills 2016). This literature focuses more on the impacts of censorship, which could be applied to this context of refugees; however, there is no research that I could find on how ICT security impacts

LGBTQ+ refugees, and how it may impact their access to finding help or safety through their asylum proeess.

4.3 Accessibility Concerns

One of the major recurring themes throughout the interview process was the concept of accessibility in the discussion of ICTs, and how accessibility is impacted by these technologies. As discussed previously in the accessibility section, ICTs inherently open up access for many reasons. First, ICTs such as the internet and email, enable users to find information regardless of geographical boundaries. This is particularly important for LGBT people who may be experiencing oppression or harassment; these technologies help immensely with finding information about resources and support regardless of regional and international boundaries. This is also important for LGBT people who live in one of the 73 countries with laws currently incriminating consensual, private, same-sex activity (Map of Countries that Criminalise LGBT People, Human Dignity Trust n.d.). In places like these, LGBTQ+ people are unable to rely on governments or police to protect them, or give them information on how to remain safe. For these groups, ICTs are essential to find information and allies who can assist them to safety.

In interviews for this study, the importance and reliance on ICTs was clear. NGO employees, such as Summer, Emma, Devon, all emphasized that they would not be able to do the work that they do, and that the work they do would even be "impossible" without the assistance of ICTs. For some interviewees, such as Yolanda at ISANS, the Private Sponsor resource program that she manages is based on an the ICT platform

"Slack," so without these technologies, these programs would simply not be possible. .

From the NGO perspective, many jobs and programs exist based on ICTs and the prevalence of communications. It is true that many professions rely on (and may be created by) the emergence of ICTs, for NGOs working with LGBTQ+ refugees, and with SOGIE asylum seekers, ICTs can make a difference between life and death.

Most Canadians, not just refugees and NGO service providers, rely on technology for accessing many services, including banking, finding affordable rent, and everyday communication (McConnaughey et al. 2013). According to a study by Statistics Canada in 2016, 96% of Canadians aged 15-34 use the internet every day and 76% of respondents reported having smartphones, with 71% having a laptop or netbook, and furthermore, 77% of Canadians reported they used technology to help communicate with others (Government of Canada 2017). An interesting line of research would be to examine whether LGTBQ+ refugees and their service providers in Canada rely on ICTs more frequently or more heavily than other types of refugees or migrants.

While the importance of ICTs in granting access to safety for LGBTQ+ refugees cannot be understated, the findings of this study have also shown that ICTs do not grant equal access to all, and that there are barriers to this access. These potential barriers include gender, finances, technological literacy, and language literacy challenges. These interviews show that the benefits of ICTs are based on a person's location in the social fabric of society, shaped by the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, financial ability, age, sexual orientation, size, mobility, geographical location, urban and rural divides, class differences, cultural differences, national laws, age, and so on (Tenorio and Lo 2011). All of these different criteria, and the various combinations of these criteria, create

a person's social location, which in turn impacts all areas and experiences in a person's life, it in turn impacts the ways they access, or cannot access ICTs, and the benefits those ICTs can provide.

For example, in interviews NGO staff discussed the fact that the majority of claims they get from people reaching out are from cis, gay men, and while they hear from other people in the LGBTQ+ community, this is the large majority of their client base. They believe this to be because of the social advantages men have which enables them to more readily access these technologies than women, as well as the education and technological skills to use them. Access to education, language based or technology-based education, is an opportunity than many people do not have, sometimes due to their gender. It is a cumulation of all of these advantages that enables cisgender gay men the ability and access to utilize these technologies. This is a factor that must be considered for organizations working on ICTs to provide services to LGBTQ+ refugees, as it is important to acknowledge how widely these platforms are used.

The challenges to providing better access to NGO services through ICTs for LGBTQ+ refugees, need to be understood in relation to social location and intersectional identities. As discussed in the theoretical framework section, one of the criticisms of queer theory generally is that using the term queer as a blanket term for diverse sexual identities can risk homogenizing the unique experiences of individual people based on race, gender, and a number of other points of intersectionality. For example, many scholars caution that queer theory risks falling into the trap of assuming the male norm, primarily focused on the experiences of white, gay men, rather than being able to identify the individual experiences that lesbian women may face. While QLT takes these

criticisms into consideration, as it draws heavily from feminist legal theory and critical race theory in its core framework, it is important to keep this argument in mind, as my study should not homogenize the experiences or identities of queer refugees in seeking to find commonalities within the asylum process. In the findings of this study, one of the major points was the variability of access to ICTs based on gender, linguistic, and financial access. As gay men may have more access to financial opportunities, as well as education, they are more likely to have the technological and linguistic access to information and communications technology, as well as the knowledge and language access to be able to use the technology efficiently and to use them to their advantages, which in this context may include reaching out for help from organizations around the world. As discussed by NGO employees interviewed, many of their clients are cisgender, gay men who reach out, because they are more likely to have the privilege to access these technologies. This consideration is important to note, as gendered realities when discussing ICT usage are important to highlight for this reason.

As previously stated in the Accessibility section, financial and resources barriers are another important reason why ICTs are not universally accessible; both physical technology device, such as cell phones, laptops, computers, as well as software, programming, platforms, apps, and data plans, can be expensive and therefore unattainable for many. These programs can be costly, like in the case of the Canadian refugee application program that Devon described. Certain programs are also only compatible with certain types of systems, so while a person may have a device, the programs that they need may not work properly on it. Additionally, some softwares are not available in certain parts of the world.

Literacy based barriers to ICT access can include both language accessibility, by not being able to speak, read or write in the language to use ICTs. It can also mean the technological literacy that is required to even use ICT and to use them effectively.

Language barriers came up frequently in discussions with refugee and NGO interview participants, as perhaps the starkest barrier to accessing these technologies. Discussing language as the first barrier to ICT accessibility is important, specifically for refugee populations, as refugees are not required to fulfill a language requirement when applying for status, as other newcomers such as skilled migrants do need to fulfill this. As a result, accessing ICTs once in Canada as a refugee may be more difficult as language may be a barrier to using these technologies.

Soofia from the 519 explains that to combat the accessibility issues that ICTs pose, specifically social media, through either language or technological barriers, the 519 attempts to share communications on a variety of platforms, and in clear language. Furthermore, by sharing their resources on a variety of platforms, including in person, Soofia explains that this can help prevent ostracizing those who do not have language or tech literacy skills from opportunities that can benefit them. By putting everything online, or only accessible through ICTs like computers or cell phones, Soofia argues that this is presuming that clients have language capabilities:

> And the way information is presented is a very important thing to consider when we talk about access through social media and making sure that other pathways are available. If you have posted an online form on social media that you want to participate in this program, fill this form out. We're assuming language, we're assuming literacy we're assuming access to a computer and to the Internet. We can't assume that we actually make sure all these things are available through different channels as well as their physical forms available. Or they can call us and we can help them on the phone. We can provide them Internet access and a computer to fill out a form with assistance here. We have have a diverse group of staff

members, including myself, who speak different languages. So what we
sort of figure it out if somebody is here, can only speak or do Hindi and
give me a call when all my staff members can speak Spanish and talk and
so forth (Soofia, The 519, December 5, 2019).

Soofia also explains that in order to break down some of these language barriers, they

have a "all hands on deck" approach, that entails using each individual staff member's

language skills, in order to make the most accommodations possible for their clients who

speak different languages.

In addition to language barriers, there is also the aspect of technological literacy

to consider. Technological literacy is not always a given skill and can impact a person's

ability to access resources. For example, a person may be able to speak, read and write in

English, but they do not have the knowledge of how to send an email, or how to search

online for contact information. There are generally gender and age implications that

impact a person's technological literacy, as mentioned above, men typically have the

resources to learn about these technologies, as well as to purchase the technology in the

first place. In terms of age barriers, while older generations use technology frequently,

they often experience barriers in learning how to use ICTs, regardless of their desire to

learn, including lack of instruction or knowledge, lack of confidence in using ICTs,

skepticism of technology, and financial barriers (Vaportzis, Giatsi Clausen, Gow 2017).

It is also important to note that older people near retirement age may have difficulty

gleaning what information online is true and what is not. In a study on fake news leading

up to the 2016 election, it was found that people over the age of 65 were the most likely

age group to visit and share fake news domains on Facebook; they shared these fake new

stories nearly seven times more than the youngest age group, age 18-29 (Guess, Nagler,

Tucker 2019).

Furthermore, as discussed in the Accessibility section in Chapter 4, sometimes technological literacy does not assist with the complexities of some programs, such as the IRCC website. As Julie from Halifax Refugee Clinic described, the IRCC website very complex, and even though she is fluent English skills and has been working on the site for over 10 years, she still finds it hard to navigate.

Despite the barriers to accessing ICTs and services, refugees may still find ways to find the help and resources they need. In the interview with Soofia from The 519, she recounted one LGBTQ+ refugee client who approached the 519 with very few English skills, but had a feeling they could get help from the organization.

> One program, refugee program participant I interviewed for a back story couldn't speak a word of English when they arrived here and weren't sure what to do and they were researching online and they found of The 519, but they couldn't fully understand that it was an LGBT focused agency, even though they were a queer identified individual and a newcomer. So they just instinctively came here after an online research of settlement programs in Toronto. And after coming here, they realized this is actually for them. And now after two years, it's a different story. They received support through our LGBTQ refugee settlement program, volunteered with us as well participate in different programs, and had a successful hearing. And so it's very interesting to see people's journey, how they arrived yet despite the barriers and how they interact with our social media and website to connect with us. (Soofia, December 5, 2019).

This inspiring anecdote outlines how, despite language barriers, refugees can find ways to safety and assistance. Other NGO staff stated during interviews that they would like to know more about how people find safety when they are faced with various barriers to ICTs, because this would help their organizations become more accessible to those who may not have certain helpful privileges (Meryl, 2019). Understanding how people with more challenging social locations find their way

to safety and access, despite difficulties accessing ICTs could be helpful to organizations to accommodate these pathways.

Language, literacy, and digital literacy based barriers among refugees in Canada have been researched, however, again there is a gap in academic literature about how these barriers may impact LGBTQ+ refugees in particular, as they have specific needs and vulnerabilities. As refugees are not required to have language skills like other newcomers are (such as skilled migrants), it is important to understand how these groups may face challenges in ICT use.

4.4 ICT Adaptation and Legal Restrictions

Another aspect of working with ICTs that came up throughout this research was how ICTs are ever evolving, as are the laws that surround them. New platforms are constantly being created which shifts how people use these platforms. New platforms evolve quickly, and are growing and changing faster than the policy and laws that surround them.

As platforms evolve, sometimes there is not sufficient technical support or security to use these platforms. This complicates work for NGOs that design all their communications on certain platforms. As Yolanda from ISANS highlighted, her organization started their sponsor support group on a different platform but changed to Slack because there was not enough technological infrastructure on their first pick of programs, which was a newer platform. Also, learning new programs can be difficult for both the refugee users and the organizations that design programs around them.

A big disadvantage of new and evolving platforms is that the security is often slower to develop. In other words, protections for vulnerable people using these platforms do not evolve quickly enough, leaving people who are searching for help at a certain level of risk. Devon and Meryl from Rainbow Railroad mention how quickly security information changes when they explained that they use Reddit to find the latest information about cybersecurity. The information about secure platforms and apps becomes outdated very quickly.

ICTs are now heavily used in the refugee hearings and verification process for SOGIE asylum seekers, without any legal regulations governing their use in this capacity. Although there is little research on ICT use in the asylum process, there is criticism of the use of text messages, Facebook profiles, photos, etc., as evidence of sexual identity because the use of private conversations or photo evidence is seen as invasive and can have long lasting impacts on peoples' relationships, as well as safety (Murray 2016). However, there are no regulations that state that this use of ICT evidence in refugee hearings is a breach of privacy. Because of the absence of legal restrictions on ICT usage in these hearings, they have become a norm in nearly all SOGIE refugee claims.

4.5 ICTs and Asylum – Verification and calls for help

While this study cannot effectively comment on how ICTs affect the asylum process for LGBTQ+ refugees beyond my interviews, it does point to some interesting findings for follow up research in regard to the use of ICTs in the initial "call for help." Three of my refugee participants mentioned using ICTs to contact NGOs for help and

having consistent communication with them prior to coming to Canada on email, phone calls, WhatsApp, and other platforms.

Four out of the five organizations I interviewed said they consistently receive messages on all of their online platforms from LGBTQ+ people around the world, asking for help and wanting to know how they can come to Canada as a refugee. The exception to this is ISANS, because only the sponsorship mentor program was discussed. As previously mentioned in the Accessibility section, Meryl from Rainbow Railroad stated that her friend received one of these messages personally while on a dating app. NGO interviewees from different organizations stated that they believed many of these messages are sent out en masse to multiple LGBTQ+ allied and refugee organizations to see who replies and who can assist them, to try to get the best chance for help they can (Meryl, 2019; Julie, 2020; Soofia, 2019). While this does not indicate that ICTs impact the ways that LGBTQ+ people find asylum or migration streams, it does indicate that many people use ICTs for their initial call for help.

The verification process discussed in these interviews relates directly to the theoretical framework of QLT, as it highlights the requirements of queer people to fit certain requirements in order to navigate throughout the legal process of refugee confirmation. This bias is present in the verification process, as refugee courts define how a LGBTQ+ person should act, look like, or experience, requires SOGIE asylum seekers to conform their stories so that they are verified in their refugee hearings. Social media plays an important role in these hearings, as they can help construct an appropriate identity and narrative for courts to decide on whether the asylum seeker is "legitimate" or not. As found to be supported by interviews through the study, there seems to be an

added pressure on LGBTQ+ refugee claimants to use ICTs in order to prove their identities, compared to other types of refugees.

As discussed in the literature review section, the verification of "queerness" through the Canadian Refugee system is the main focus in research on LGBTQ+ refugees today. While I did not ask any questions in the interviews surrounding the verification of LGBTQ+ asylum seekers or refugees, it came up in multiple conversations, mostly with the NGO staff participants. This aspect of verification of identity also came up in terms of a security purpose, with discussion as to how the process of verification is done for NGOs that work with asylum seekers and people who have reached out to them directly for help, as Summer from Rainbow Railroad explains. She says that because all of the initial contact is done online, and they do usually meet the client in person before they are moved, their organization must have a verification process, to ensure that the person they are talking to is LGBTQ+ (Summer, November 20, 2019). In this sense, verification is a necessary part of their work.

Social media was brought up in interviews an important aspect of the verification process of LGBTQ identity during the refugee confirmation process. Social media activity demonstrating one's identity is not necessarily a requirement to prove identity in these refugee hearings, but social media "evidence" can be very helpful for a person's case . But how "optional" is including social media profiles or digital evidence during the confirmation process, if it does increase the claimant's chance of being recognized in court as LGBTQ+. The relevance of the verification process certainly echoes the focus in current literature which highlights this verification process as a major part of the LGBTQ+ refugee experience in Canada.

Another question that can be asked when discussing this topic of verification, is to what degree is a person verified? For Rainbow Refugee, anyone who reaches out and self-identifies is "verified" (Emma, November 12, 2019), but at government refugee hearings, immigration officers have further questions and requirements in order to confirm the claimant's identity. The verification process is a part of a long process made up of several interactions with immigration officers, but perhaps it is the length and scrutiny of the process itself that should be criticized, rather than the process of verification as a whole.

The"verification" of LGBTQ+ identity and persecution is a very robust topic in current literature, but it does not consider how ICTs are used throughout the process. It is possible that ICTs may be one of the only ways to "prove" identity, through photos, profiles, memberships to certain groups, messages, etc, as there are no official documents that state one's sexual identity (and how could there be as sexuality is fluid for many people) or trans claimants may be from countries without real legal process for changing one's documented gender identity. So, while having so-called "digital evidence" to help support SOGIE refugee claims in court may not be officially "mandatory", the absence of these forms of digital proof could potentially be a cause for concern to judges.

Future studies on the verification of SOGIE refugee claims in Canada should examine how ICTs and digital evidence play a role in this process, in order to fully understand why these processes are important and what type of evidence proves a LGBTQ+ person's identity.

4.6 ICTs Impact on Support and Resources

ICTs play a large role in NGO fundraising, as well as through promoting LGBTQ+ activism and advocacy online. Three of the organizations interviewed (Rainbow Railroad, Rainbow Refugee, The 519) all discussed how ICTs, including their social media platforms, are used to help with fundraising initiatives, as they rely on donations to work as an organization. ICTs are an important part of this process, as NGOs can share stories on social media, and fundraise online instead of in person or through cheques in the mail. This instant support is incredibly beneficial, as Devon explains, for Rainbow Railroad, as they can use these funds immediately to do their work. Emma also explains how essential it is to raise funds online, as supporters do not have to write cheques, so there is a sense of instant support. While not directly mentioned by interview participants, there is also the aspect of grants and funding that are available and submitted online through ICTs.

At the same time, just because there are opportunities for financial support online for NGOs, does not mean they can always benefit from them. As Julie from the Halifax Refugee Clinic explains, with such a small staff (3 full time employees), and as the nature of their work is very urgent, they do not have the resources to have a big online presence to fundraise or complete grant applications online (Julie, January 29, 2020). In a similar vein, Soofia from The 519 explains how despite communications importance in supporting organizations and refugee clients, communications work does not get a large budget, and is often cut first in times of lack of funding, as frontline support is funded first (Soofia, December 5, 2019).

These accounts display that while ICTs can be incredibly helpful to organizations in helping them raise financial support to do the work that they do, utilizing these tools is time consuming and takes a great deal of resources, and is not always beneficial as for NGOs with limited resources.

In addition to funding support, another large part of ICT usage that was cited in interviews was the element of LGBTQ+ advocacy and activism that can occur on these communication platforms. For both NGO and refugee respondents, activism was a frequently cited use of ICTs, specifically social media. Through platforms like Twitter, organizations can spread awareness of current events, causes, and information. As organizations such as Rainbow Railroad work with activists internationally, they communicate through ICTs to learn about what is happening on the ground in other places, which can help give information and spread awareness about current events. This is especially relevant for organizations that work with LGBTQ+ people and with refugees, as they are often leaders in LBGTQ+ justice and try to reduce stigma around queer and refugee populations.

This aspect of utlilizing ICTs for advocacy and activism work also appears in some relevant literature, such as when Rodriguez argues that because NGOs are so important to assessing the unique needs of LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers, it is important to understand how these NGOs use ICT strategies to gain support (Rodriguez 2016). While this topic it is certainly underrepresented in literature, there are more recent additions to this topic that include how ICTs can be useful for this work, such as in a recent PhD dissertation (Karimi 2020), which examines how Iranian LGBTQ+ groups

use social media to communicate with Canadian politicans and activists, to increase

awareness and improve programs for Iranian LGBTQ+ refugees (Karimi 2020).

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The primary research question for this thesis was to consider how LGBTQ+ refugees use, or discuss using, information and communications technology (ICTs) in accessing information about, and communicating with Canadian NGOs. Results found that ICTs are largely influential in relationships between NGOs in Canada and LGBTQ+ refugees, as they provide communication for resources throughout all stages of the asylum process. However, despite the importance of ICTs for various services and supports for both NGOs and refugees, there are also a variety of barriers to exist that prevent these technologies from being completely accessible to all. My findings show that ICTs are used in a variety of ways by LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers, but the main three uses are: to find resources and services that can be useful throughout the refugee process, from the initial "call for help" to settlement services; to spread awareness about causes and promote activism, and draw awareness to LGBTQ+ related human rights crises across the globe; and to fundraise. ICTs are helpful for providing instant support to individuals and for spreading information quickly, especially through social media platforms. LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and refugees use ICTs to communicate with NGOs and a broader community to find out asylum information and processes, and about life in Canada, especially throughout the settlement period.

My research also found that ICTs play a large role in the verification process for these refugees, as social media "evidence" is an important part of the verification of their identity to confirm their refugee claim, which is consistent with current literature on this verification process in Canada for SOGIE asylum seekers in Canada. Finally, while ICTs are incredibly helpful for LGBTQ+ refugees, their usefulness is dependent on a variety of

factors, as a person's social location impacts their ability to access these technologies. Security measures are also a concern, especially for SOGIE asylum seekers, for protecting their personal information, as well as their physical safety while using ICTs.

This research used Queer Legal Theory as a theoretical lens to examine LGBTQ+ refugee and Canadian NGOs' use of ICTs. One of the aims of Queer Legal Theory is to "inform and reform" legal culture, to make active changes to biased legal requirements, and to consider the needs of sexual minorities throughout these legal proceses (Valdes 1997). The findings of this study hope to inform those involved in these legal processes, and eventually reform some of the requirements for SOGIE asylum seekers throughout this process.

The study confirmed that ICTs are used by LGBTQ+ refugees and Canadian NGOs to individually accommodate refugees throughout the refugee system. ICTs are used for the initial call for help, all the way through the hearing and settlement processes. NGOs use ICTs to disseminate information and resources to LGBTQ+ clients in efforts to alleviate some of the unique challenges they face throughout this process. Both NGO staff and refugee interview participants expressed the importance of social media in informing those about injustice against the queer community. Canadian NGOs also use ICTs and specifically social media as tools to support their organization through funding by donations, and awareness..

While there is existing research that examines some aspects of Canadian NGOs and LGBTQ+ refugee experiences with ICTs, there is still a gap in literature that does not adequately address the intersectional needs of SOGIE asylum seekers and refugees, and their needs for technology. Current research on ICTs and LGBTQ+ refugees focuses

primarily on the verification process in status hearings, and while this is certainly a very important area of study, it is crucial to identify other digital needs for SOGIE asylum seekers in various areas of the asylum and settlement period. Similarly, interviews for this study emphasisized accessibility concerns and cybersecurity, while in existing literature these topics are underrepresented. The topic of cybersecurity for the ICTs under discussion is still underrepresented in the research, in part because of rapid changes and growth in technology. Future research should continue to examine how cybersecurity plays a role in refugee pathways to asylum, as ICTs are now an essential part of this journey.

While this study has contributed to the literature on LGBTQ+ refugees and Canadian NGOs and their use of social media, it should be noted that because of the small number of interviews conducted these findings could not be used to make generalizations about queer refugee experiences with ICTs in Canada, or about NGO experiences with these technologies, more broadly. However, it does point to gaps in the current research and suggest that questions about ICT use need to be asked on a larger scale.

My research has identified needs of Canadian NGOs, LGBTQ+ refugees in Canada, and has contributed to current literature on these groups' use of ICT technology, and barriers that exist for their ICT use. The thesis has also identified gaps in literature that need to be addressed when examining SOGIE asylum seeker's use of ICTs in Canada and throughout the asylum process. This study has contributed to current literature by identifying the current uses and obstacles of ICTs and social media for LGBTQ+ refugees in Canada, and for Canadian NGOs who work with LGBTQ+ refugees. Future research in this area should build on these findings, and with bigger sample sizes,

especially more interviews with refugees, in order to further confirm the recommendations from this study. Also, as ICTs and social media change and adapt so frequently, and as the legal frameworks surrounding ICTs consistently evolve, there is a need to re-evalute these systems as time progresses.

Based on the conclusions for these studies, Canadian service providers working with LGBTQ+ refugees should use, or continue to use, ICTs and social media when possible in order to spread awareness about resources, opportunities, and information. As both NGO employees and LGBTQ+ refugees in this study emphasized that despite the various barriers that occur with ICT use, using these technologies are essential in the work between these groups, and social media is a great tool to spread awareness about resouces for LGBTQ+ refugees, and advocacy for the LGBTQ+ community as a whole. Language accomodations can help refugees who do not speak English with accessing these resources. Language accomodations can include both online translations, and staff members originally translating these resources.

Furthermore, it is strongly recommended that the IRCC refugee application process is re-examined, and for these applications be able to be completed on a cell phone. The requirement for these applications to use programs such as Adobe, which need to be used on a laptop or computer, and have a fee associated, are not accessible to many refugee claimants and asylum seekers, especially those located in refugee camps. These processes should encourage applications and help assist people to safety in the quickest possible way, and should not erect further barriers for claimants based on technological and financial access.

In conclusion, ICTs are instrumental in assisting both NGO and LGBTQ+ refugees in all stages of the asylum and settlement process, despite their challenges with accessibility and security. As information and communications technology progresses, and as further studies are pursued examining these challenges, especially for vulnerable populations, these gaps will close, and the benefits of ICTs will outweigh the challenges they pose.

NGO Employee Interviews

Devon, Rainbow Railroad, November 20th, 2019
Meryl, Rainbow Railroad, November 20th, 2019
Summer, Rainbow Railroad, November 20th, 2019
Emma, Rainbow Refugee, November 12th, 2019
Yolanda, ISANS, November 4th, 2019
Julie, Halifax Refugee Clinic, January 29th, 2020
Soofia, The 519, December 5th, 2019

Refugee Participant Interviews (All names are psedonyms for privacy)
Sandra, November 18th, 2019
Michael, November 19th, 2019
Sam, November 19th 2019
Rachel, November 21st, 2019

B.1 Interview Questions for Refugee Participant

1. Hi there. Thank you so much for meeting with me and agreeing to chat. To begin, would you mind telling me about yourself and your story? Who are you, when did you arrive in Canada and why did you come here?

2. How did you learn about Canada before arriving here?

3. Did you interact with any organizations like rainbow railroad before arriving?

4. Before arriving to Canada, can you tell me about the technology that you used in your day to day routine? Did you regularly use the internet, facebook, Instagram, twitter, etc?

5. Can you tell me about what access to technology you had through your journey to Canada as a refugee? For example, were you able to use a cell phone or computer while travelling, or while

    a. How did this technology impact the process for you?

6. Can you tell me how you interact with communications technology, such as social media now?

7. Follow up from previous question: If you didn't have access to technology as an asylum seeker, or had limited access, how did this impact your process of becoming a refugee?

8. If you could speak to the organizations in Canada, how would you suggest they improve the way they communicate with LGBTQ+ refugees in the future?

9. Is there anything else you would like me to know that we haven't discussed?

10. If you were working in this field, what would you like to know about LGBT refugees and technology in Canada?

B.2 Interview Questions NGO Employees

-   Would you mind telling me a little bit about your role at The 519? How long have you been in this position? What duties are associated with this position? Would you mind giving me a general overview of the work that The 519 does in Toronto and beyond.

- My research looks at how digital technology is used by Canadian NGOs and LGBTQ+ refugees. Would you mind talking a bit about how your job (or perhaps others' positions at Rainbow Refugee) might include some communications technology such as email, social media, texting, etc.

- In my research thus far, I've tried to understand the asylum or refugee process in its stages, and what I've learned is that there are 3 major aspects – search for help, arrival and status process, and then community integration. Do you think that those stages are accurate?

- Can you discuss some of the ways in which you believe LGBTQ+ refugees or asylum seekers may use communications technology to contact your organization?

- Can you discuss some of the ways in which communications technology has shaped the way that your organization works with LGBTQ+ refugees?

- Are there any resources – whether physical, logistical, academically, or otherwise - that you wish you as an organization had access to?

Appendix C: Email to Rainbow Railroad Clients

Hi all,

I hope you have been taking care of yourself!
I am reaching out today to see if you are interested in participating in an interview for a research study that will be conducted in November - the week of the 18th -22nd. This study will be conducted by a researcher at Dalhousie University, and Rainbow Railroad will be supporting this study by helping find willing participants.

Martine Panzica is a master's student at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and will be conducting a research project on the relationship between refugees who identify as LGBTQ+, Canadian non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and modern Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Examples of ICTs are social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and email.

Martine is looking for participants who are willing to share their experiences with communications technology and their journey as refugees/asylum seekers who were assisted through Rainbow Railroad. Martine hopes that her research will improve understanding of how to better work with refugees and asylum seekers and have an impact on the sector.

Your identity will be protected if you choose to participate in the study, and the interview should take no more than 1.5 hours of your time. For participating, you will receive an honorarium of $15 in the form of a gift card, and any of your travel expenses incurred will be covered. Martine will be in charge of communicating with you directly.

I want you to know that participating in this research is completely optional and you declining to be involved will have no negative repercussions or impact on Rainbow Railroad. If you are interested in the opportunity, we encourage you to get involved but please do not reply if you are not interested.

For more information regarding the study, compensation, time commitment, or anything else, please contact: martine.panzica@dal.ca.

Best,
D

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