What are the experiences of sexual minority youths using online support groups to navigate marginalised identities?

People have been congregating online for around two decades. People gather online for many of the same reasons they do offline; shared interests, sharing information, and shared characteristics. The common factor is a beneficial exchange between two or more people.

Online groups have a number of features that make them an ideal tool and resource for people to share. They enable cross-geographical communication and almost instantaneous exchange. What makes the internet different from the telephone is that it combines these features with the ability to support multiple communicants and provides anonymity, which can have a variety of positive and negative effects.

The question is can these online social groupings be an asset to the person, with benefits to physical and mental health?

Research has suggested that people who claim a stigmatised identity are at greater risk of health complications including substance abuse, depression, self-harm and suicide. This research takes the position that stress is a known contributor to poor health, and that minorities must deal with additional stress caused by their minority status.

Models include two types of minority stress: External stress include experiences of prejudice, discrimination and victimisation. Internal stress include fears of rejection, the effort required for concealment and the acceptance of homophobic values that diminish self-worth.

Savin-Williams\(^1\) argues that these are very loaded terms, with a history and a significance. They are symbols that communicate information about us to other people when used or known about.

He has found that many young people are eschewing these identity labels and, more importantly, the stereotypes and baggage associated with them. Many people have been congregating online for around two decades. People gather online for many of the same reasons they do offline; shared interests, sharing information, and shared characteristics. The common factor is a beneficial exchange between two or more people.

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