

Sex & Resilience: The Power to Survive & *Thrive*



sExploration 2026



Sexual issues can be as difficult for clinicians to address as they are for clients to share. While it is easy for them to go unrecognized, they are present across the lifespan. The annual **sExploration** series are designed by PASD as catalysts for discussions on integrating sexuality issues into all levels of our work: assessment, consultation, research, clinical practice, and teaching.

Resilience: the capacity to withstand or to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness

Oxford Languages

2026 Sex & Resilience: The Power to Survive & Thrive

At the start of each academic year our group generates potential themes for the spring sExploration program and then considers the merits and relevance of the options. Given the sociopolitical climate the choice was easy this year. The assaults on gender ideology, authentic identities and bodily autonomy are compounding, and taking a toll on members of our communities, those we serve, and ourselves.. Using a strengths perspective, we are turning our attention to flourishing in these times.

The American Psychological Association (2025) defines resilience as the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands. The APA proposes that the following factors contribute to how well people adapt to adversity: (a) the ways in which individuals view and engage with the world, (b) the availability and quality of social resources, and (c) specific coping strategies.

sExploration 2026 will explore and promote resilience through examining how people adapt, survive and THRIVE in the face of challenges related to sex, reproduction, sexual orientation, gender, and gender identity. Together we will explore the development and fostering of resilience in these areas through colloquia, critical discussions, and academic presentations.

SCHEDULE OVERVIEW

All presentations & discussions will be held from **12:00 – 12:50 pm CDT.**

| DATE | DAY | Topic | Location |
|----------|-----------|---|-------------------|
| March.16 | Monday | Display opens - Noon celebration | 5th Floor Hallway |
| March.17 | Tuesday | Poster Fair opens | 5th Floor Hallway |
| March.18 | Wednesday | Poster Fair Presentations | 5th Floor Hallway |
| March.19 | Thursday | Kim Hunt - Pride Action Tank | 513 |
| March.24 | Tuesday | Spring Cooper - Keynote on Cyber Trauma | 513 & Zoom |
| March.25 | Wednesday | Book Discussion - Female Empowerment | 513 |

Our website and programs may be accessed through this code:



PARTICIPATE!



Build Our Kaleidoscope Celebrating Sexual Resilience

Monday, March 16th 12-1 pm *FREE snacks!*

5th Floor Hallway

Join us for a celebration of resilience! Stop by our display to record your word for thriving and add a butterfly to our community tree. What helps you through life's struggles? What word gives you strength? Butterflies symbolize transformation, endurance, and growth, reminding us that even through challenge, we have the capacity to emerge stronger. A group of butterflies is known as a *kaleidoscope*.

PRESENTATIONS & DISCUSSIONS

2026 Poster Fair

Presentations

Wednesday, March 18th

5th Floor Hallway *FREE pizza & snacks!*

Poster authors will be present to describe and discuss their work from 12-1 pm.

Posters will be on display from March 17th to the 20th.



My Ancestor's Wildest Dreams: Queer Older Adults and the Power of Storytelling

Kim L. Hunt

Thursday, March 19th 12-1 Room 513 *FREE pizza!*

Pride Action Tank (PAT), a project of AIDS Foundation Chicago, has been working since 2017 to bring the voices of older adults who identify as LGBTQ+ and/or are living with HIV to policy and advocacy spaces. Through its "For Change" training series and public policy work, PAT has collaborated to enshrine innovative policy solutions to Illinois while co-creating with older adults. In this presentation Kim L. Hunt will share information about PAT's work, lessons learned and the importance of freedom dreaming, especially in the midst of crisis.

Ms. Hunt has used her platforms in storytelling, public speaking and civic engagement to curate brave, inclusive spaces for PAT, a project of AIDS Foundation Chicago, where she also serves as the Vice President of Special Projects and Innovation in the Policy & Advocacy department. She has served on the AMA Foundation LGBTQ+ Health Fellowship Commission, was appointed by the Governor to serve on the Illinois Council on Aging and Illinois Commission on LGBTQ+ Aging Issues and by the Mayor to serve on the Chicago LGBTQ+ Advisory Council.

Sponsored by the **PRIDE Queer Collective**



From Victimization to Visibility: Researching and Living Sexual Resilience

Spring Cooper, Ph.D.

Tuesday, March 24th 12-1 Zoom and Room 513

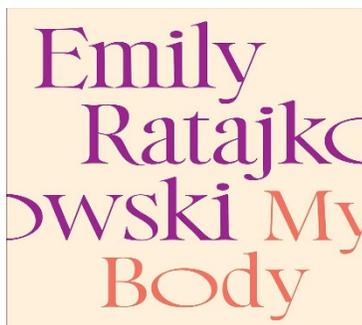
FREE pizza!

<https://tcsedsystem-hipaa.zoom.us/j/5043204807?pwd=TGNodjRaemNFV2JFdkIEWmFZM25nZz09>

Dr. Cooper is an Associate Professor and the Community Health and Social Sciences Department Chairperson at the City University of New York. Her academic background is in BioBehavioral Health, an interdisciplinary approach to health and prevention (<http://bbh.hhdev.psu.edu>). She is a social researcher with academic qualifications in public health, health promotion, and sexuality. Dr. Cooper completed a Postdoctoral Fellowship with The University of Sydney in Australia where she taught for three years in the Master's program on HIV, STIs, and sexual health. She joined CUNY in 2015.

Dr. Cooper's research interests include Sexual Agency; Social Media's Impacts on Sexual Health; Intimate Partner Violence and Cyber Sexual Assault. During her keynote presentation she will be presenting on cyber assault and revenge porn, sharing her perspectives as a victim and researcher on sexual resilience.

A 2019 study estimated 10 million Americans have been affected by revenge porn.



Book Discussion on Female Empowerment

Wednesday, March 25th Room 513

FREE pizza!

My Body is a profoundly personal exploration of feminism, sexuality, and power, of men's treatment of women and women's rationalizations for accepting that treatment. These essays chronicle moments from Emily Ratajkowski's life as a model and actress, while investigating the culture's fetishization of girls and female beauty, its obsession with and contempt for women's sexuality, the perverse dynamics of the fashion and film industries, and the gray area between consent and abuse. Join us for a discussion reflects on the book's assertions, exploring our culture's commodification of women and empowerment.

2026 POSTER FAIR ENTRIES

The Self, After Harm:

A Phenomenological Study of Sexual-Minority Adolescents Along the NSSI–Suicide Continuum

Natalie Dolan, M.S.

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This study examines how sexual-minority adolescents understand and make meaning of their experiences with non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI). Adolescence represents a pivotal developmental period characterized by identity formation, including sexual identity exploration. Although NSSI is a well-established predictor of later suicide attempts, existing research has primarily emphasized risk factors for suicidality rather than the processes that interrupt escalation among adolescents who discontinue NSSI without attempting suicide. Rather than treating NSSI and suicide as distinct phenomena, this project conceptualizes them as related experiences along a continuum.

Using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, this project explores how adolescents interpret their engagement in NSSI, with particular attention to identity development, belongingness, and relational experiences within their social environments. The framework integrates minority stress theory with biopsychosocial and philosophical perspectives to conceptualize self-harm as embedded within lived experience. The study aims to develop a clinically useful framework identifying protective and resilience-related processes that move sexual-minority adolescents away from suicidality and to inform trauma-informed, identity-affirming therapeutic interventions.

There's a word for that? Discursive Mean-Making as a Source of Resilience in ASPEC Communities

Kinsey Erickson, MA Clinical Psychology

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This poster examines asexual and aromantic discursive meaning-making in ASPEC (asexual and aromantic spectrum) communities and the role these discussions play in legitimizing ASPEC orientations and lives. The creation of language and new modes of discussing sex, sexuality, relationships, etc. creates the possibility for asexual or aromantic lives by providing tools with which these lives can be imagined, communicated, and then lived by ASPEC individuals. This discourse, then, allows for new modes of engaging with others and the world which affirm asexual and aromantic experiences, desires, and relationships, and can foster resiliency within ASPEC individuals.

Resilience Through Identity Integration Among Genderqueer Masculine-Presenting Lesbians

Diya Guptaray, B.A.

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This poster reviews research on resilience among genderqueer masculine-presenting lesbians. While studies have explored lesbian identity, nonbinary identity, and female masculinity, these topics are often examined separately. This literature review brings these areas together to better understand how people who identify as both lesbian and gender diverse navigate gender expression, sexuality, and community belonging.

The research highlights challenges such as stigma, gender policing, and discrimination that gender nonconforming individuals may experience. At the same time, the literature shows several sources of resilience, including authenticity, social support, chosen family, and community connection. Drawing on queer theory and minority stress theory, this poster explores how identity integration may help individuals cope with social pressures and maintain well-being. By synthesizing existing research, this poster identifies gaps in current studies and suggests directions for future research on resilience among genderqueer masculine-presenting lesbians.

Building Resiliency Against Depression for QTBIPOC

Marisa Ikehara B.S.

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This literature review examines the variety of protective factors developed by Queer People of Color to survive in the face of marginalization by society. Specifically, it discusses the impact of the community, family support, role models, and religion as protective factors against depression. The review concludes with a discussion on the application of these findings to practice and areas for additional study.

Voices of Resilience: Understanding Intimacy and Communication in Relationships Impacted by Sexual Trauma

Annabelle Lawrence, M.A.

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An exploration of how couples navigate communication, emotional closeness, and sexual intimacy in the aftermath of sexual trauma. This review is the basis for a study that will examine survivors' and partners' experiences of interpersonal communication, barriers to connection, and strategies that promote relational healing.

Influences on Post-Traumatic Growth for Women Who Have Experienced Birth Trauma

Abigail Meikle, B.A.

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This literature review aims to examine factors that contribute to post-traumatic growth in women who have experienced traumatic births. This overview of the current literature will seek to inform best practices with this population, as well as identify factors that may convey increased risk along with positive outcomes.

Intersectional Pathways to Resilience: Protective Factors for Sexual Minority Women Impacted by Sexual Violence

Shaye Meyers, B.A.

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My presentation will review literature on protective factors that contribute to resilience and post-traumatic growth in sexual minority women after experiencing sexual assault. Most of the literature is centered around risk factors, so my presentation will seek to view recovery through a positive psychology lens.

The Role of Resilience in Trauma and Identity Development Among LGBTQIA+ Individuals

Alex Mills, B.A.

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Much of the existing research explores the role of resilience in buffering the effects of trauma, as well as how trauma can influence identity development. However, less attention has been given to how these processes unfold within LGBTQIA+ populations. This project will explore how resilience may mediate the impact of trauma and support more compassionate, affirming identity development among LGBTQIA+ individuals.

From Stigma to Strength: Relational Resilience in HIV-Serodiscordant Male Couples

Samantha Myers, MA

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HIV-serodiscordant male couples (HSMC), in which one partner is living with HIV and the other is not, navigate complex stressors related to stigma, minority stress, and sexual health. Research consistently links HIV stigma to psychological distress, shame, reduced sexual satisfaction, and relational strain. However, these findings do not tell the whole story. Many HSMC report strong commitment, intimacy, and relationship satisfaction. This presentation explores empirical findings on HIV stigma, dyadic coping, and sexual satisfaction to examine how resilience manifests within HIV-affected same-sex relationships. Drawing from the HIV Stigma Framework and intersectional stigma theory, the presentation highlights how shared coping strategies, mutually satisfying sexual experiences, and other key factors may buffer against stigma's harmful effects and strengthen relationship dynamics. Ultimately, resilience in these couples is not about eliminating adversity, but it reflects the capacity to transform stigma into connection and strength.

The Cognitive Benefits of Sexual Well-Being in Later Life

Lauren Peterson, B.A.

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This literature review examines whether sexual well-being is associated with preserved or enhanced cognitive functioning in older adulthood. Sexuality is framed as a multidimensional construct that includes behavior, satisfaction, identity, and intimacy. The review synthesizes empirical findings on the relationship between sexuality and cognitive aging. It explores how sexual activity, sexual satisfaction, and positive sexual self-perception relate to cognitive outcomes, while also addressing the complexities introduced by neurocognitive disorders, ethical considerations around consent, and the role of caregivers and institutions. Attention is given to psychosocial, cultural, and structural influences as well as gaps in the existing literature. Overall, the review positions sexual well-being as a potential resilience factor in cognitive aging and highlights implications for research, clinical practice, and policy.

Thriving Authentically: A Case Study of Queer Resilience and Success

Molly Schwibinger, B.A.

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This presentation is a qualitative case study of a queer individual whose career trajectory illustrates resilience in the face of mental health challenges and ongoing adversity. Through multiple interviews, this brief case study examines how social and community support contributed to the development of resilience and ultimately facilitated professional success.

Congratulations! sExploration 2025 Poster to be presented at AASECT Conference

Fat, Fetishized, or Forgotten? The Representation of Fat Bodies in Pornography

Amanda Bressler, M.A.

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Fat bodies in pornography exist at the intersection of fetishization and invisibility, reflecting broader societal attitudes toward desirability and sexuality. This poster examines the literature on how fat individuals are portrayed in adult content, the implications of these depictions for body image and self-perception, and the role of online spaces in shaping fat sexual representation. It explores the contrast between mainstream erasure and niche categorization, the impact of porn consumption on desirability politics, and the intersectionality of fatness with gender, race, and queerness. Additionally, the review considers the psychological and therapeutic implications for individuals navigating self-perception and intimacy in a media landscape that often marginalizes fat bodies. As digital spaces continue to evolve, this work highlights the importance of expanding representation beyond fetishization and toward affirming, diverse portrayals of fat sexuality.

Ms. Bressler will present her work at the American Association of Sexuality Educator, Counselors and Therapists June conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Yeah Team PASD!

RESOURCES

American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists www.aasect.org

The Kinsey Institute www.kinseyinstitute.org

Sexuality Education Counselling and Consultancy Agency <https://www.secca.org.au/resources/>

RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) — 24/7 support for sexual assault survivors <https://www.rainn.org>

National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) — Information and referral resources <http://www.nsvrc.org>

UNHCR “Refugee Support Network” Resources — Guidance and assistance for refugees/asylum seekers <https://www.unhcr.org>

PRIDE Queer Collective - a Chicago School Student Group

Interested in continuing to plan, organize, or participate in events related to sex and LGBTQIA+ topics? Please look join us to promote a culture of safety and acceptance of the LGBTQIA+ community at TCS, encourage discussion and education surrounding allyship with diverse communities, and act as a student voice of TCS administration to advocate for LGBTQIA+ student interests. Previous events have included PRIDE month socials, student and professor discussion panels, collaboration with the TCS Diversity & Action Board, and more.

PRIDE is currently interviewing incoming officers for the 2025- 2026 school year. For information on membership and leadership opportunities contact Alex Mills at amills4@ego.thechicadgoschool.edu

Special THANKS to our partners...



Robert Bartlett at **BRB Design** for construction of display figures.



2026 Event Planning & Management

- Marisa Ikehara, B.S. (she/her)
- Abigail Meikle, B.A. (she/her)
- Shaye Meyers, B.A. (she/her)
- Lauren Peterson, B.A. (she/her)
- Mariana Uzeta, B.S. (she/they)

PASD leadership

- Braden Berkey, PsyD, CSE (he/him) Executive Director
- Ashley Molin, PsyD. (she/her) Program Director
- Daniel Warshawsky, B.A. (he/him) Social Media Manager

Projects Advancing Sexual Diversity applies the practice of psychology to further the understanding and acceptance of diverse sexual and gender identities, relationship structures, perspectives, practices and cultures. Utilizing innovative research and interventions, PASD strives to create sustainable change in conditions impacting the health and welfare of sexual, gender and relationship minority individuals, families and communities.

www.ProjectsAdvancingSexualDiversity.org