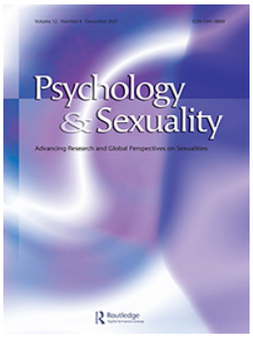

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Building bridges and breaking down silos: A framework for developing interdisciplinary, international academic-community research collaborations for the benefit of sexual and gender minority youth

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Building bridges and breaking down silos: A framework for developing interdisciplinary, international academic-community research collaborations for the benefit of sexual and gender minority youth

Abstract

Interdisciplinary collaboration fuels research innovation and funders are increasingly offering long-term grants prioritizing partnerships. However, a gap remains regarding the effective development, evaluatation, and sustainment of research partnerships; particularly those supporting marginalized populations such as sexual and gender minority youth (SGMY). There is a concomitant need to expand research internationally to cross-culturally conceptualize SGMY's experiences, which information and communication technologies (ICTs) may facilitate. The International Partnership for Queer Youth Resilience (INQYR) is a research consortium comprising over 40 academic and community representatives investigating and addressing issues faced by SGMY in Canada, the United Kingdom (UK), **United States of America (USA),** and Mexico from an interdisciplinary perspective by: (a) conducting and disseminating interventions and exploratory research on SGMY's ICT use, and (b) training cohorts of SGMY scholars and practitioners.

This article details **INQYR's rationale and formation**, including its objectives and organizational framework. Facilitators and barriers are discussed through reflection on INQYR's first operational phase from 2018-2021, considering collaboration with diverse stakeholders and settings; shared goals; language and technology barriers; personal and workload barriers; infrastructure; and power and historical tensions. Implications for other research partnerships and concrete tools such as author guidelines for large-scale research partnership formation, operation, and evaluation are discussed.

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Keywords

LGBTQ+; Sexual and Gender Minority Youth; Research Collaborations; Academic-Community Partnerships, International

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Introduction

Sexual and gender minority youth (SGMY) exhibit poorer wellbeing than their non-SGMY peers globally, exemplified by their elevated risk for familial rejection, social exclusion, and various forms of violence and victimization (Baruch-Dominguez et al., 2016; Craig et al., 2020). These minority stressors contribute to heightened risks for depression and other mental and behavioral health concerns and estimates suggest that SGMY are at three to seven times greater risk of suicide in Canada, the UK, the **USA**, and Mexico compared to their non-SGM peers (Centre for Suicide Prevention, 2019; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2019; Public Health England, 2015). This is compounded by the lack of LGBTQ+-focused social support available to SGMY navigating these challenges (Bedard-Thomas et al., 2019; Lloyd & Galupo, 2019; Swank et al., 2012).

Information communication technologies (ICTs) have potential to facilitate cross-cultural and -geographical improvements in SGMY wellbeing. ICTs used by SGMY include mobile and non mobile devices, social networks, and apps (McInroy et al., 2018). ICTs are widely used by youth across geographies; in Canada, the **USA**, and the UK 92%-99% of youth ages 16–24 are online regularly (Lenhart, 2015; ONS, 2021; Pew Research Centre, 2017) and household surveys indicate that 60% of youth ages 6-12 in Mexico use the internet (UNICEF, 2014). SGMY actively engage with ICTs to develop their LGBTQ+ identities, access resources and information, and engage in community and civic participation (Craig et al., 2021; Craig & McInroy, 2014).

Despite gradual asynchronous improvements in legal protections and rights for sexual and gender minorities globally, SGMY remain socially or legally oppressed in many countries (Alessi, 2016). In international contexts with fewer protections for SGMY, ICTs may facilitate access to often life-saving support and information (Han et al., 2019). UNICEF (2014) also highlighted that youth access to ICTs can enhance their human rights such as freedom of expression. Yet, despite these potentially protective benefits, there have been few interdisciplinary and

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international efforts to understand SGMY ICT usage and how ICTs can be used to improve SGMY outcomes. Indeed, much of the research in this area has privileged North American populations, exacerbating these international disparities.

ICTs have also been instrumental in building capacity and networks for practice and research (Craig et al., 2021), naturally presenting a point of convergence with SGMY and opportunities for international academic-community partnerships in SGMY research and development. ICTs are mutually enabling for SGMY and researchers because they increase opportunities for connection by: (a) reducing travel cost barriers (Catalini et al., 2020); (b) addressing privacy concerns (Archibald et al., 2019); and (c) facilitating participation from more diverse and intersectional community members (McDermott & Roen, 2012). However, health research on LGBTQ+ communities is underfunded, with the majority of funding in this area directed towards HIV/AIDS research (Coulter et al., 2014). Consequently, few international academic-community partnerships focus holistically on SGM health and, to our knowledge, none have examined SGMY mental health in tandem with ICT use until now. Further, the current literature insufficiently describes the development of international research partnership models. These research gaps stymie research innovation and limit the ability of prospective SGM partnership leaders to make evidence-based decisions about their partnership approach and implementation.

Therefore, this article is a critical reflection on forming and managing the International Partnership for Queer Youth Resilience (INQYR) based on insights gleaned during its first four years from 2018-2021. In so doing, we aim to contribute to a greater understanding of the processes of developing and evaluating long-term, international academic-community research partnerships focused on SGMY by: (a) outlining the utility of research partnerships, (b) highlighting the importance of funding international and interdisciplinary research partnerships; (c) outlining the formation and governance of INQYR; (d) sharing challenges in INQYR and how they were mitigated; and (e) offering implications and considerations for similar partnership endeavours.

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Research Partnership Approaches

Research partnerships are designed to centralize and integrate numerous studies, scholars, and geographies around a topic and are typically formalized into a network or organization over multiple years (Meza et al., 2016). Over the past 40 years, funders are increasingly offering multi-million dollar, multi-year grants for team-based approaches (National Research Council, 2015). Examples of these awards include Partnership Grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), Research Program Project Grants from the **USA** National Institutes of Health (NIH), and Research Partnership Schemes from the UK's Wellcome Trust. These opportunities differ from the notion of research grants as proposals focused upon a discrete study, since applicants are required to form a consortium to conduct multiple studies on regional, national, or international scales while advancing research, training, and dissemination through collaboration and sharing of intellectual leadership. Additional cash and in-kind resources from the applicants' institutions and other funding sources are also sought to further increase endorsement and impact (Economic and Social Research Council, 2020; SSHRC, 2019; Wellcome Trust, 2020).

Demand and uptake of research partnerships have seen a gradual increase in recent years both nationally and internationally (Childs & Potter, 2014; Lantz et al., 2001; Riemer et al., 2012; Schensul et al., 2006). This cross-disciplinary trend is evident in disability studies (Gomez et al., 2018), social work (Dentato et al., 2010; Karban & Ngandu, 2017; Sanders-Phillips et al., 2009), criminal justice (Childs & Potter, 2014), public health (Halbert et al., 2006; Hampton et al., 2007; Lantz et al., 2001; Soltani et al., 2017), and mental health (Ayers & Arch, 2013; Cavaleri et al., 2010; Horsfall et al., 2010; Meza et al., 2016; Riemer et al., 2012; Schensul et al., 2006) to name a few.

Research partnerships have the potential to produce more comprehensive knowledge, increased impact, and greater change in practice and policy than studies conducted by a single institution or without engagement from key stakeholders in the community, non-profit

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organisations, and industry (Cavaleri et al., 2010; Gomez et al., 2018; Horsfall et al., 2010; Melese et al., 2009; Meza et al., 2016). Partnerships offer significant benefits to researchers and communities. They may lessen duplicative efforts in areas of inquiry, enhancing collective knowledge (Hoekstra et al., 2018; Makinde et al., 2018) and research impact by improving the knowledge-to-practice implementation timeline (Rycroft-Malone et al., 2015).

Partnerships provide greater mobility for faculty and students through opportunities such as visiting scholar and student exchange programs (Hynie et al., 2014), improved interdisciplinary collaboration (Nyström et al., 2018), and increased visibility of research findings (Aikins et al., 2012) compared to research conducted independently and in situ. Researchers may experience greater commitment when contributing to a partnership, as the network of like-minded colleagues can provide enthusiasm and inspiration to further research endeavours (de Moissac et al., 2019; Rycroft-Malone et al., 2015). Research partnerships can also support community-based organizations through influencing service, practice, and policy standards with research knowledge; widening access to financial resources; providing staff training; enabling networking; increasing service options; creating new programs; and improving communication and service delivery (Ayers & Arch, 2013; Childs & Potter, 2014; Craig et al., 2015; Dentato et al., 2010 Horsfall, 2010; Meza et al., 2016; Soltani et al., 2017). By engaging in research partnerships, community partners can serve as a safeguard to their community by ensuring that their needs are integrated with academic interests (Dentato et al., 2010).

However, several barriers to research partnership success exist. Time requirements, balancing community and academic interests, inconsistent participation, poor management or delegation of responsibilities, limited access to resources, and power differences between partners are also common challenges that can hinder a partnership's longevity and success (Ayers & Arch, 2013; Dentato et al., 2010; Gomez et al., 2018; Lantz et al., 2001; Meza et al., 2016; Soltani et al., 2017; Travers et al., 2013). Researchers have identified facilitative factors to

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overcome those barriers and develop successful academic-community research partnerships. Gomez et al. (2018) categorize these inhibitors and enablers as *organizational* or *interpersonal*. Organizational factors are mostly associated with effective leadership whereas interpersonal factors are primarily grounded in trust-building and colleagiality between participants. As such, it is important to identify and mitigate against potential and emergent barriers while maximizing the benefits of facilitators to assure partnership success (van der Hoorn, 2016).

Developing INQYR

INQYR is a seven-year SSHRC-funded research partnership working to identify and address the needs of SGMY, investigate their use of ICTs within diverse global contexts, and train the next generation of scholars and practitioners. In developing INQYR, a literature search for existing partnership models using various combinations of terms such as 'SGMY', 'international', and 'partnerships' was conducted. The literature search identified three international partnerships broadly focused on SGM populations. Two had important, but specific, missions to address human rights and criminalization of SGM identities, behaviors, and communities (Human Rights Watch, 2009; Nicol et al., 2014). The remaining example is the International Psychology Network for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Issues, which aims to decenter psychological practice and guidelines from a Western context (Horne et al., 2019). Given these partnerships focused on neither SGMY specifically nor ICT use, we identified an opportunity to assemble a unique international and interdisciplinary partnership focusing on the resilience-enhancing potential of ICTs among SGMY (DeVito et al., 2019). Unknown to us at the inception of the partnership, ICTs would become more integral to the daily lives of SGMY during the COVID-19 pandemic (Cerezo et al., 2021; Gonzales et al., 2021)**,** later galvanizing our partnership goals.

INQYR is designed to achieve four objectives. First, it aims to understand how ICTs influence identity development and wellbeing for geographically dispersed SGMY in multiple sociocultural contexts. This involves: (a) exploring and describing ICT use of SGMY within

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multiple regions; (b) identifying the unique ethnoracial, sociocultural, and human rights factors of each region and their association with SGMY's gender identity, sexual orientation, wellbeing, and ICT use; and (c) distinguishing the intersecting relationships between SGMY's conceptualizations and experiences of **their** gender identity, sexual orientation, and other identities. Second, INQYR will develop an integrated theoretical framework incorporating the complex role of ICTs by: (a) examining sources of minority stress (Meyer, 2003) and resilience (Colpitts & Gahagan, 2016) for SGMY, expanding existing theoretical conceptualizations and accounting for geographic and sociocultural contexts; and (b) identifying the impact of ICTs on minority stress and resilience for SGMY (Craig et al., 2019).

Third, this theoretical framework will be used to inform a series of online programs that facilitate SGMY resilience and wellbeing in a manner responsive to context. These resilience enhancement products (REPs) will include text, visuals, videos, games, and self-assessments. Finally, INQYR aims to establish an international network of SGMY scholars, service providers, research institutions, and community organizations to enhance SGMY wellbeing through ICTs. This capacity-building effort is designed to sustain INQYR's REPs and impact beyond the completion of the seven-year partnership.

INQYR's objectives are planned to advance through three distinct phases (Figure 1). Phase one (years 1–3) involves developing four regional networks, forming an International Student Training Network (ISTN), and conducting regionally-specific projects. This initial developmental phase is the central focus of this paper and is designed to gather contextual data and build local capacity to inform later phases. Phase two (years 3–4) will consist of an online, mixed-methods, multi-lingual survey, including cross-regional components alongside regionally-specific questions. Phase three (years 5–7) involves the development of REPs alongside dissemination of partnership findings, including to key stakeholders. Here, we describe the key considerations made in forming and developing the partnership.

[Figure 1]

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Identification of Regions and Partners

Globally, SGMY experience disparate sociocultural vulnerabilities stemming from victimization in contexts such as the family, school, and neighbourhoods in both the northern (Bender & Lauritsen, 2020; Riggs et al., 2018) and southern hemispheres (Mendoza et al, 2015; Lozano-Verduzco & Salinas-Quiroz, 2016; Lozano-Verduzco, 2016). Given these worldwide deficits, it was necessary to define the regional scope of the international partnership. Following significant communication with researchers, the team identified particular regions for inclusion in the first phase based on four factors: (a) SGMY research need in regional contexts; (b) expertise, availability and scope of scholars and community organizations; (c) history of interdisciplinary work; (d) linguistic competence; and (e) interest in technology-facilitated projects.

From these criteria, we identified that a partnership would be viable and beneficial for prospective partners in so-called "developing" countries in the Global South such as Mexico where research receives around $6.8 billion USD per annum from the federal government, approximately **0.28%** of the country's GDP. By comparison, Canada's investment in R&D is approximately $26.6 billion USD, approximately 1.54% of Canada's GDP; OECD, 2021. Further, Mexico's existing funding is unequally distributed across disciplines, with natural sciences receiving disproportionally more funding than research in the social and health sciences and humanities because funding is typically derived from the GDP to potentially serve economic interests and the private sector (Medina & Villegas, 2016). Therefore, international and interdisciplinary collaboration and financial investment may be enticing for researchers from diverse regions, institutions, and disciplines who may otherwise struggle to secure direct investment and increase the visibility of their work, meeting a key goal of our partnership.

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At the time of proposal and funding, INQYR comprised over 40 academic and community partners from a diverse range of disciplines and locations, offering a variety of skills and expertise necessary for project execution (see Table 1).

[Table 1]

The partnership continues to grow in response to: (a) emerging needs of SGMY across the regions; (b) recommendations from founding INQYR members; (c) requests to join the partnership; and (d) students and advisory board members attaining academic and practice positions, changing their affiliation with INQYR. Another key strategy to sustain the partnership was to ensure that the majority of the academic partners, including the principal investigator, have a history of SGM community work experience as practitioners, professionals, non-profit board members, or executive directors. This ensured that both academic and community perspectives could be preserved and leveraged regardless of the changing membership, that community impact remained a priority throughout the partnership and beyond, and that the partnership could draw on a wide range of community and academic connections to replenish the complement of partners and mitigate against attrition. We identified this as a key facilitator for INQYR in particular because SGM researchers may have more extensive community connections than researchers in other domains due to the longstanding history of community engagement in SGM theory and research (Eaton et al., 2018; Fredriksen-Goldsen & Kim, 2017; Strunk et al., 2017).

INQYR's Operating Framework

To support the engagement of the partnership within and across regions, INQYR designed a variety of collaborative regional and international activities facilitated by ICTs focusing on the key organizational facilitators necessary for success (Gomez et al., 2018). The full partnership holds a multi-day annual meeting, which is bolstered by presentations on emerging results to key stakeholders and relevant members of the public. Furthermore, INQYR's leadership team and regional networks each hold quarterly web conferences. Project-specific

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meetings and committees including student training also gather regularly through web conferencing. The partnership also engages in concept mapping and brainstorming activities, both virtually and in person. Much of this work is presented in lay terms on INQYR's website as part of a living timeline. This ICT-enabled approach has helped INQYR's operations resist disruption from lockdowns or international travel bans caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

INQYR has an integrated governance framework that is illustrated in Figure 2. A Partnership Leadership Council (PLC) oversees overall governance, including cross-regional coordination, conflict resolution, and direction of sub-grant funds for specific research projects. The PLC also reviews and approves authorship on partnership outputs, following consensus guidelines (supplementary file 1). The PLC includes two co-chairs from each of INQYR's four regional networks, Canada, Mexico, the **USA**, and the UK, alongside the partnership's principal investigator and project manager. Additional regions may join INQYR over the course of the partnership.

INQYR's regional networks (RNs) are the primary mechanism for engagement and participation of community partners, co-applicants, and collaborators within each region. Students work and study within each region, engage with their respective RNs, and participate in cross-regional training through the ISTN. Using participatory research methods and integrating guidance from youth advisory boards, the RNs develop regional-specific projects that align with INQYR's goals and are relevant to the local context with opportunities for cross-regional scale-up and adaptation (Maiter et al., 2012), thus providing an emic and etic perspective of the issues that SGMY face. Regions formally propose projects to the PLC via sub-grant applications (supplementary file 2), and each project lead reports summaries of financial and in-kind contributions annually. Following each INQYR annual meeting, attendees complete a mixed-methods online survey concerning synergy, leadership, decision-making, and overall satisfaction, as well as open-ended questions on partnership benefits and drawbacks. The PLC reviews annual results, making adjustments to operational frameworks and policy accordingly.

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[Figure 2]

International Student Training Network (ISTN)

INQYR's formal training mechanism for students is the ISTN, which consists of a minimum of two graduate students from each of INQYR's regions. ISTN cohorts complete a two-year training program that includes: (a) eight educational webinars from INQYR team members (Figure 3); (b) experiential learning activities such as student grant applications and small group exercises; (c) paid research assistantships on INQYR's studies; and (d) an in-person symposium to present work completed and to receive additional training. These activities are led by INQYR team members and external experts. It is hoped that this collaborative international network of future leaders in SGMY research and practice leaves a lasting legacy that provides sustained benefits to emerging scholars and practitioners internationally.

[Figure 3]

Critical Reflection

Given INQYR's international scope, large team, considerable budget, vulnerable community of interest, and **seven**-year duration, we engaged in an introspective and reflexive case study (Weger et al., 2018) at the end of the parnership's second year to recall partnership barriers and facilitators and risk mitigation strategies. Such a case study approach is useful as part of a reflexive governance strategy that is responsive to complex and evolving stakeholder needs (Ersoy & Hall, 2020). Here, we describe challenges we experienced and how we mitigated against them (Table 2), partnership facilitators and how we maximized their benefits, and the implications this may have for similar partnerships.

Partnership Barriers

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Language Barriers. International partnerships are often faced with the communication challenges of language barriers (Harder et al., 2007; Hynie et al., 2014) and cultural differences in expression and terminology (Hynie et al., 2014; Karban & Ngandu, 2017). To mitigate these, we procured interpretation services for all meetings and translation and cultural adaptation of mixed methods data collection materials, transcripts, and other deliverables. Elsewhere, new ICT features such as automatic live closed captioning of online video meetings have been critical in reducing barriers for participants with auditory processing deficits (McCarron, 2021). Likewise, these innovations may offer utility to bilingual international collaborators who can supplement what they are listening to with text (Hsieh, 2020). Altogether, our efforts have supported the Spanish-speaking members of INQYR and the ISTN in staying productive and engaged with content that otherwise may have been inaccesible due to language differences.

While INQYR is multilingual, all partners have some degree of fluency in English in addition to access to technology. These issues may have excluded potential partners and stakeholders such as in Mexico where ICT uptake remains lower (Martínez-Domínguez & Mora-Rivera, 2020; Montiel, 2016), in French-only organizations in Canada, or with partners in other regions operating exclusively in other languages.

Time Zone Barriers. Time differences between international partners have presented challenges in scheduling meetings at mutually agreeable times and awaiting responses to communications (see also Bond et al., 2021; Tee et al., 2015). This constrains INQYRs ability to effectively expand its regional networks and may require partners to participate at inconvenient times of day. Though much effort has gone into creating a colleagial and collaborative environment where partners afford each other some scheduling flexibility, we remain vigilant for instances where this becomes a problematic practice that negatively impacts the health of the partnerships (Nurmi, 2011). This can be further mitigated against by identifying opportunities to hand off work-in-progress to international partners who may be able to progress it at a more

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reasonable time of day, thereby ensuring equitable apportionment of work and rest (Phelps & Hohlfeld, 2011). As well, use of asynchronous communications such as newsletters may facilitate engagement with partners who are unable to be easily accommodated in synchronous forums (Wöhlert, 2020).

Personal and Workload Barriers. Maintaining long-term, consistent participation of academic and community collaborators in research partnerships is challenging. Devoting significant time to the early development of the partnership to establish roles and responsibilities, design studies, determine procedures, and build relationships can counter poor management and lack of investment in the partnership (Dentato et al., 2010; Hampton et al., 2007; Lantz et al., 2001). Considering availability during partner selection, using technology, and adopting evidence-based engagement strategies are potential solutions for the issue of inconsistent participation and drop-out (Gomez et al., 2018). In its early stages, INQYR attempted to establish clear meeting agendas, discrete roles and responsibilities, and thorough documentation to new partner representatives. This includes authorship guidelines, a sub-grant application template, as well as rotating annual meeting locations for the partnership across regions. Nonetheless, we have experienced fluctuating levels of participation amongst members including regional co-chairs, resulting in changes to INQYR's PLC.

Community partners usually develop under different dynamics and structures than academic partners because they direct their work to their beneficiaries and administer funds to guarantee the continuity of their work. This is particularly true for regions such as Mexico, where there are 27 community organizations for every 100 thousand inhabitants compared to the 670 community organizations for every 100 thousand residents in the U.S. (García, 2019). This stymies their in-depth involvement and participation in INQYR, relegating them to a secondary level in the partnership compared to academic partners. We continually address this limitation through community events, public dissemination, and additional engagement opportunities.

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Lack of infrastructure. The lack of funding and infrastructure for SGM research and practice and limited access to research opportunities in some regions are barriers for international partnerships of this nature (Coulter et al., 2014; Viehl et al., 2017). The difference in scope of regional projects, the capacity of project-specific teams, and other factors can cause a differential in financial and material support that could impact partnership cohesion. Further, institutional bureaucracies, due-dilligence assessment requirements, and the administrative burden of negotiating sub-grant contract agreements can delay project initiation and reimbursements. INQYR is trying to proactively address these gaps by providing significant and consistent supports to each regional network and project team but this remains an ongoing struggle. For example, INQYR's host institution would not recognize the insitutional academic partners in Mexico for the traditional subcontracting process despite their approval as co-investigators by SSHRC. The host institution eventually agreed to the unorthodox process of wire transfering research funds, however they are frequently delayed. Although INQYR**'s** team is attentive to disruptions in this process, these infrastructure issues remain challenging.

To further minimise burden to parties in regions with less infrastructure, INQYR has chosen a somewhat centralized approach to project management. Data management, including quantitative data collection software, raw data storage, and qualitative data translation is centralized with INQYR's project director and manager and is codified into a data management plan. This central team also manages design, construction, and maintenance of websites, social media, recruitment materials, and other products. Responsibilities for administrative aspects of INQYR are also centralized, including scheduling and hosting virtual meetings and student trainings. Community partners have central support to update products and materials in order to ensure relevance to the SGMY that their organizations are serving. In addition, INQYR strives to leverage additional funding to provide regions with additional supports, such as ICT platforms and technological support that will enhance each region's capacity to meet INQYR's outcomes.

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Power and Historical Tensions. (Inter)national partners face complex challenges in navigating power dynamics, imperialist and colonial tensions, and cultural differences (deSchweinitz et al., 2009; Karban & Ngandu, 2017). This manifested during an early annual partnership meeting where the Mexican network explained that the word 'cisgender', terminology universally understood in SGM research and practice emanating from the Global North, was less relevant in their sociocultural context. The literature suggests that this may be mitigated interpersonally with vigilance, open acknowledgment of imperialist and colonial tensions, resisting White saviour complex, willingness to learn among partners, and early development of and commitment to an anti-oppressive guiding framework (deSchweinitz et al., 2009; Higgs, 2015; Hynie et al., 2014; Karban & Ngandu, 2017; Nicol et al., 2014). However, our partnership is limited in its ability to substantively redress the myriad structural inequities implicated in academia because the expertise on INQYR**'s** leadership team draws on colonized notions of genders and sexualities (Morgensen, 2012) and much academic work is supported by colonized research funding (Williams, Umangay, & Brant, 2020)**.**

Interactions with prospective SGMY research participants may also be fraught with international power imbalances (Schrager et al., 2019). Currency exchange rates, international purchasing power differences, and financial insecurity among SGMY may necessitate the development of an ethical participant remuneration strategy (Saleh et al., 2020). Similarly, cross-cultural differences in the understanding of minors' decision-making capacity exposes SGMY to different levels of research risk. Notably, the **USA** mandates parental consent for minors to participate in research with few exceptions, potentially outing and endangering SGMY (Sims & Nolen, 2021).

Other power dynamics that require vigilance in academic partnerships are those between less experienced and more senior academics, where different workloads, professional networks, and experiences are present (Reich & Reich, 2006). There are also power dynamics unique to interdisciplinary partnerships that require vigilance. For example, when the majority of partners belong to the same discipline and only a

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few belong to others, these few voices may be 'drowned out' by the voices of the dominant discipline. INQYR's partners aim to be open to and invested in learning from the contributions of each other, and be cognizant of their own disciplinary norms, processes, and expectations (Reich & Reich, 2006).

Technology Failure. While we have used technology to mitigate some of the challenges described, technological failures can nonetheless compound them (Harder et al., 2007; Hynie et al., 2014). For INQYR, particularly during project startup, communication challenges were experienced during meetings with unreliable internet connection or technology as key concerns. Technology failure can also disrupt asynchronous information dissemination such as wikis (Berthoud & Giddon, 2018), limiting the ability to communicate effectively across disparate time zones. As well, our reliance on cloud storage necessitated important conversations about data security, given our focus on vulnerable communities (Milliff, 2020).

[Table 2]

Potential Partnership Facilitators

Extensive Collaboration with Diverse Stakeholders and Settings. INQYR's structure is informed by literature emphasizing collaboration, shared power, and decision making between partners throughout a partnership (Halbert et al., 2006; Nicol et al., 2014; Riemer et al., 2012; Schensul et al., 2006; Travers et al., 2013). INQYR facilitates this with clear timelines, structured meetings, and informal opportunities for engagement as well as collective problem-solving through PLC and regional meetings. Research design, data collection and analysis, and dissemination of findings are collaboratively discussed and completed. This does not require that every partner be equally involved in every task, as partner interest, experience, and time may not permit this level of involvement (Travers et al., 2013). Rather, all

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partners should be involved in early developmental stages, and roles and responsibilities for execution of the research should be collectively determined and agreed upon with clear timelines for delivery.

INQYR aims to achieve equitable collaboration through regional meetings and committees to develop projects and ideas, with support of their chair and co-chair and with oversight of the PLC. Technology is indispensable for work of this nature, both with international collaboration and with an extensive regional partnership in large countries. INQYR's PLC has been careful to manage power dynamics by keeping expectations consistent across regions, promoting autonomy to develop and direct regionally-specific and global initiatives, and responding to specific needs for appreciation and recognition. Given that researchers and organizations focused on SGM research and service provision, including INQYR's partners, have access to limited financial support and may experience isolation or burnout (Coulter et al., 2014; Viehl et al., 2017), supportive collaboration and trust is a key motivator for participation.

Building trust **is** especially prudent in cases where marginalized communities, such as SGMY, have historically been over-researched without reaping proportional, tangible benefits (Gomez et al., 2018; Schensul et al., 2006; Travers et al., 2013). INQYR mitigates against this exploitation with its youth advisory board, a stipended panel of SGMY who provide feedback and suggestions to ensure the research meets the diverse needs of the community. Accounting for diversity includes consulting on culturally specific language and research approaches with SGMY, translators, and other contributors who live in each region. All interpretations or concerns about particular stages or tasks should be recognized and discussed as part of equitable design of the partnership (Schulz et al., 2003). Essential to this process is the awareness of power dynamics and the willingness to share power (Horsfall et al., 2010; Nicol et al., 2014; Riemer et al., 2012; Schensul et al., 2006; Travers et al., 2013). Sharing power includes respecting the diversity and culture of a setting (Hynie et al., 2014); partners' unique skills, knowledge, and experience (Cavaleri et al., 2010; Hampton et al., 2007; Reich & Reich, 2006; Schensul et al., 2006; Soltani et al., 2017;

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Travers et al., 2013); and partners' investment of time and other resources (Meza et al., 2016) through the recognition of macro-economic disparities between regional partners.

Shared Goals. Strong partnerships are sustained through clearly articulated goals shared by all members of the partnership (Cavaleri et al., 2010; Childs & Potter, 2014; Halbert et al., 2006; Hynie et al., 2014; Gomez et al., 2018; Riemer et al., 2012; Soltani et al., 2017). A written mission statement unifies INQYR**'s** partners, facilitating shared goals among them, which is further fostered with planned social outings as well as virtually through informal research discussions and social gatherings. Further, researchers have submitted multiple symposia and panel presentations and are encouraged to work together on research projects and give feedback on manuscripts.

Evaluating the progress toward these shared goals provides an opportunity for partners to clarify their expectations for the partnership (Ayers & Arch, 2013) and also helps to maintain participation investment in results and recognition (Gomez et al., 2018). Opportunities for feedback are provided formally through INQYR's annual partnership survey, and informally during regional and partnership meetings. These opportunities may contribute to the development of trust and respect through the ongoing presence of all partners throughout the research process (Hampton et al., 2007), collaborative development of clear research procedures (Lantz et al., 2001; Schensul et al., 2006), and clear and equitable distribution of roles and responsibilities (Hynie et al., 2014; Nicol et al., 2014; Matthew, 2017; Schensul et al., 2006; Soltani et al., 2017).

Hynie et al. (2014) note that specific outcome goals may vary for different partners in an international context, so it is important that all partners are committed to supporting one another and sharing experiences and expertise to achieve their relative goals. Annual partnership evaluations and the ability for regional co-chairs to solely lead or collaborate on projects with student support and training for data analysis

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provides a flexible framework to implement these considerations. Partners receive acknowledgement of all of their participation and findings are shared in formats tailored for each RN and partner to better benefit the community.

Community partners are also unified behind the goals of INQYR. They may directly benefit from the development of REPs in phase three, which complement their mission to improve the wellbeing of SGMY. Community partners may also benefit from direct investment, and publication of resources and materials, such as intervention manuals, infographics, and lay summaries that can be used to develop further services and leverage funding.

Conclusions

This article presented an instrospective and reflexive case study of a developing international academic-community partnership to improve the wellbeing of SGMY. This work contributes to partnership development efforts by exploring how facilitating and challenging factors can guide decision-making during grant application preparation and early implementation. Our considerations will be especially relevant to prospective partnerships with comparable regional, cultural, and linguistic scopes, integration of academic and community objectives, and populations of interest.

Several insights have been gleaned from the development of INQYR that are important for prospective partnership leaders to consider. SGM-focused researchers should be aware that community trauma, isolation, ongoing safety concerns, human rights violations, distrust of researchers, and systemic queerphobia are present and more pronounced in many Global South countries (Human Rights Watch, 2009; Nicol et al., 2014; Travers et al., 2013) and that partner countries implicated in these disparities stand to gain much from being involved in a partnership. However, it is important to be vigilant in monitoring the different systemic manifestations of colonization, racism, and queerphobia; how they impact the partnership; and how the partnership can respond. Such dynamics can include differences in SGM

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terminology, culture, language, community, and sociopolitics across contexts. Likewise, partners should attend to both academic and community interests to ensure that exploitative research practices are not replicated and that dominant research and cultural values and practices are not prioritized or assumed (Karban & Ngandu, 2017). These insights may support stable and effective academic-community partnerships for SGM wellbeing in the future, as discussions about SGM research stakeholders, partnership contexts, and processes have been largely absent in the literature to date (Hoekstra et al., 2020).

We also identified ICTs as an enabling, mitigating, and constraining component of our partnership. ICTs enabled us to easily connect with international collaborators and engage in effective knowledge dissemination while mitigating against language barriers and time zone conflicts. However, these benefits require that the technology functions as expected and users have the competence and resources to use it. With the increasing integration and proliferation of ICTs – not least due to the COVID-19 pandemic – we anticipate that our observations about their utility in INQYR can be expanded in the literature, given the emerging ICTs currently being utilized in academic settings (e.g., GatherTown; Li et al., 2021).

As a critical reflection, our analysis of INQYR is a subjective endeavour and is not as evaluatively powerful as data-driven evaluation. While a reflexive approach to evaluating academic-community partnerships is valuable (Soleri, Long, Ramirez-Andreotta, Eitemiller, & Pandaya, 2016), a prescriptive benchmarking process would be more rigorous. Future partnership leaders may experience improved grant application success and project delivery utilizing a structured set of recommendations that incorporates the sociocultural and interpersonal insights gleaned from INQYR's nascent years. Finally, a systematic literature review and partnership evaluation process providing greater clarity on the success of INQYR may be possible in **its** later years and could further illuminate the project's benefits and challenges alongside the intersectional experiences of SGMY internationally.

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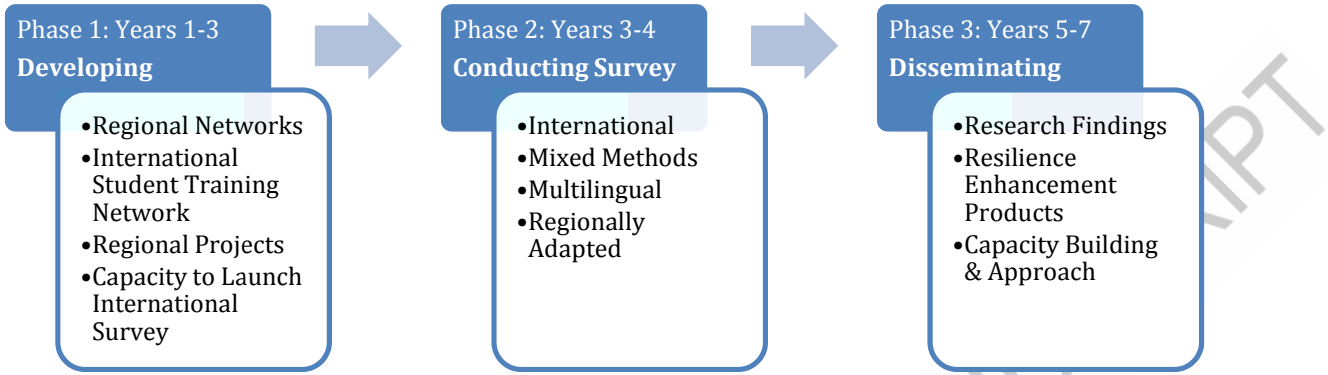

Figure 1: Partnership phases of INQYR

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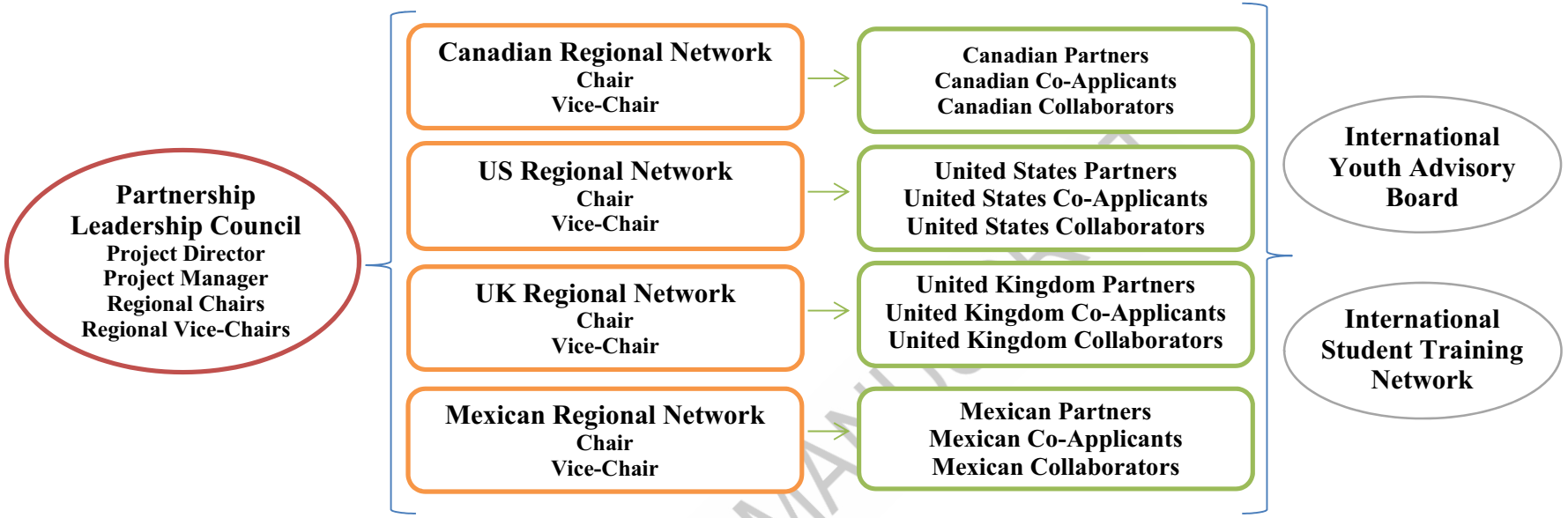

Figure 2: INQYR's governance framework.

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Figure 3: Curriculum for Cohort 1 ISTN (2018-2020)

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Table 1

List of inaugural INQYR partners

Region	Partner type	Discipline	Community experience	Expertise/Skills: Contribution
Canada	Academic	Social Work	Yes	SGMY, ICTs, resilience, affirmative interventions.
Canada	Academic	Education	Yes	SGMY identities and cultural contexts.
Canada	Academic	Social Work	Yes	SGM information-seeking, social media.
Canada	Academic	Social Work	No	Web-based intervention programming.
Canada	Academic	Social Work	Yes	SGMY resilience, large-scale online studies.
Canada	Academic	Social Work	No	SGM newcomers and trauma, knowledge mobilization.
Canada	Academic	Information	No	Partnership expertise, ICTs, privacy.
Canada	Academic	Sexualities	Yes	Student training, SGMY community engagement.
Canada	Community	Social Work	Yes	SGMY community engagement.
US	Academic	Social Work	Yes	SGMY affirmative care, gender identity
US	Academic	Social Work	Yes	Non-profit leadership, SGMY health disparities.
US	Academic	Social Work	Yes	SGMY refugees, qualitative methods.
US	Academic	Psychology	Yes	Stigma and discrimination in SGMY healthcare.
US	Academic	Public Health	Yes	Efficacy of SGM ICT interventions.
US	Academic	Social Work	Yes	Participatory research with SGMY youth advisors.
US	Academic	Social Work	Yes	Stigma, stress, and health among SGMY.
US	Academic	Psychology	No	Quantitative methods, competence in SGMY healthcare.
US	Academic	Social Work	Yes	Multicultural SGM issues and ICTs.
US	Community	Social Work	Yes	Knowledge mobilization, community engagement.
UK	Academic	Psychology	Yes	Psychology of sex, sexualities, and genders.
UK	Academic	Social Work	Yes	Large scale SGM survey recruitment, SGMY wellbeing.
UK	Academic	Psychology	Yes	SGM mental health, measurement, and survey expertise.
UK	Academic	Anthropology	Yes	ICTs, social and cultural anthropology.
UK	Community	Social Work	Yes	SGMY non-profit governance, community engagement.
UK	Community	Social Work	Yes	Knowledge mobilization.
Mexico	Academic	Psychology	Yes	Masculinities, violence, and homophobia.
Mexico	Academic	Public Health	Yes	Large scale SGM survey recruitment, ICTs.
Mexico	Academic	Psychology	Yes	Gender issues, stigma, research methods.
Mexico	Academic	Sociology	Yes	Sexuality, transnationalism, and Latinx ethnicity and culture
Mexico	Academic	Political Science	Yes	ICTs for health communication, political action.

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Barrier	Contextual Indicators in INQYR	INQYR's Mitigation Strategies
Language differences	Filtering of communications through partners with greater bilingual competency. Reliance on stronger areas of communication (e.g., typing comments rather than verbalizing). Redundancy of common Westernized terminology (e.g., 'cisgender').	Engaging bilingual partners and facilitators. Procuring translation and interpretation services for all meetings. Publishing bilingual research abstracts. Inviting bilingual speakers to choose the language they prefer to talk in. Using translation technologies where appropriate.
Time zone differences	Difficulty in convening all partners at one time. Partners working at abnormally early/late hours. Email communications between some international partners consistently spanning multiple days due to large time differences. Cognitive load of regularly converting time zones and resulting conversion mistakes. Asynchronous occurrence of daylight savings.	Setting clear project timelines and expectations. Making effective use of time together. Being flexible and equitable when scheduling partnership activities. Providing advanced notice of timing disruptions (e.g., upcoming holidays, daylight savings). Using ICT-enabled scheduling solutions that are responsive to time zone differences. Scheduling smaller meetings that are easier to convene.
Personal and workload challenges	Intense initial workload in setting up research infrastructure. Leadership stressors (e.g., mid-late career researchers with multiple research responsibilities) Multiple competing project timelines (e.g., drafting research materials in time to receive feedback at Youth Advisory Board meetings). Fluctuating partner participation. Initial limited involvement of community partners. High workload for teaching faculty also leading research.	Engaging enthusiastic and energized early-career researchers, research assistants, and volunteers. Defining clear roles and responsibilities. Setting clear agendas and plans of action. Identifying and fulfilling partnership needs as they occur. Publishing a unified mission statement detailing goals and commitments.

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Lack of infrastructure	Working in an under-funded research area. Few to no other partnership models to build on. Institutional policies that contributed to research challenges for our partners in Mexico.	Providing centralized project management, communication and design support for all partners and regions. Providing research training and consultation across regions. Documenting processes, policies, and templates (e.g., author guidelines).
Power and historical tensions	Underrepresentation of some expertise (e.g., Two Spirit Peoples). Overrepresentation of certain disciplines (e.g., social work, psychology). Challenges in reconciling different ethical standards internationally (e.g., competence of minors to consent to participating in research).	Exercising vigilance, open-mindedness, deference, self-reflection, and listening skills. Adopting community-based research approaches when working with marginalized communities. Ensuring reciprocal benefits for all academic and community partners and research participants. Discussing and negotiating power sharing early on and throughout the partnership. Outlining research participant risks and rewards thoroughly for each project.
Technology failure	Unstable internet connections (especially impactful if interpreters are affected). Partners not having access to files or correct software permissions. File corruption.	Seeking advice from institutional ICT departments. Developing a data management plan to minimize data breaches and corruption. Backing up data locally and on cloud storage and reviewing permissions regularly. Agreeing alternative communication channels in the event of technology failure. Turning webcams off (if needed) to conserve internet bandwidth during videoconferencing.

Table 2: Research partnership barriers experienced in INQYR, contextual indicators, and potential mitigation strategies.

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