



# ROBERT P. GAUTHIER

**Program:** PhD

## Major Research Project

**Project co-researchers:** Dr. James R. Wallace, School of Public Health and Health Systems, Faculty Supervisor; Dr. Mary Jean Costello, Homewood Research Institute, Research and Evaluation Scientist

**Robert Gauthier** studies online communities, examining how researchers can gain insights that can inform, and even improve, public health practices. He explores the sensitive topic of addiction recovery by using topic modelling from machine learning to understand how Reddit communities provide support. He found that Reddit communities were helping members find activities that could replace addictive behaviors. The communities also allowed people to share negative and positive experiences with members and outsiders, such as family members. Robert found that communities were using Reddit to have these critical discussions because the online platform provides pseudonymity — anonymity while remaining under a re-usable user-name. The pseudonymity is crucial for many individuals to be able to have, or observe, discussions that might otherwise be discouraged or rejected in in-person support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), or other organized therapy. The Reddit communities foster critical and complex discussions such as questioning the religious undertones in AA, or wondering how living in recovery from opiates could interfere with healthcare treatment in a system that prescribes opiates for pain management.