

# Online Mental Health Information Behaviours of Emerging Adults: A Web Usability and User Experience Study

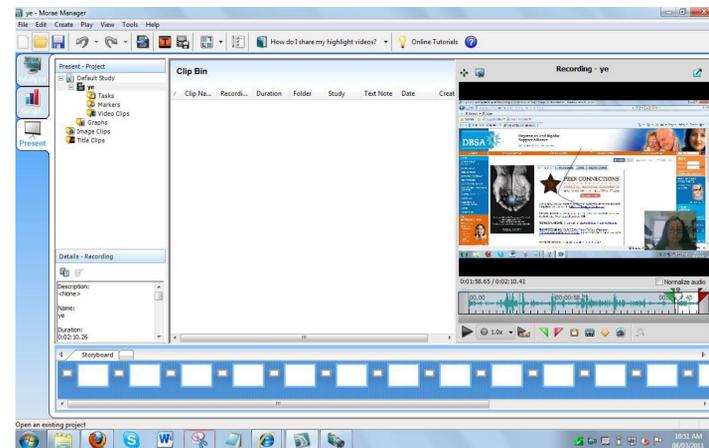
Diane Rasmussen Neal, PhD, Faculty of Information and Media Studies, dneal2@uwo.ca  
Cameron Hoffman, MLIS; PhD student, Faculty of Information and Media Studies, choffma4@uwo.ca  
Ye Liu, BA (Honors specialization in psychology) student, Brescia University College, yliu524@uwo.ca

## Seeking Mental Health Help

- 20% of Canadians will contend with a mental illness—and for *emerging adults* (persons aged 18-25) this rate is even higher.
- Emerging adults face various barriers in seeking help for mental health issues (e.g. avoiding their own feelings, believing their feelings should be ‘normal,’ financial issues, and the stigma associated with many forms of mental illness.)
- Emerging adults prefer to seek out mental health information in online environments.
- While information retrieval research indicates that most Internet users look only through the first few hits from search engines, it is not clear what *online information practices* emerging adults carry out to obtain or interact with information.

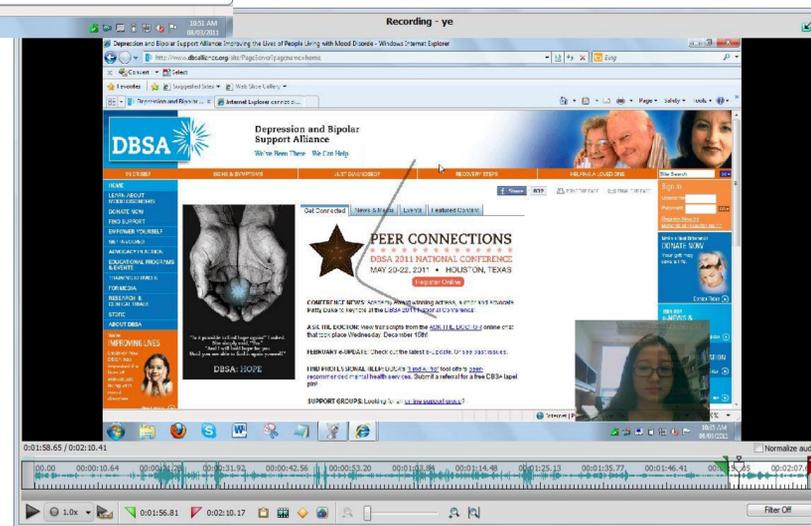
## Beyond Usability Studies

- This study aims to employ usability study technologies to learn how emerging adults interact online with mental health information.
- Most usability studies employ screen-recording technologies to test Web design or to test user accuracy/speed with Web page/site content.
  - This study employs usability study technology (Techsmith Morae) not to test a particular Web site but to record user onscreen behaviours.
  - These behaviours and post-test interview responses are then analyzed and coded to derive online information practices.



Morae is software used for usability and user-centred design practices. It records participants' online behaviours, on-screen mouse movements, keystrokes, and audio and video.

Sample recording session showing online mental health information seeking, including the participant's face, mouse movements, and recording timeline



## Pilot Study: Past & Potential Mental Health Information Seeking

- Online quantitative and qualitative survey;  $n = 1,308$  UWO students aged 18-25
- Most did not know about many online resources, but wanted to know more
- 74% would be “very likely” or “somewhat likely” to use search engines such as Google
- Only 3% said previous utilization of online mental health resources “helped a lot”
- Replicated at The University of Sydney with similar results
- These results inform the current study
- For more information:
  - Neal, D., Campbell, A., Williams, L., Liu, Y., & Nussbaumer, D. (2011). "I did not realize so many options are available": Cognitive authority, search engines, emerging adults, and e-mental health. *Library & Information Science Research*, 33(1), 25-33.

## Emerging Adult Information Practices

- Study participants work uninterrupted on various mental health information tasks, followed by a post-recording interview with the researcher.
- Finding addresses/contact information of mental health services
  - Helping other emerging adult friends find information related to eating disorders
  - Using the Internet to communicate with others about mental health issues
  - Finding information related to stress management
  - Exploring safe online environments for mental health information
  - Evaluating the credibility of online mental health information
  - Assessing the quality of mental health information on the basis of Web design
  - Sharing mental health information with friends
  - Exploring information purposively/serendipitously

## Community Partners

- Maria Luisa Contursi, OATR, Program Manager & Co-Founder, mindyourmind, London, ON
- Christine Garinger, RN, Pro Site Coordinator & Educator, mindyourmind, London, ON