The multisystemic resilience of gender and sexually diverse youth in a rural community context in the Free State Province

By

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DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

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I declare that THE MULTISYSTEMIC RESILIENCE OF GENDER AND SEXUALLY DIVERSE YOUTH IN A RURAL COMMUNITY CONTEXT IN THE FREE STATE PROVINCE is my work and that every source that I have utilised or cited has been shown and accredited through comprehensive reference. I further declare that I submitted the thesis to originality-checking software. It is submitted following the requirements for the Philosophy Doctor in Psychology of Education degree at the University of South Africa, Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

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ABSTRACT

Gender and sexually diverse youth in rural communities across the globe face devastating adversities that compromise their physical and psychological wellbeing. Despite this, they have developed unique pathways to resilience, which are informed by multiple systems that influence resistance, adaptation and transformation. Current theorisations view resilience as a product of multi-systems that intersect to enhance the wellbeing of young people, yet almost nothing was known about the gender and sexually diverse youth resilience processes obtaining in a Free State rural community. As a result, research into the multisystemic resilience of this cohort was needed. This study followed a qualitative phenomenological design, with semi-structured interviews being conducted with 12 rural youngsters from the Free State, who identify as gender and sexually diverse. The participants were selected using non-probability purposive and snowball sampling methods. Apart from the devastating risk factors facing the participants, which are perpetuated by intersecting variables such as cultural and conservative Christian community norms, poverty, unemployment and orphanhood, resilience accounts were also documented. The study found that multiple resources, such as the participants' psychological qualities, recreational activities, family, friends and peers, teachers, community members, local non-profit organisations, and their natural and structural environment, played an important role in their resilience processes. Although family affirmation seemed to be a crucial factor in the psychological adjustment of LGBTQ+ youth, their resilience processes were enabled by different intersecting systems in their community. Four themes derived from this study: 1) the distal and proximal stressors and resources LGBTQ+ youth need; 2) individualistic qualities that foster resilience; 3) relational and structural supports within the rural ecology, cultivating self-acceptance and coping with minority stress; and 4) a sense of safety and connection with the environment. The complex compromises between different systems found to foster resilience in this research, call for a holistic intervention that engages the micro, meso and macro systems for a more responsive intervention. Furthermore, this research indicates that, to promote resilience in LGBTQ+ youth, structural hetero-cis-normativity must be challenged through policy reform and implementation, as well as psychoeducation on gender and sexual diversity.

KEYWORDS: Cisnormativity, Colonial, Gender and Sexual Diversity, Heteronormativity, Intervention, LGBTQ+ Youth, Multisystemic, Resilience, Rural Community, Trade-offs

KAKARETSO

Batjha ba metseng e mahaeng ba bong bo fapanang lefatsheng ka bophara ba tobane le ditsietsi tse senyang bophelo ba bona ba mmele le ba kelello. Ho sa tsotellehe sena, ba thehile ditsela tse ikgethang tsa ho mamella, tse tshehetswang ke mekgwa e mengata e susumetsang kganyetso, ho ikamahanya le maemo le phetoho. Dikgopolo tsa morao-rao di bona ho mamella e le phello ya mekgwa e mengata e kopaneng ho ntlafatsa bophelo bo botle ba batjha, leha ele hore ho ne ho se letho le tsejwang ka bong le mekgwa e fapaneng ya bong ya batjha e fumanwang motseng wa mahaeng wa Foreisetata. Ka lebaka leo, ho ne ho hlokahala dipatlisiso mabapi le ho mamella ha ditsamaiso tse ngata tsa sehlopha sena. Phuputso ena e latetse moralo wa boleng wa kutlwisiso ka dipuisano, mme dipuisano tse batlang di hlophisitswe di entswe le batjha ba 12 ba mahaeng ba Foreisetata, ba ikgethang e le ba bong bo fapaneng. Bankakarolo ba kgethuwe ho sebediswa mekgwa e sa tlwaelehang ya sepheo le ya ho thaotha bankakarolo. Ntle le dikotsi tse sithabetsang tse tobaneng le bankakarolo, tse tswelang pele ka mefuta e fapa-fapaneng e kang meetlo le ditlwaelo tsa setjhaba sa Bakreste ba latelang melao e tlwaelehileng, bofutsana, ho hloka mosebetsi le bokgutsana, ditlaleho tsa ho mamella le tsona di tlalehwa. Phuputso e fumane hore mehlodi e mengata, e kang ditshwaneleho tsa kelello tsa bankakarolo, mesebetsi ya ho itlosa bodutu, lelapa, metswalle le dithaka, matitjhere, ditho tsa setjhaba, mekgatlo ya lehae e sa etseng phaello, le tikoloho ya bona ya tlhaho le ya meralo, e phethile karolo ya bohlokwa tshebetsong ya bona ya ho mamella. Leha tiiso ya lelapa e ne e bonahala e le ntlha ya bohlokwa tokisong ya kelello ya batjha ba LGBTQ+, ditshebetso tsa bona tsa mamello di ile tsa thuswa ke ditsamaiso tse fapaneng tse hokahaneng setjhabeng sa bona. Dihlooho tse nne tse fumanweng phuputsong ena: 1) kgatello ya maikutlo le mehlodi e hlokahalang ho batjha ba LGBTQ+; 2) ditshwaneleho tsa botho tse kgothalletsang mamello; 3) ditshehetso tsa dikamano le tsa sebopeho kahara tikoloho ya mahaeng, ho ba le ho ikamohela le ho sebetsana le kgatello ya maikutlo e fokolang; le 4) maikutlo a polokeho le kamano le tikoloho. Dikamano tse rarahaneng dipakeng tsa ditsamaiso tse fapaneng tse fumanweng ho kgothaletsa boitelo phuputsong ena, di hloka hore ho be le tshebetso e akaretsang e kenyang ditshebetso tse nyane, tse mahareng le tse kgolo bakeng sa tshebetso e arabelang haholwanyane. Ho feta moo, phuputso ena e bontsha hore, ho ntshetsapele mamello ho batjha ba LGBTQ+, sebopeho sa tlwaeleho ya kgahleho ya bong bo tshwanang se tlameha ho phephetswa ka tokiso ya maano le tshebetsong, hammoho le thuto ya kelello mabapi le bong le phapang ya bong.

MANTSWE A SEHLOOHO: Phapang ya Cisnormativity, Bong le Bong bo Fapaneng, Heteronormativity, Ho kena dipakeng, Batjha ba LGBTQ+, Mamello ya Ditsamaiso tse Ngata, Setjhaba sa Mahaeng, Ditshekisetso

ISISHWANKATHELO

Ulutsha olunezini nobuni obahlukeneyo olusemaphandleni kwihlabathi liphela lujongene neembandezelo ezitshabalalisayo nezidodobalisa impilo qete yabo ngokwasemzimbeni nangokwasengqondweni. Nangona kunjalo, babonakalise iindlela ezizodwa zonyamezelo, ezibangelwe ziinkqubo ezininzi eziphembelela uxhathalazo, ukulungelana neemeko kunye nenguqu. Iithiyori zakutshanje zilubona unyamezelo njengesiqhamo seenkqubo ezininzi ezinqamlezanayo ukuze ziphucule impilo qete yabantu abatsha, ngelo xesha kungaphantse kuthiwe kwakungekho kwanto yayisaziwa ngeenkqubo zolutsha olunezini nobuni obahlukeneyo obufumaneka kuluntu lwasemaphandleni eFreyistata. Ngenxa yaloo nto, uphando olungonyameko olunkquboninzi kweli qela lwaba yimfuneko. Esi sifundo silandele inkqubophando ephicotha intsingiselo nesiseko sokuthile (*qualitative phenomenological design*), nodliwanondlebe olungacwangiswanga ngokupheleleyo oluthe lwenziwa kubantu abatsha abali12 eFreyistata, nabathe baqapheleka njengabanesini nobuni obahlukileyo. Abathathinxaxheba bakhethwa ngokusebenzisa imethodi yosampulo oluqingqekileyo nolo lumana ukongezwa (*non-probability and snowball sampling*). Ngaphandle kweemeko ezingumngcipheko ezitshabalalisayo eziphenjelelwa ziimeko eziguqukugukayo ezixananazileyo ezinjengezithethe zoluntu zobuKrestu zabadla ngendeb' endala nenkcubeko, indlala, intswelangqesho, ubunkedama, iinkcazo ezingokunyameka zaye zashicilelwa nazo. Uphando lufumanise ukuba izinto ezilulutho ezininzi ezinjengeempawu ngokwasengqondweni zabathathinxaxheba, ezemidlalo, usapho, abahlobo noontangandini, ootitshala, abahlali, imibutho yasekuhlaleni engenzi nzuzo, okubangqongileyo ngokwendalo nangokwakhiwa kudlale indima ebaluleke gqitha kwiinkqubo zabo zonyameko. Nangona ukubalulwa kweentsapho kukhangeleka kungumba ophambili kulungelelwaniso lwengqondo yeLGBTQ+youth, iinkqubo zonyameko lwabo zavunyelwa ziinkqubo ezahlukileyo ekuhlaleni. Mine imixholo efumaneke kolu phando: 1) izibangelixinzelelo ezikude nezikufuphi kunye nezinto ezisetyenziswayo ezifunwa yiLGBTQ+youth; 2) iimpawu zomntu ngamnye ezikhuthaza unyamezelo; 3) inkxaso yobuhlobo nemo ngaphakathi kwiekholoji yasemaphandleni ibethelela ukuzamkela nokumelana noxinzelelo olungephi; kunye 4) novakalelo lokhuseleko nonxibelelwano nokusingqongileyo. Uhlangabezwano olumbaxa oluphakathi kweenkqubo ezahlukeneyo ezifumaniseke ziyikhulisa unyamezelo kolu phando, zihlaba ikhwelo kungenelelo olupheleleyo olunokubandakanya iinkqubo zabantu ngabanye, ezamaqela namaqumrhu, ezentlalo nezamaziko (*micro, meso, and macro*). Kwakhona olu phando lubonisa ukuba uphuhliso lwenyameko kwiLGBTQ+youth, ucalulo lwamaqela

(hetero-cis-nomarcity) malucelelwe umngeni ngokusebenzisa inguqu yomgaqonkqubo nokusebenza kwawo, kwanemfundo yezengqondo kwisini nobuni obahlukeneyo.

ISIGAMA ESINGUNDOQO Isini osabelwa njengesona siso ekuzalweni, iYantlukwano ngokweSini noBuni, iMbono eSekelwe ekuthini Wonke uMntu uNomtsalane koweSini esaHlukileyo, uNgenelelo, LGBTQ+ Youth, uNyamezelo oluziiNkqubo eziNinzi ezaHlukileyo, UluNtu lwasemaPhandleni, uhlangabezwano ngezimvo okanye xa kusenziwa izigqibo

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Bisexual

It means a person who is not exclusively sexually attracted to people of one particular gender.

Cisgender

It is a term for people whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender identity

A personal inner perception of self as male/female/both/neither

Gender Expression

It means how a person outwardly expresses their gender identity, typically through their name, pronoun, appearance, dress and behaviour.

Gender Transition

Refers to the process through which, or the steps taken by, transgender people to begin to live as the gender with which they identify rather than the one typically associated with their sex assigned at birth. Social transition may include changing names, pronouns, hairstyles, and clothing. The medical transition may include medical processes such as gender-affirming hormone therapy and gender-affirming surgeries.

Heterosexual

Refers to the romantic or sexual attraction between people on opposite ends of the gender binary sub-division.

Hetero and Cisnormativity

Heteronormativity means dominant societal norms that encourage and legitimise heterosexuality as the only acceptable sexual orientation/ Cisnormativity means dominant societal norms which emphasise prescribed gender roles that follow a rigid binary distinction between women and men, which enforces a cisgender gender expression.

Homosexual

Means the romantic or sexual attraction between members of the same sex or gender.

LGBTQ+

An acronym referring to individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer or who have other sexual- or gender-minority identities. "Plus" is included in the LGBTQI+ acronym to encompass a list of other identities and orientations, ensuring that the term is as inclusive and intentional as possible in representing different expressions and identities.

Stabane

It is used in IsiZulu vocabulary to describe an intersexual person; however, it has been widely used as a derogatory word referring to individuals who are either gender or sexually diverse.

Trasssie

It is used in Afrikaans vocabulary to describe an intersexual person; however, it has been widely used as a derogatory word referring to individuals who are either gender or sexually diverse.

Transgender

This means a person whose sense of personal identity and gender differs from what is generally considered typical for the sex assigned at birth.

Trade-offs

Trade-offs result in one system experiencing resilience and automatically influencing resilience in other co-occurring systems.

Sangoma

African traditional healers who use traditional medicine to heal and are working in contact with the ancestral spirits.

Queer

A general term referring to all non-heterosexual individuals, furthermore it is an umbrella term which may be used to describe expressions of all gender identities and sexual orientations which are not heterosexual or cisgender.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

APA	American Psychiatric Association
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
DOE	Department of Education
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental
FS	Free State
GP	Gauteng Province
HEI	Higher education institutions
HPCSA	Health Professions Council of South Africa
ICD	International Classification of Diseases
IPA	Interpretive Phenomenological analysis
LGB	Lesbian, gay, bisexual
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender
LSE	London School of Economics
MSM	Men who have sex with men
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPO	Non-profit organisation
SERT	Socio-ecological resilience theory
STATS SA	Statistics South Africa
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNISA	University of South Africa

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF STUDY

1.1   Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the study by examining its background and context. It includes the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the general aim, the objectives, and the rationale for investigating the multisystemic resilience of gender and sexually diverse youth in a rural community within the Free State province. In addition, a comprehensive exposition was provided regarding the research design and technique employed in this study. The ethical issues implemented throughout the investigation were also mentioned. The study briefly addressed the conceptual framework that served as its foundation and provided an overview of the anticipated limitations and delimitations of the study.

1.2   Background and Context

The colonial era witnessed the emergence of theoretical frameworks about gender and sexual diversity, subsequently influencing practices intended to eradicate, correct, or heal such diversity in Africa (Montle, 2021). Msibi (2014) argues that throughout history, the Western conceptualisation of homosexuality has had detrimental effects on Africa as a colonial continent. According to Khuzwayo-Magwaza (2021), it is widely held that the colonisers acquired knowledge of African culture, including sexual practices, via the lens of colonial perspectives.

The existing conceptualisation of gender and sexuality within the African continent, encompassing rural areas as well, has been influenced by the imposition of hetero- and cis-normative legislation throughout the colonial era (Bajaha, 2015; Kuloba, 2016; Montle, 2021). These laws, which deemed gender and sexually varied individuals as criminal, have played a significant role in shaping the prevailing understanding of sexuality in this context (Kaoma, 2018). During the colonial period in Africa, various legislation, including sodomy laws, penal codes, and acts addressing sexual immorality, were implemented in several countries to address homosexuality, resulting in severe penalties such as life imprisonment or capital punishment (Amusan et al., 2019).

The perpetuation of colonial heteronormativity during the apartheid regime in South Africa was facilitated by the enforcement of the sodomy statute and the Sexual Offences Act of 1957, which resulted in the continued oppression of individuals who identified as sexual and gender-diverse (Kaoma, 2018). The termination of the apartheid government in 1994 in South Africa

and the subsequent implementation of the democratic constitution in 1996 resulted in a heightened acknowledgement of the rights of the LGBTQ+ population (Moreno et al., 2020). Chapter 2, section 9(3) of the Republic of South Africa's constitution stipulates that:

> *The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.* (Chapter 2: Bill of Rights, P 6)

The sodomy laws of Apartheid, which imposed criminal penalties on homosexual and other forms of same-sex sexual activity, were repealed in 1998 (Moreno et al., 2020). In 2006, the government legalised same-sex weddings (Lease & Gevisser, 2017). Nevertheless, LGBTQ+ youth continue to encounter numerous risk factors within the community and educational institutions (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019; Mayeza, 2021). The educational institutions and broader societal framework in South Africa appear to be encountering challenges in effectively adjusting to the constitutional reforms implemented since 1998. Moreover, it has been observed that the policies, practices, and curricula in educational institutions fail to adequately address the needs and concerns of LGBTQ+ youth (Francis, 2017, 2021; Francis & Kuhl, 2020). Furthermore, the LGBTQ+ group persists in encountering marginalisation, hate crimes, instances of bullying, and various infringements upon their human rights inside educational institutions and broader societal contexts (Pepin-Neff & Wynter, 2020). Moreover, it is important to note that instances of discrimination can have detrimental effects on the mental well-being of individuals, particularly within the LGBTQ+ community. These effects may manifest as symptoms of sadness and anxiety, which can subsequently contribute to the development of substance misuse, self-harm behaviours, suicidal thoughts, and even suicide itself (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021). Several risk factors associated with the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals have been identified in previous research (Rothmann, 2018). However, LGBTQ+ youth continue to exhibit typical and atypical coping mechanisms, and they show resilience amid their adversity (Daniels et al., 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021).

Coping is associated with both normative and non-normative atypical coping mechanisms, as discussed by Ungar (2011). For example, a study by Theron and Malindi (2010) showed that youth residing in street environments employ glue sniffing to alleviate the distress associated with their living circumstances and experiences. Additionally, they engage in theft and

deliberately don soiled garments to elicit compassion from others. Beyond coping is resilience, theorised by diverse support systems that facilitate normative coping strategies in the face of substantial adversity (Masten, 2014).

According to Bousquet et al. (2016), resilience is the ability to manage and adapt to various changes effectively while maintaining ongoing personal growth (p. 40). Moreover, the concept of resilience within psychology has developed significantly over time. For example, during the initial stages of resilience research, scholars primarily focused on examining individualistic aspects of resilience, including emotional qualities, physical well-being, behavioural and social competencies, cognitive abilities, and spiritual beliefs (Kumpfer, 1999). However, scholars such as Masten (2014, p. 6) have recently adopted a multisystemic developmental perspective to define resilience as "the ability of a dynamic system to effectively adjust to disruptions that pose a threat to the functioning, sustainability, or progress of the system." The notion above can be effectively employed in various systems, encompassing diverse degrees of interaction, encompassing both living and non-living entities. These systems may include but are not limited to microorganisms, youth, families, security systems, economies, forests, and the global climate.

There are various conceptual frameworks for resilience, such as those that entirely focus on individualistic traits and those that are systems orientated. According to van Breda and Theron (2018), researchers who espoused an individualistic perspective stated that individuals are responsible for their coping mechanisms rather than attributing blame to the broader societal macro system. Nevertheless, contemporary theoretical perspectives conceptualise resilience as the availability of and effective use of resources that promote physical, emotional, and psychological well-being in the face of adversity. These resources are contingent upon contextual and cultural factors, encompassing comprehensive approaches (Ungar, 2011). Therefore, broader structural and systemic elements significantly influence individual coping. Research has shown that relational support and systemic factors are crucial in determining an individual's ability to successfully navigate and overcome adversity (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021).

Resilience is adapting, recovering, or even transforming in adversity (Ungar, 2018b). According to Theron and Malindi (2010), resilience encompasses utilising cognitive and behavioural strategies to navigate and address challenging circumstances effectively. Moreover, individuals engage in resilience to enhance their advantage and overall well-being

amidst challenging circumstances. This resilience involves proactively expecting favourable outcomes, deriving significance from adversity, and establishing meaningful connections with one's surroundings (Theron, 2019). Hence, this research endeavour aimed to examine the impact of multisystemic resilience enablers of LGBTQ+ youth residing in a rural community within the Free State province, particularly regarding risk factors. Furthermore, this research adopted a multisystemic perspective in examining the concept of resilience.

Numerous studies investigating systemic approaches to resilience have revealed that young individuals derive substantial advantages from various systems, including familial and peer relationships, as well as structural resources such as educational institutions (Clements-Nolle & Waddington, 2019; Crush & Tawodzera, 2014; Fazel & Betancourt, 2018; Rahmati et al., 2017; Schelbe & Geiger, 2017; Van Breda, 2017). However, LGBTQ+ youth may not necessarily have access to the advantages provided by relational, environmental, and structural resources since they frequently encounter feelings of marginalisation within their communities due to homophobia, particularly in rural community settings (Abreu & Gonzalez, 2020; Francis, 2017; Soldatic et al., 2021). Hence, it was important to study their unique pathways to resilience.

1.3   Definition of Key Concepts

1.3.1   Resilience

Resilience encompasses several mechanisms that facilitate adaptation and growth, serving as a protective mechanism against maladjustment in the face of severe risks to an individual's life and functioning (Wright & Masten, 2010). Moreover, resilience is intricately linked to both internal and external adaptability and the ability to effectively manage and harmonise several domains of functioning (Masten, 2014). Intrapsychic processes, including agency, motivation, and adaptive meaning-making, are crucial in cultivating resilience. As viewed through the socio-ecological lens, resilience primarily pertains to utilising existing resources within one's environment to generate favourable results in adversity (Ungar, 2016). When examined via an ecological lens, resilience encompasses interconnected protective characteristics spanning various levels, including individual and contextual factors (Ungar, 2011, 2015). Furthermore, the multisystemic perspective entails the examination of interactions across several systems within a specific ecological context (Ungar, 2021).

In the present study, resilience is defined as the capacity of LGBTQ+ youth to maintain emotional strength and recover from challenging circumstances. This process entails

effectively utilising socio-cultural resources, such as connections and structures, to promote overall well-being. The complex interactions across ecosystem systems facilitate the development of resilience (Ungar, 2021). Moreover, resilience encompasses qualities such as persistence, resistance to adversity, recovery from adversity, adaptation to adversity, and transformation resulting from experiencing challenges (Ungar, 2018b). This procedure entails the active involvement of individuals in accessing and acquiring valuable resources within the socio-ecological context (Ungar, 2011). The influence of multisystemic factors, encompassing biological, psychological, social, environmental, and built environment resources and processes, is also contingent upon various circumstances (Ungar, 2018b).

1.3.2   LGBTQ+ Youth

LGBTQ+ youth, an umbrella phrase encompassing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and other diverse identities, refers to a population of young individuals who exhibit non-heterosexual orientations and possess a range of gender and sexual diversities (Monro, 2020). Sexually varied youth encompasses both cisgender individuals who identify with the gender assigned to them at birth and transgender youth (Francis, 2017; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2015).

The term "lesbian" refers to an individual who identifies as cisgender female and experiences attraction only towards other individuals who identify as female. In contrast, the term "gay" refers to a cisgender male who experiences sexual attraction only towards other males. Conversely, "bisexual" encompasses both cisgender and transgender individuals, regardless of gender, who are sexually attracted to individuals of several genders. Transgender individuals are characterised by a discrepancy between their gender identification and the sex assigned to them at birth, which typically categorises individuals as either male or female. Furthermore, the term "queer" refers to an individual who possesses a gender identity that is not fixed, while "questioning" denotes the process of examining one's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Moreover, the inclusion of a plus sign within the LGBTQ+ acronym encompasses a wide range of gender identities and sexual orientations that are not explicitly represented by the initial five letters. For instance, within an African indigenous framework, terms such as "Inkonkoni" and "istabane/setabane" are recognised as additional gender identities (Khuzwayo-Magwaza, 2021). Similarly, the plus sign acknowledges the existence of various sexual identities and orientations, such as pansexual, asexual, and questioning, which are not specifically accounted for within the acronym (Monro, 2020). According to Cramm et

al. (2013), the age range of those classified as youth in South Africa is from 14 to 35 years. In the context of this study, the term "youth" refers to those within the age range of 16 to 30 years.

1.3.3 Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity refers to the societal belief that heterosexual partnerships are the typical and expected type of sexual connections, while relationships involving individuals of the same gender are seen as deviating from established norms, values, and societal expectations (Francis & Kuhl, 2020; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019).

The concept of heteronormativity encompasses historical, political, and social frameworks in which certain individuals within a community perceive heterosexuality as the sole natural, African, and valid form of sexuality and gender expression (Gyamerah et al., 2019; Luvuno et al., 2019; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). Moreover, the concept of heteronormativity frequently results in the perpetuation of discriminatory practices, acts of violence, and the marginalisation of LGBTQ+ youth within various societal contexts (Luvuno et al., 2019; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019).

1.3.4 Rural Community

A rural community is a geographical area undergoing expansion and lacking the level of civilisation typically associated with urban areas, as shown by the prevailing physical conditions (Mbabazi, 2015; Mbhiza, 2020). According to Theron et al. (2013), rural areas are characterised by language, cultural practices, and homogeneity in social standards. According to Mbabazi (2015), rural communities in South Africa are characterised by substandard infrastructure, deficient service provision, and insufficient resources for health and education.

In the present study, the rural community possesses dynamism, complexity, and generativity qualities. A rural community can be understood as more than simply a geographically marginalised region but as a distinct entity independent of urban and metropolitan authority centres. The literature suggests that the impact of many factors on LGBTQ+ resilience can be both supportive and detrimental (Mbabazi, 2015; Mbhiza, 2020).

During the period of colonisation in South Africa, rural communities arose, characterised by marginalisation and the implementation of racially segregated policies that resulted in the alienation of various ethnic populations of Black individuals through the establishment of homelands (Mbhiza, 2020). Rural communities encompass a spectrum of settlement patterns, ranging from sparsely populated settlements to villages, small towns, medium-sized towns, and large towns.

1.4 Problem Statement

A literature analysis conducted by Van Breda and Theron (2018) consisted of prior investigations into the resilience of youth in South Africa, which predominantly adopted a socio-ecological framework. The studies in the previous review have primarily concentrated on examining adversities such as intellectual disability, paternal absence, and HIV. The focus of these studies also encompasses the topics of orphanhood, structural disadvantage, and sexual abuse (Van Breda & Theron, 2018). Nevertheless, the studies above did not specifically examine the resilience processes within the LGBTQ+ community. The little attention given to the resilience of the LGBTQ+ community suggests a lack of understanding regarding the various interconnected aspects that contribute to their ability to overcome adversity. The generalisability of resilience findings from studies conducted on the general population to the LGBTQ+ community cannot be assumed (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Ungar, 2018a).

While highlighting the true vulnerabilities experienced by LGBTQ+ youth residing in rural communities, it is important to acknowledge that these portrayals may inadvertently depict LGBTQ+ young people solely as passive victims. It is crucial to examine the concept of multisystemic resilience to gain insight into the ability of LGBTQ+ youth to withstand and overcome challenges. This approach involves analysing the interconnections among various systems within the rural environment and their impact on the resilience process. Previous studies by Haffejee and Wiebesiek (2021) and Ungar (2018b) have emphasised the significance of this perspective.

In the South African context, there is a noticeable lack of research on the socio-ecological resilience of LGBTQ+ youth, particularly when considering a multisystemic view. Therefore, limited research exists regarding the intersection of personal, interpersonal, and systemic factors and their impact on resilience within the LGBTIQ+ community (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021). Several studies (Govender et al., 2019; Gyamerah et al., 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Harper et al., 2021; Logie et al., 2018; Luvuno et al., 2019; Okanlawon, 2021) examining LGBTQ+ resilience within the African context have either not employed an ecological framework or have been limited to urban settings. The topic of LGBTQ+ youth experiences is generally lacking in comprehensive research, resulting in a shortage of quantitative studies. Consequently, most existing studies on this subject adopt a qualitative exploratory approach. Moreover, substantial research has been conducted on LGBTQ+ youth residing in rural settings, examining their potential risks (Bhana, 2014; Francis, 2017; Soldatic et al., 2021). It is necessary to conduct a study on the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in rural settings, with a

particular emphasis on exploring the qualities exhibited by LGBTQ+ individuals (Balfour, 2016; Masinire, 2020; Rand & Paceley, 2022).

1.5 Purpose of Study

It is worth noting that resilience frameworks that adhere to heteronormative and cis-normative perspectives, as exemplified in the literature study conducted by van Breda and Theron (2018) about youth resilience, may not universally apply to LGBTQ+ youths, particularly within rural environments (Colpitts & Gahagan, 2016). Consequently, the present study aimed to fill the existing gaps in the resilience literature by examining the socio-ecology of resilience among LGBTQ+ youth, adopting a multisystemic approach. This study investigated the various elements contributing to resilience across multiple systems and how these components interact to shape resilience in the face of adversity. Consequently, this study has contributed a culturally and contextually sensitive framework that will serve as a basis for various interventions targeting LGBTQ+ youths in rural communities.

Rural communities on a global scale are characterised by their geographical seclusion and adherence to traditional value systems (Rand & Paceley, 2022). Likewise, rural communities in Africa and South Africa are characterised by modest, remote structures and traditional belief systems encompassing Christian religion, cultural norms, and values (Mbabazi, 2015; Mbhiza, 2020; Theron et al., 2013). The notion of rurality is frequently associated with conditions of poverty, geographic isolation, low household income, material deprivation, inadequate funding, dysfunctionality, substandard education, and membership in the Black community (Mbabazi, 2015).

According to Moletsane (2012), scholars perceive rural places as impoverished and socially disconnected from metropolitan life based on their historical context. Nevertheless, by adopting a strength-based approach, rural areas can be perceived as productive, vibrant, and intricate. According to Moletsane (2012), a comprehensive understanding of the subject can be achieved by evaluating risks, assertions, and opportunities. Human development and life in rural areas occur autonomously, without being influenced or controlled by urban authority, as indicated by scholarly works such as Balfour (2016) and Masinire (2020). Hence, it is imperative to recognise that the resilience exhibited by LGBTQ+ youth in rural communities should not be regarded as inferior to that of LGBTQ+ youth residing in urban areas but rather as distinct due to the presence of diverse contextual elements specific to rural environments (Rand & Paceley, 2022).

Furthermore, it's necessary to prioritise examining rural physical and socio-ecological resources while also moving away from a negative perception of rural areas as lacking in certain aspects (Balfour, 2016; Masinire, 2020; Rand & Paceley, 2022). The present study examined the various factors contributing to resilience within a rural socio-ecological context, specifically focusing on LGBTQ+ youth. It posits that individuals identifying as LGBTQ+ in rural communities possess inherent resilience, and their socio-ecological environment plays a crucial role in fostering and bolstering their resilience (Rand & Paceley, 2022).

1.6   Research Questions

1.6.1   The Primary Research Question

This study's overarching research question is: How do multisystemic factors in a rural community context in the Free State province influence LGBTQ+ youth resilience?

1.6.2   Secondary Empirical Research Questions

a. What multisystemic factors intersect to threaten the well-being of LGBTQ+ in a rural Free State context?

b. How do multisystemic factors intersect to enable resilience in LQBTQ+ youth in rural communities?

c. How can knowledge gained from LGBTQ + resilience research be used to develop a framework that healthcare professionals, psychotherapists, and community service providers can use to promote the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in rural communities?

1.6.3   Research Sub-Questions Explored in the Literature Review

a. What is the pre-colonial historical, colonial, and current political and social context of gender and sexuality in African communities?

b. How do colonial political ideologies, religious beliefs and myths on gender and sexual diversity in Africa and South African gender and sexuality perpetuate risk factors faced by LGBTQ+ youth in a rural community?

c. What personal, relational, and structural resilience-enabling resources do LGBTQ+ youth in different international, African, and South African communities rely on for their resilience?

1.7   General Aim

This study aimed to explore the multisystemic resilience of gender and sexually diverse youth in a rural community context in the Free State (FS) province to develop a conceptual framework for a resilience-enabling intervention for LGBTQ+ youth in this and similar contexts.

1.7.1   Study Objectives

The study's overall objectives to achieve the above aim were as follows:

a. To explore how multisystemic factors intersect to threaten the well-being of LGBTQ+ in the rural FS

b. To explore how multisystemic factors intersect to enable resilience in LGBTQ+ youth

c. To use resilience research to develop a framework that healthcare professionals, psychotherapists and community service providers can use to promote the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in rural communities

1.7.2   Objectives of the Literature Review

The objectives of the literature review of the study are:

a. To explore how personal, interpersonal, and systemic factors intersect to threaten the well-being of LGBTQ+ in different African and South African communities

b. To gain insight into how personal, interpersonal, and systemic factors intersect to enable resilience in LQBTQ+ youth

c. To integrate existing knowledge to form a conceptual framework that healthcare professionals, psychotherapists, and community service providers can use to promote the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in rural communities

1.8   The Rationale of the Study

According to a study conducted by Daniels et al. (2019), transgender youth residing in rural a community exhibited a sense of positivity and resilience within the educational environment. The individuals desired to complete their education to facilitate the realisation of their long-term educational aspirations and integration into the wider societal framework. Additionally, netball was utilised as a means of coping. Nevertheless, the investigation conducted by Daniels et al. (2019) and similar research focusing on LGBTQ+ groups in rural areas of South Africa fail to provide a comprehensive analysis of resilience, particularly from an ecological standpoint. Simultaneously, the marginalisation of LGBTQ+ youth is a widespread occurrence observed globally across many community contexts, encompassing rural areas (Robinson,

2021; Schmitz & Tyler, 2019; Singh et al., 2014). Several scholarly studies have been undertaken within the international community, examining resilience from a systems viewpoint. Notable contributions in this area include the works of Gonzalez et al. (2021), López-Cañada et al. (2021), Rand and Paceley (2022), Schmitz and Tyler (2019), and Singh et al. (2014). These studies specifically focused on resilience within rural communities. It is important to acknowledge that international research on resilience lacks contextual and cultural relevance when applied to rural populations in South Africa (Ungar, 2011). There is a need for a comprehensive study on multisystemic resilience in South Africa, exploring the intersection between African culture and context and the various aspects that influence the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth. These factors include risks, personal protective measures, and relational and structural elements (Ungar, 2018b).

The literature on LGBTQ+ studies in South Africa that I examined (Brown, 2020; Brown & Njoko, 2019; Daniels et al., 2019; Francis & Kuhl, 2020; Francis & Reygan, 2016; Luvuno et al., 2019; Mayeza, 2021; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021) primarily emphasises the lived experiences of individuals within the rural community and similar contexts, particularly about themes of exclusion, familial dynamics, and societal attitudes towards gender and sexuality. The studies above hold significant importance as they have effectively addressed the necessity for implementing more comprehensive educational and research methodologies to critically examine and challenge the prevailing norms around heterosexuality (Moreno et al., 2020). Several prior studies (Francis, 2017; Francis & Kuhl, 2020; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019) have contributed to the advancement of knowledge by investigating the contextual experiences of LGBTQ+ youth about their sexual orientation and gender identity. Prior research has examined the impact of LGBTQ+ factors on resilience by focusing on the structural aspects of LGBTQ+ concerns. The authors Bhana (2014), Francis and Kuhl (2020), and Matsúmunyane and Hlalele (2019) have identified many structural barriers, including but not limited to heterosexual privilege, religious beliefs, cultural norms, racial dynamics, and gender disparities, that frequently impede the advancement of LGBTQ+ individuals in terms of inclusion and the realisation of their human rights.

The existing body of research on LGBTQ+ issues in South Africa has demonstrated the intricate interplay of structural forces that hinder the advancement of social justice (Bhana, 2014; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021). Consequently, this has implications for the coping strategies individuals employ and their ability to adapt in various domains associated with resilience. Moreover, a limited number of research investigations conducted in South Africa, exemplified

by Haffejee and Wiebesiek (2021) and Rothmann (2018), have specifically addressed the socio-ecological aspects of resilience.

In the South African context, there is a noticeable lack of research on the socio-ecological resilience of LGBTQ+ youth, particularly when considering a multisystemic framework. Therefore, limited research exists regarding the intersection of personal, interpersonal, and systemic factors and their impact on resilience within the LGBTQ+ community (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021). Several studies (Govender et al., 2019; Gyamerah et al., 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Harper et al., 2021; Logie et al., 2018; Luvuno et al., 2019; Okanlawon, 2021) examining LGBTQ+ resilience within the African context have either not employed an ecological approach or have been limited to non-rural settings. Consequently, the experiences of LGBTQ+ young people are generally lacking in scholarly investigation, resulting in a shortage of comprehensive studies on this subject. As a result, most research on this topic tends to be qualitative and exploratory. Moreover, there has been substantial research conducted on LGBTQ+ youth residing in rural communities, mostly focusing on the examination of risks associated with their experiences (Bhana, 2014; Francis, 2017; Soldatic et al., 2021). Therefore, it was imperative to study the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in rural settings, particularly emphasising their strengths (Balfour, 2016; Masinire, 2020; Rand & Paceley, 2022).

1.9 Research Assumptions

I have formulated the following assumptions regarding the factors that influence the natural resources utilised by LGBTQ+ youth for their resilience and the many risk factors present in rural communities.

- Individualistic intrapsychic processes and limited relational, structural and environmental resources influence the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in rural areas of South Africa. Several prior studies (Daniels et al., 2019; Francis, 2021; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Harper et al., 2021) have indicated that LGBTQ+ youth frequently encounter limited relational support systems (e.g., family, friends, and service providers) as well as ecological resilience resources (e.g., healthcare facilities, educational institutions, and social services). LGBTQ+ youth residing in rural social contexts in Western contexts likewise rely on a limited number of natural resources, as evidenced by the works of Asakura (2019), Rand and Paceley (2022), and Wike (2021). Numerous studies conducted at both local and international levels have provided evidence that LGBTQ+ youth frequently encounter heightened levels of victimisation

and diminished social support within rural communities. These circumstances can be attributed to the prevalence of conservative religious practices and the adherence to shared cultural norms and values within these environments (Harper et al., 2021; Khuzwayo-Magwaza, 2021; Wike et al., 2022).

- LGBTQ+ youth residing in rural regions of South Africa, akin to their counterparts in other African societies as well as American and Western communities, tend to conceal their gender and sexual orientation until they deem it appropriate or secure to disclose it (Epprecht & Mngoma, 2022; Mayeza, 2021; Semang et al., 2020). This disclosure typically occurs when they have achieved a certain level of independence or have relocated from a rural area. Individuals choose to conceal their gender and sexual identity as a means of safeguarding themselves against perceived psychological and physical risks associated with disclosing their true identities. Epprecht and Mngoma (2022), McCormick (2015), and Semang et al. (2020) have also raised concerns regarding the problematic nature of the rhetoric around the act of coming out in some socio-cultural situations. As an individual hailing from a rural town in my adolescence, I have personally observed the presence of stigmatisation and victimisation experienced by LGBTQ+ youth. The existing body of literature also highlights that in numerous Western and American civilisations, LGBTQ+ youth conceal their sexual orientation as a result of perceived risks associated with disclosing their sexual identity to various others, such as family members and peers (Robinson, 2021; Schmitz & Tyler, 2019). Heteronormativity is a pervasive global phenomenon, leading to the victimisation of individuals within the LGBTQ+ community across diverse socio-cultural contexts (Francis, 2017).

- In rural communities, LGBTQ+ youth who have openly disclosed their sexual orientations and gender identities often establish friendships with peers who share similar identities, as well as with heterosexual peers who possess open-minded attitudes, to foster a sense of security. This assumption is based on the findings reported by Johns et al. (2019b) and Okanlawon (2021), which suggest that LGB youth in schools and communities primarily rely on their heterosexual and homosexual peers for emotional and social support.

1.10   Research Approach, Design and Methodology

1.10.1   Research Approach

Qualitative research is used by the researcher and participants to construct knowledge (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). A qualitative research methodology is an approach that seeks to understand the reality and experiences of people as valid when they are reported by such people subjectively; it involves analysis of people's experiences and considers the context (Bryman, 2001; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Qualitative research usually uses few participants (Creswell, 2014). The reasons why I chose the paradigm above are reported in detail in Chapter 4.

1.10.2   Research Paradigm

Socio-constructivism and critical theory perspectives are paradigmatic perspectives in this research (Creswell, 2014). Socio-constructivist epistemology entails looking at subjective meanings of people's experiences; thus, the researcher is mainly interested in exploring the views of the participants rather than relying on the objective knowledge derived outside the knower (Becvar & Becvar, 2014; Creswell, 2014; Gergen, 2001). It goes against the positivist view that knowledge is objective, unbiased, and universal, also acknowledging the contextual and the cultural specificity of knowledge and the important role that language and discourses play in constructing meaning which is co-owned by people in a specific socio-cultural space (Becvar & Becvar, 2014).

Furthermore, critical theory perspectives deepen the understanding of reality by examining how different aspects of positionality influence the perception of reality. Thus, examining history, societal position, and prominent culture influences the construction of reality (Sankofa, 2021). Given different aspects of reality, a researcher must examine power, politics, and social issues to get a clear picture of reality (Mertens, 2017). Examining power relations aims to advocate for the inclusion and social justice of marginalised groups such as LGBTQ+ youth (Jackson et al., 2018; Mertens, 2017; Sankofa, 2021).

1.10.3 Research Design

Interpretive phenomenological research design refers to a study of personal or lived experiences by the researcher, which requires the researcher to have a deeper description and interpretation of a phenomenon experienced by research participants (Padilla-Diaz, 2015; Kafle, 2011). The phenomenological research approach emphasises the validity of the way things appear to the consciousness of the participants, as well as the validity of an individual's perceptions and subjective meanings of the experiences of the research participants (Engward

& Goldspink, 2020; Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; Miller et al., 2018). Following this research design, I recruited fourteen participants who identify as LGBTQ+ youth to participate in this study.

1.10.4 Research Methodology

Purposive and snowball sampling were used in this research. Non-probability purposive sampling refers to any kind of sampling where the selection of participants is not determined by the statistical principles of randomness (Padilla-Diaz, 2015; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). When researchers use purposive samples, they only rely on the availability of a sample from the population, which has the potential to answer the research question; this implies that sampling depends on the availability and willingness of the recruited respondents to participate in a research project (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). Snowball sampling refers to a sampling method where the initial participants can recruit other participants who meet the selection criterion for the study. Thus, Free State Rainbow Seeds NPO used the study flyer to recruit the first participants. The organisation mentioned above is a non-profit organisation (NPO) in the Free State that offers psychosocial and health services to the LGBTQ+ population. I had to arrange interviews with the participants, and after that, participants were encouraged to invite other participants who may be interested in the study. Some participants recruited their friends in neighbouring towns to participate in this study.

1.11 Ethical Considerations

To ensure I conducted ethical research, I upheld ethical principles: anatomy, respect for the participants' dignity, non-maleficence, beneficence, justice, and informed consent (Allan, 2011; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Before starting the fieldwork, I applied for an ethics clearance from the University of South Africa (UNISA) College of Education Research Ethics Committee, ethics no: **2023/07/05/55075924/28/AM**. See Appendix A for an ethics clearance certificate.

1.11.1 Non-Maleficence

Non-maleficence refers to the researcher's responsibility against demonstrating any physical, emotional, or psychological harm (Allan, 2011). I ensured I did not cause damage or engage in foreseeable behaviour that could hurt the participants. Thus, I explained to the participants the potential emotional harm that might be caused by them relating their experiences as sexual and gender minorities in risk-saturated ecologies such as rural communities. Furthermore, I liaised

with social workers from Free State Rainbow Seeds and Tholoana e Molemo to offer counselling should any participant exhibit any emotional distress resulting from the interviews.

1.11.2 Beneficence

The ethical consideration of beneficence relates to the researcher's moral code of conduct in acting in the best interest of the participants or the involved community (Allan, 2011). Conducting this study was necessary because it provided helpful information that service providers such as psychologists, social workers, clinic nurses, and school managers can use to strengthen the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth. The study is an inquiry into the meaningful or relevant resources enabling resilience in the rural community. This research could have long-term benefits for LGBTQ+ youth in the FS community or similar contexts. Furthermore, this research is rooted in a social justice stance. It is, moreover, placing the responsibility for LGBTQ+ youth on supersystems (i.e., social, natural and built environment) for providing resilience and enabling resources to promote human rights and inclusion (Fleshman, 2019; Rand & Paceley, 2022).

1.11.3 Justice

A social justice stance guided the research. From the social justice stance, socio-ecology should account for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ youth. This stance implies that there should be an implementation of LGBTQ+ rights in the rural community space. The research aimed to promote such by making recommendations to structural organisations in rural communities, thus advocating for justice for the marginalised sexual minority, the LGBTQ+ youth (Bhana, 2014; Francis, 2017; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021). This attempt also promotes the fundamental human rights of LGBTQ+ youth.

1.11.4 Privacy and Confidentiality

Privacy refers to the right against personal intrusion (Allan, 2011). During the informed consent process, the researcher must ask the participants whether their identities may be known in any published materials (Creswell, 2014). This process can be circumvented by agreeing to anonymity and confidentiality (Allan, 2011). Interviews were conducted where the participants felt comfortable. I explained to the participants that their responses would be kept confidential and that their real names would not be used in this research.

1.11.5 Informed Consent

Informed consent relates to sharing details of the focus of the study, contact details of who the researchers are, a summary of the entire research process, and a discussion of the potential risks

and benefits of the study (Creswell, 2014). A soft copy of the study's informed consent forms was sent to the participants before the interview. On the day of the interview, I went through the consent form with the participants, explaining and requesting that they should ask questions. During interviews, instructions and questions were offered in a language that the participants preferred. Participants could ask questions for clarity (Allan, 2011)

1.12 Conceptual Framework

1.12.1 Theories in the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was informed by the multisystemic resilience framework as the main theory (Ungar, 2018b, 2021). I also included the socio-ecological resilience theory (SERT) as a focal point for understanding the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in rural community contexts (Ungar, 2011). Furthermore, to examine risk exposure, I adopted the minority stress model into the conceptual framework. I also integrated the feminist theory of intersectionality into the conceptual framework. Also, I looked at African perspectives in understanding psychopathology and well-being since resilience is a culturally and contextually bound phenomenon. Finally, resilience research aims to create interventions to promote recovery, adaptation, or transformation following adversity (Ungar, 2021). Risk exposure and resilience pathways of LGBTQ+ youth is a complex phenomenon; no single theory was seen as sufficient to explain this phenomenon, given the limitations of the different theories used in this framework. Thus, integrating different theories offers a comprehensive model that incorporates the conceptualisation of risk exposure and resilience while paying attention to aspects relating to the intersectionality of culture and context (APA, 2021).

1.12.2 Conceptual Framework for Rural LGBTQ+ Multisystemic Resilience

LGBTQ+ resilience (i.e., processes of persistence, resistance, recovery, adaptation, and transformation) is a product of co-occurring multi-system (i.e., biological, psychological, social, and environmental), which facilitates coping and well-being amid adversity (Ungar, 2018b, 2021). Furthermore, according to the minority stress model distal stressors can be being internalised, producing homonegativity or internalised homophobia (Meyer, 2003). The distal stressors that LGBTQ+ youth face are hetero and cis-normative ecologies (Bhana, 2014; Lopang, 2014). Such non-affirming ecologies perpetuate risk factors compromising their physical, psychological, and social well-being (Bhana, 2014; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021; Rothmann, 2018). The risk factors faced by LGBTQ+ youth range from structural inequalities, discrimination, victimisation, and prejudice in families, among peers at school and in the

community (Daniels, 2019; Gonzalez et al., 2021; Gyamerah et al., 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Hillier et al., 2020; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021; Okanlawon, 2021).

Furthermore, there are groups of LGBTQ+ youth who are more advantaged and less advantaged, especially when gender and sexual diversity intersect with other identity markers (APA, 2021; Chan & Howard, 2020). Different other identity markers that either advantage or disadvantage LGBTQ+ youth can include race, ethnicity, disability, social status, and socio-economic background, among others (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019; Mayeza, 2021). Because LGBTQ+ youth are often faced with social risks, socio-ecology is seen as a driver of the resilience process for LGBTQ+ youth (Ungar, 2021). Moreover, the socio-ecology is typified by the inclusion and exclusion of LGBTQ+ youth, which should be one of the focal points for a resilience-enabling intervention.

1.12.3 Resilience Enabling Biopsychosocial Ecological Intervention Model for Rural Community LGBTQ + Youth

When engaging the macro, meso, and microsystems, an emphasis on human rights and LGBTQ+ legislation, the history of gender and sexuality in an African context, and the Ubuntu philosophy could be necessary (Monro, 2020). Not only should LGBTQ+ youth possess agency, but their ecologies should also cultivate agency through affirmation and inclusion (Francis, 2021; Ungar, 2011).

1.12.3.1 Macrosystem Intervention

At the macro level, negotiating for resources such as funding for LGBTQ+ health and social programmes and challenging the heterosexist political, social, health and education systems is necessary. Moreover, this implies that sexual and gender diversity issues should be reflected in school policies such as uniforms and the curriculum (Francis & Kuhl, 2020). The curriculum of nurses, teachers and psychologists should explicitly address LGBTQ+ issues (Brown & Njoko, 2019; Francis, 2021; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021).

1.12.3.2 Mesosystem Intervention

At the mesosystem level, schools, local health facilities, families, peers, and communities must be engaged in a dialogue toward inclusion (Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). A conversation to psycho-educate communities by tracing gender and sexuality from the pre-colonial society, during colonialism and post-colonialism realities, while emphasising the Ubuntu principles is needed (Bajaha, 2015; Kuloba, 2016; Montle, 2021). The factors to take into account include the prominent heterosexist systems and the effects on LGBTQ+ youth, LGBTQ+ youth hiding

their sexuality, and the implication of revealing their sexuality to family and friends (Epprecht & Mngoma, 2022; Mayeza, 2021; Semang et al., 2020).

1.12.3.3 Microsystem Intervention

In the microsystem, LGBTQ+ resilience can be facilitated in different systems that inform their functioning. For example, biological resilience enabling resources such as hormonal and gender reassignment services for transgender youth, MSM (men who have sex with men) services, and antiretroviral treatment (Luvuno et al., 2019; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021; Scherf & Zanatta, 2021). They enhance resilience in a psychological system through different therapeutic interventions such as therapy, family intervention and psychoeducation (APA, 2021). Such interventions are aimed at cultivating agency, self-acceptance/positive identity, coping strategies, self-relying attitudes, a sense of mastery, and hope in LGBTQ+ youth (Álvarez et al., 2022; Harper et al., 2021; Lo et al., 2022).

1.13   Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

This study explored the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ youth and how they navigate rural community risks to remain strong despite challenges. Moreover, this study was phenomenologically delimited to a rural FS community. Thus, research conducted in the rural community implies that the data obtained from this study may apply to LGBTQ+ youth living in similar contexts in South Africa and possibly other African communities. Also, this research did not cover the lived experiences of intersex people, implying that the results cannot be applied to persons who identify as intersex. Hence, the acronym used in this research was LGBTQ+ instead of LGBTQI+.

This study was delimited to exploring the risks faced by and the needs of LQBTQ+ youth in the FS rural context to develop conceptual links between risk exposure and resilience. As a result, this research cannot produce any theory. It only provides a framework on how different multisystemic factors can enable the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in a rural community context. However, the study filled the knowledge gap in resilience. One of the study's objectives is to develop a model to inform different community stakeholders on enabling LGBTQ+ youth resilience in institutions such as schools. The analysis helped with insights on developing strategies that various community-based education stakeholders can use to mitigate barriers to the inclusivity of LGBTQ+ youth in schools and the community. Furthermore, this study provided valuable knowledge therapists can draw from for individual and family resilience, enabling psychotherapy for LGBTQ+ youth in rural communities.

1.14 Layout of Chapters

Chapter One: Overview and Rationale

Chapter One discussed an overview of the research by outlining the background and context of the study. Furthermore, the key terms used, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the general aim, the objectives, and the rationale are discussed. The chapter also outlines the research design and the research methodology. Furthermore, ethical issues and quality criteria issues undertaken throughout the study were considered. The conceptual framework underpinning this study, as well as the study's potential limitations and delimitations, were briefly discussed.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

In this chapter, I review the literature examining the historical context of gender and sexuality, masculinity, and femininity. I further discuss different risk factors faced by LGBTQ+ youth. In the resilience section, I focus the review on ecological resilience and finally present the multisystemic resilience perspective with gaps in the literature which informed this study.

Chapter Three: Conceptual Framework

In Chapter 3, I present a conceptual framework underpinning the study, which focuses on the multisystemic resilience framework as the focus of the study. I also integrate socio-ecological resilience, minority stress, intersectionality, and African perspectives to develop a comprehensive framework accounting for the multisystemic resilience of gender and sexually-diverse youth.

Chapter Four: The Research Methodology

In this chapter, I deliberate the choice of research design and outline the methodology I adopted to explore the research questions. In this chapter, I also justify the ethical considerations and the quality criteria undertaken to ensure the credibility of this study.

Chapter Five: Data Analysis and Discussions

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the interviews.

Chapter Six: Discussion of Findings

This chapter sets out the findings while linking them to the literature study presented in Chapter Two and conceptual frameworks in Chapter Three.

Chapter Seven: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations.

This chapter presents the study findings, conclusions, and recommendations for practice and future research. The discussion of this chapter is based on findings, analysis, and discussions. As a result, this study provides a biopsychosocial framework with practice recommendations to schools, primary health care, community NGOs, and service providers such as psychologists and social workers on enhancing the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth.

1.15. Summary of the Chapter and Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented a synopsis of the research, including background, context, and purpose. Also, I outlined the research design and methodology I used in the study, detailing the ethical considerations I adhered to while conducting this research. A brief overview of the potential limitations and delimitations was discussed. I also discussed the study's conceptual framework and expanded on key terminologies.

In the next chapter, I will examine the literature on empirical studies and other reports on gender and sexuality. I will focus on the historical context of this phenomenon, as well as look at different risk factors that shape the resilience process of LGBTQ+ youth. I then discussed the resilience process of LGBTQ+ youth using African and international studies. Finally, I highlight gaps in the literature that advocated for the focus of the study on multisystemic resilience.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter provided a comprehensive review of the research. The overview outlined the study's objectives, providing relevant background information. Furthermore, I provided a comprehensive overview of the thesis's organisation, encompassing the research objectives, questions, assumptions, conceptual framework, techniques, and ethical issues.

This chapter explores the topics of gender and sexual diversity, historical worldwide trends, gender and sexual diversity within an African context, the challenges encountered, and the coping strategies employed by youth who identify as gender and sexually diverse. The present review offers a comprehensive examination of gender and sexual diversity during the pre-colonial era and the subsequent impact of colonialism on the conceptualisation of gender and sexual diversity. This colonial influence has contributed to establishing a heteronormative and cisnormative discourse, which has resulted in the marginalisation of youth who identify as gender- and sexually nonconforming within their respective communities. In addition, this study examines the multisystemic resilience of youth who identify as gender and sexually diverse, focusing on their resilience enablers identified in both global and African scholarly works.

This review drew upon various peer-reviewed academic sources, including scholarly publications, journals, books, and reputable media sources. The present review was undertaken with the recognition that a comprehensive comprehension of resilience within social systems, encompassing community dynamics, necessitates an examination of both contemporary and historical power dynamics (Ungar, 2018b). Power dynamics are pivotal in shaping socio-ecological outcomes within a community context, influencing the allocation of resources, rights, and the distribution of risks and benefits, thus impacting resilience. Power dynamics can also arise due to external and internal influences, such as societal and cultural standards (Ramcilovic-Suominen & Kotilainen, 2020). Hence, in this literature review, I directed my attention to examining different dimensions of power by delving into historical narratives that shed light on gender and sexual diversity in the African context before colonial influence.

2.2 Gender and Sexual Diversity in an African Context

Gender and sexual diversity refer to the range of identities and orientations that deviate from traditional displays of cisgender identification and heterosexual inclination. According to

Monro (2020), a gender-diverse individual refers to an individual whose gender identity does not correspond with the sex assigned at birth. In addition, gender diversity includes youth who identify as transgender or have gender-fluid traits that surpass the conventional binary gender paradigm (APA, 2021). On the other hand, those who self-identify as sexually diverse exhibit a predisposition or inclination towards participating in sexual activities with others of the same gender. Gender and sexual diversity span a broad spectrum of sexual orientations, including but not limited to lesbian, gay, bi+ (including bisexual, pansexual, queer, and fluid orientations), as well as asexual orientations (APA, 2021). One facet of sexual diversity concerns homosexuality, a widely used term referring to youth who experience attraction to youth of the same sex (Amusan et al., 2019; Murray & Roscoe, 1998). In the present analysis, the terms homosexuality and sexual variation have been utilised synonymously to refer to sexual orientations that deviate from heterosexuality. The term "homosexuality" has been utilised in historical literature to refer to youth who engage in same-sex sexual activities, also referred to as sexually diverse youth (Freud, 1935; Hooker, 1957; McIntosh, 1968; Murray & Roscoe, 1998). Throughout history, the term "homosexuality" has been utilised to characterise youth who demonstrate variations in gender expression and participate in the practice of wearing clothing often associated with the opposite sex. It has been hypothesised and projected that these persons exhibit a sexual orientation characterised by attraction to youth of the same gender and are culturally expected to assume the societal position of a spouse (Murray & Roscoe, 1998). Moreover, it is worth noting that a frequently utilised modern umbrella term that encompasses a wide spectrum of gender and sexual diversities is LGBTIQA+. The acronym, which is subject to modification, comprises those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, and asexual. Furthermore, it recognises the incorporation of supplementary terminology, such as non-binary and pansexual, employed to delineate a diverse range of gender, sexual, and physiological attributes (Monro, 2020).

Within the African continent, gender and sexual diversity are influenced by a range of historical and contemporary political ideologies, which play a significant role in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of Africans towards this phenomenon (Amusan et al., 2019; Khuzwayo-Magwaza, 2021; Lopang, 2014; Montle, 2021; Msibi, 2014; Tamale, 2014). Moreover, the continent of Africa has had profound consequences as a result of a historical period characterised by colonialism, which had adverse implications for the gender and sexual orientations of native African communities. Therefore, within the context of African nations, the dynamics and privileges associated with heterosexual power have persisted, resulting in

significant negative consequences for youth with diverse sexual orientations (Francis & Kjaran, 2020; Schmitz et al., 2020). The concept of hegemonic masculinity presents an added obstacle to the presence and welfare of those who identify as LGBTQ+ (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016). Numerous African groups adhere to traditional religious and cultural norms to govern sexual orientations and behaviours (Burchardt, 2020; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). Furthermore, the existing societal construct of masculinity and femininity sustains norms that present an ongoing risk to the viability of gender expression and sexuality that deviate from the established standards.

The conceptualisation of gender and sexual diversity is crucial in fostering resilience among LGBTQ+ youth (McCormick, 2015). Unfortunately, the existence of diverse viewpoints, misunderstandings, philosophical ideologies, and preconceived notions regarding same-sex sexual orientations and non-conforming gender expressions can impact the accessibility of resources that promote resilience within the socio-ecology and other interconnected multiple systems (Kaoma, 2018; Khuzwayo-Magwaza, 2021; Lopang, 2014; McEwen, 2019). However, evidence (Epprecht, 2014; Montle, 2021; Murray & Roscoe, 1998) suggests that gender and sexual diversity existed in a pre-colonial society, and LGBTQ+ people continue to thrive despite the present risk factors in communities.

2.3 African Linguistics, Gender, and Sexual Diversity

African linguistics indicates the existence of pre-colonial same-sex or homosexual relationships. According to Montle (2021), there existed a cultural practice among the Shangaan people wherein feminine men were referred to as "inkotshane" or male wives, which was associated with same-sex interactions. Moreover, within the Basotho culture, it is seen that females employ the term "motsoalle" to denote contemporary socially accepted intimate connections between women (Tamale, 2014). According to Montle (2021), the Langi community in northern Uganda recognised youth known as "mudoko dako" as feminine males considered women and eligible to enter into marital unions with men. According to Jones and Ferguson (2020), the Khoisan, the initial inhabitants of Southern Africa, employed the term "koetsire" to denote those engaged in same-sex sexual activities.

According to Epprecht (2014), within the Shona community in Zimbabwe, there existed a cultural practice where a man would assume the responsibilities of a wife by marrying another man and fulfilling the household and sexual duties traditionally associated with a wife. This individual was commonly called a "murumekadzi," which can be translated as "man-woman."

Similarly, in the context of a same-sex relationship, a woman who assumed the role of a husband was known as a "mukadsirume." Moreover, according to Khuzwayo-Magwaza (2021), Zulu terms such as "Inkonkoni" are understood within Western theoretical frameworks to denote a bisexual man, whereas "Istabane" is associated with a homosexual male.

According to Montle (2021), those who identify as homosexual males in the Wolof language, which is predominantly spoken in Senegal, are referred to as "gor-digen" or "men-women." According to Khuzwayo-Magwaza (2021), an examination of indigenous conceptualisations of homosexuality reveals that terms such as "intoshane" in IsiZulu, "oukonchana" in Sesotho, "tinkonkana" in Mpondo, and "nkhonsthana" in Tsonga were used to describe same-sex practices that were not considered deviant or in opposition to heterosexuality, but rather as complementary to it (Bajaha, 2015; Kuloba, 2016). Consequently, the existing categorisations and depictions of homosexuality and heterosexuality among African youth can be understood as reflections of the coloniser's perspectives imposed upon the colonised, as argued by Tamale (2014). The operationalisation of gender and sexuality by external African observers is devoid of an indigenous perspective, as Khuzwayo-Magwaza (2021) notes. Moreover, it has been argued by Khuzwayo-Magwaza (2021) and Matebeni and Msibi (2015) that terms such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and others are rooted in Western cultural contexts and may not accurately reflect the experiences and identities of African Indigenous populations.

The publication titled "Boy Wives and Female Husbands: Studies in African Homosexuality," edited by Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe in 1998, provides a comprehensive examination of testimonies about pre-colonial African homosexuality, gender, and sexual variety across many contexts. Furthermore, Montle (2021) states that gender and sexual diversity, including homosexuality, were historically associated with the attribution of magical powers that were believed to bring about favourable outcomes such as increased crop yields, successful hunting, improved health, and protection against evil spirits. According to Khuzwayo-Magwaza (2021), gender and sexual variation were formerly perceived as a possession of an ancestor spirit of the opposite sex.

Epprecht (2014) asserts that the Bantu people, who were the second residents of Zimbabwe, exclusively attributed cultural and theological significance to heterosexual sexual relationships. However, there was a notable lack of focus and concern directed towards same-sex relationships. During the winter, unmarried males tend to engage in a practice where they sleep

close to one another without clothing, forming a huddled arrangement to maintain warmth collectively. Due to interpersonal physical touch, the youth may experience sexual arousal, leading to potential engagement in sexual activities. Furthermore, during the early 1900s in South Africa, miners adopted a practice of engaging in marriages that involved young males assuming the responsibilities traditionally associated with women, including cooking and providing sexual satisfaction (Epprecht, 2014; Murray & Roscoe, 1998).

Despite the prevalent absence of support in political and theological discussions, linguistic evidence suggests that gender and sexual variety are inherent aspects of African culture. Furthermore, it may be inferred that African indigenous theorisation has the potential to provide affirmation for sexual and gender-diverse youth (Khuzwayo-Magwaza, 2021). Moreover, the significance of affirmation, cultural identity, and a strong sense of belonging within a given ecological context is a crucial factor in fostering resilience, particularly among African youth (Ebersöhn, 2017; Nwoye , 2017; Theron, 2017; Theron & Theron, 2013; Theron et al., 2013).

2.4 Gender and Sexual Diversity as Deviance, Views for Non-Affirming Western Developmental Psychology and Psychiatry

During the 19th century, there was a notable transition in Western culture from religious to secular authority, resulting in the emergence of several theoretical frameworks to understand representations of sexual and gender diversity (McCormick, 2015). Theories about gender and sexual diversity can be classified into many categories, which include pathologising homosexuality, perceiving it as a state of immaturity, and considering it as a normal variation (Msibi, 2014). According to McIntosh's (1968) perspective, a significant issue associated with categorising youth as homosexual is the potential for them to develop an excessive preoccupation with this aspect of their identity. Furthermore, it was not until the seventeenth century that Western civilisation began transitioning from speculative notions to the practice of describing and categorising youth as homosexual. In the past, those identifying as homosexual were referred to by labels such as Molly, Nancy Boy, and madge cull, whereas contemporary designations include gay, fag, queer, and bent (McIntosh, 1968).

In the pursuit of understanding the psychological origins of homosexuality and sexual diversity as a deviation, it was previously theorised that this phenomenon may be attributed to a neurotic condition characterised by immature personality traits, a tendency to victimise oneself, and a self-centred disposition (Freud, 1905) In addition, scholars have posited that homosexuality was once perceived as a syndrome that has implications for the emotional, moral, and spiritual

aspects of an individual's psyche (Bulamah & Kupermann, 2018; Crozier, 2000; Wake, 2019). Additionally, transsexualism has been linked to perceptions of gender inadequacy, the presence of underdeveloped masculine or feminine personality traits, emotional immaturity, and an obsessive focus on oneself.

The listing of homosexuality as a diagnostic category was removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in 1973 (McCormick, 2015). The exclusion of homosexuality from the DSM-II can be attributed to the findings of Evelyn Hooker's research in 1957. Hooker conducted a study involving the administration of psychological tests to a sample of 30 self-identified homosexuals and 30 heterosexual men. The results of this study led to the conclusion that homosexuality should not be considered a clinical condition. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that transsexualism was officially recognised as a diagnostic category in the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) in 1980. However, it is important to mention that this diagnosis has since been superseded by the term "gender disorder." The diagnosis of gender identity disorder can be established when an individual is facing considerable discomfort and impairment in their overall functioning due to incongruence between their internally experienced gender and the gender assigned to them at birth (APA, 2013). The primary objective of the initiative to revise the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) was to mitigate the societal prejudice and discrimination faced by those who identify as gender diverse. According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the DSM-5 currently includes a diagnosis known as Gender Identity Disorder (APA, 2013). It is important to note that this diagnosis does not encompass persons who simply exhibit gender nonconformity. Rather, it is specifically intended for therapeutic purposes, such as facilitating gender transition processes like reassignment surgery.

Despite the various attempts made to revise the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), it was not until the 43rd World Health Assembly on 17 May 1990 that homosexuality was officially removed from the International Classification of Diseases (ICD). Historically, up until about 1990, practitioners in the fields of psychoanalysis and psychiatry endeavoured to address same-sex relationships through various therapeutic approaches (Samper Vendrell, 2018). Various therapeutic approaches have been employed in attempts to address homosexuality, encompassing a spectrum of interventions. These include social skills training, visualisation techniques, psychoanalytic therapy, religious interventions, as well as more extreme measures such as the administration of electric shocks to the hands and genitals.

(Bulamah & Kupermann, 2018; Davison, 2021; Wake, 2019). Nevertheless, previous endeavours by Western psychologists, psychoanalysts, and spiritual healers to rectify homosexuality have been demonstrated to yield detrimental outcomes, leading to notable negative impacts on mental well-being (Bulamah & Kupermann, 2018; Wake, 2019). After a prolonged period of harm inflicted upon youth identifying as LGBTQ+, the APA issued an apology for its previous classification of homosexuality as a mental disorder (Trotta, 2019).

To enhance the resilience of the LGBTQ+ community, the worldwide community has recently embraced the adoption of affirming gender and sexual pronouns (APA, 2021). Moreover, clinicians have embraced affirmative theorisation by incorporating several theoretical frameworks, including queer theory, feminist theory of intersectionality, and the minority stress model, into the development of responsive therapies at both micro and macro levels (APA, 2021; Chan & Howard, 2020; Gonzalez et al., 2021). According to existing research, the utilisation of affirming theoretical frameworks and psychological interventions has been shown to positively impact the development of resilience among youth who identify as LGBTQ+. This effect extends to several interconnected systems, such as the individual, family, and community contexts in which these youths are situated (Colpitts & Gahagan, 2016; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021).

2.5 Conservative Non-affirming Christian Beliefs on Gender and Sexual Diversity

According to the orthodox patriarchal Christian viewpoint, homosexuality is regarded as a transgression that warrants societal and legal repercussions. According to Mladin et al. (2003):

The sins that cry out to Heaven are those that call for their punishment while they are still in this world, that evil may be defeated and that the evils that flow from them may be restrained. These are grave sins against our neighbours and society, and they are also severely punished by the laws of society. Some signs are against the natural and social order and, through them, harm human dignity and society. (p. 88)

The enforcement of patriarchal norms and Roman-Dutch Laws frequently relies on utilising religious texts and cultural practices to advance male domination and superiority (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Burchardt, 2020; Thobejane et al., 2018). The concept of patriarchy is intricately connected to heteronormativity, wherein homosexuality is perceived as aberrant and despised, necessitating corrective measures (Mkasi, 2013). Certain academics believe that

biblical scriptures are exclusively interpreted in a literal manner to promote a discourse that upholds heteronormativity (Haffner, 2004; Gnuse, 2015).

According to Gnuse (2015), there are biblical references that express disapproval towards same-sex relationships. These references include the story of Noah and Ham (Genesis 9:20–27), the account of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:1–11), the Levitical laws that condemn same-sex sexual relationships (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13), Paul's letters to the church in Corinth and Timothy (1 Corinthians 6:9–10; 1 Timothy 1:10), as well as Paul's letter to the Romans (Romans 1:26–27). According to Gnuse (2015), the biblical passages under consideration do not indicate the presence of same-sex partnerships involving consenting, adult, and affectionate youth. The biblical passages of Genesis 9:20–27 and 19:1–11 discuss instances of rape or attempted rape. Additionally, there are references in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 that condemn cultic prostitution, while 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 and 1 Timothy 1:10 address the issues of male prostitution and pederasty in Corinth. Furthermore, the cult of Isis in Rome is mentioned in Romans 1:26–27.

Haffner (2004) provides more evidence to support the notion that the relationship between Jonathan and David, as well as Ruth and Naomi, encompasses certain elements associated with same-sex partnerships. The individual cited biblical passages, specifically 1 Samuel 18:1, 1 Samuel 19:1, and 2 Samuel 1:26. These passages depict the profound emotional connection between David and Jonathan. One Samuel 18:1 state that Jonathan's soul became closely intertwined with David's, and Jonathan loved David as deeply as he loved his own soul. Similarly, 1 Samuel 19:1 highlights Jonathan's immense delight in David's presence. Furthermore, David himself expressed his profound affection for Jonathan in 2 Samuel 1:26, describing Jonathan as greatly beloved and emphasising that Jonathan's love surpassed that of women. While biblical texts address various forms of sexual impurity, such as engaging in sexual activity with a woman during her menstrual cycle (Leviticus 15:19-30), committing adultery (Leviticus 20:10-16), and participating in fornication. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the Levitical regulations encompass a range of dietary restrictions, including the prohibition of consuming specific items such as pork, shrimp, shellfish, certain insects, and scavenging birds, as outlined in Leviticus 11. Additionally, these laws extend to the realm of marriage, as seen by the prohibition of unions between those of Jewish descent and foreigners or non-Jewish youth, as stated in Deuteronomy 7:3-4. Consequently, the studies of biblical scriptures frequently overlook their historical and cultural backdrop when examined

superficially, leading to potential exegetical and hermeneutical inaccuracies in their interpretation (Dahan, 2019).

The discourse within the Christian community that does not affirm homosexuality frequently leads to the internalisation of negative attitudes towards homosexuality, which in turn has detrimental effects on the youth's mental well-being (Jones & Ferguson, 2020; Luvuno et al., 2019; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). Moreover, it has been noted that the narrative tends to undermine the agency of parents, families, and communities to take affirmative measures (Epprecht & Mngoma, 2022; Mayeza, 2021; Semang et al., 2020). In this regard, the absence of affirmation towards LGBTQ+ youth has a detrimental impact on their ability to cope, frequently leading to the adoption of atypical coping mechanisms that reflect resistance against heteronormative and cisnormative norms (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021).

2.6 Non-affirming Political Discourse on Gender and Sexual Diversity

The prevailing Christian perspective, characterised by its adherence to traditional and patriarchal values, has exerted a significant influence on societal perceptions of gender and sexual variety. This influence extends to major African political personalities, such as Robert Mugabe, Yahya Jammeh, Yoweri Museveni, and Jacob Zuma, as evidenced by scholarly works such as those authored by Amusan et al. (2019), Montle (2021), and Msibi (2014). For example, the British newspaper The Guardian reported that in the Gambia, former President Yahya Jammeh uttered these words against homosexuality: *"We will fight these vermins called homosexuals or gays the same way we are fighting malaria-causing mosquitoes, if not more aggressively,"* He further said: *"We will therefore not accept any friendship, aid or any other gesture that is conditional on accepting homosexuals or LGBT as they are now baptised by the powers that promote them,"* and *"As far as I am concerned, LGBT can only stand for Leprosy, Gonorrhoea, Bacteria and Tuberculosis; all of which are detrimental to human existence"* (Staff, 2014). Jammeh's statement indicates that political figures are unwilling to embrace inclusivity towards the LGBTQ+ population (Lopang, 2014; Montle, 2021). These ideas pose a significant danger to the human rights and overall welfare of youth who identify as LGBTQ+. Certain African political leaders hold the belief that Western nations, particularly the United States, harbour intentions of perpetuating colonisation in Africa using dictatorial regimes (McEwen, 2019).

At the Zimbabwe International Book Fair held in August 1995, the former president of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, expressed his disapproval of homosexuality, asserting that it undermines the inherent worth of youth. He said:

[Homosexuality] degrades human dignity. It's unnatural, and there is no question of allowing these people to behave worse than dogs and pigs. If dogs and pigs do not do it, why must human beings? We have our own culture, and we must re-dedicate ourselves to the traditional values that make us human beings.

In a public gathering held in his home province of KwaZulu-Natal, former president Jacob Zuma expressed his disapproval of same-sex marriages, characterising them as a source of disgrace to both the nation and religious beliefs, as reported by The New Humanitarian (2022). He further stated that throughout his formative years, youth who identified as homosexual were not seen as equals in his presence. The prevailing perception of homosexuality as deviant and uncharacteristic of African culture persists despite the documented evidence provided by Western explorers, religious missionaries, anthropologists, sociologists, and physicians upon their arrival in Africa. Additionally, insights from African traditional healers and sangomas further contribute to this body of narratives (Jones & Ferguson, 2020; Khuzwayo-Magwaza, 2021). Stewart et al. (2021) provided evidence indicating that gay behaviour is observed in non-human species, including mammals. Consequently, there exists a prevailing notion that the youth of African descent tend to overlook or forget the impact of colonialism on the conceptualisation and understanding of gender and sexual diversity (Kuloba, 2016). According to Hook (2006), Africans perceive their way of life as being inferior, demonic, and pathological because of the colonial impact.

Population control is a topic of contention in ongoing discussions surrounding sexuality. Certain African leaders hold the belief that homosexuality is part of a larger strategy orchestrated by the United States to exert control over the African population (McEwen, 2019). According to McEwen (2019), political and religious authorities have urged parents to refrain from participating in the immunisation campaign because of their belief that the vaccines have been contaminated with undisclosed contraceptive substances that may hinder future fertility in girls. According to Montagna (2015), Bishop Emmanuel Badejo asserted that the United States offered assistance to Nigeria in addressing the issue of Boko Haram, contingent upon the country's modification of legislation about homosexuality, family planning, and birth control. Emmanuel Badejo holds the view that the United States is pursuing a course of cultural

imperialism, wherein it seeks to impose Western values, such as those about gay rights, homosexual weddings, abortion, and contraception, upon the African continent.

Politics significantly influences the resiliency of LGBTQ+ youth (Ungar, 2018b). Politicians frequently assume the responsibility of formulating constitutions, legislation, and policies at a foundational level. Politicians and other stakeholders engage in the policy implementation and evaluation process, which includes developing and accessing policies that promote gender and sexual diversity affirmation (Bhana, 2014; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021; Moreno et al., 2020). The absence of endorsement from political figures suggests that LGBTQ+ youth may be subjected to inhumane treatment, hence intensifying their psychological vulnerabilities (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Okanlawon, 2021; Pinheiro & Harvey, 2019). Moreover, it is worth noting that non-affirmation policies harm the social structure, particularly in affirmation practices inside families and schools (Francis, 2017; Gyamerah et al., 2019).

2.7 LGBTQ+ Risk Factors

In this part of the literature review, I look at the current risk factors faced by LGBTQ+ youth in Africa, South Africa, and rural areas. The purpose of exploring different factors is that they play an integral part in the resilience process (Ungar, 2011, 2018b). Risk exposure often threatens a system's development, well-being, and sustainability (Masten, 2014). Risk factors are external perturbations that treat a system's equilibrium functioning. In this section of the review, I look at how post-colonial constructions of masculinity and femininity, including hegemonic masculinity, serve as a threat to LGBTQ+ youth. I further look at the impact of inter-systemic structural inequalities outside the rural ecologies, which are perpetuating risks to LGBTQ+ people. I consider different community and family-based risk factors such as discrimination in schools and health care facilities, and, lastly, family denial and rejection.

Numerous studies have extensively investigated the systemic approaches to resilience, revealing that the presence of strong familial and social connections, as well as access to structural resources like educational institutions, have a substantial positive impact on the well-being of young individuals (Clements-Nolle & Waddington, 2019; Crush & Tawodzera, 2014; Fazel & Betancourt, 2018; Rahmati et al., 2017; Schelbe & Geiger, 2017; Van Breda & Theron, 2017). The LGBTQ+ youth may not always experience the advantages of relational and structural resources due to their marginalisation within communities, particularly in rural schools, because of homophobia rooted in community heterosexist norms (Abreu & Gonzalez, 2020; Soldatic et al., 2021).

2.7.1 Post-colonial Performances of Masculinity and Femininity as a Threat to LGBTQ+ Youth

Thobejane et al. (2018) argue that African male identity and masculinity are a product of slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and globalisation. Also, scholars (Epprecht, 1998, 2014; Jones & Ferguson, 2020; Murray & Roscoe, 1998; Montle, 2021; Tamale, 2014) suggest that in traditional African society, men who acted feminine in different societal spaces would be recognised as women to the point of being married by masculine men who even paid a bridal price for them. Similarly, masculine females would marry females and assume the duties of a husband. However, indigenous practices have now changed regarding what constitutes a man and a woman in African societies. For example, during the Apartheid era in South Africa, men were excluded from working in traditional homelands and restricted to work in urban areas. Masculinity was constructed by a man who could withstand harsh labour, which involved physical strength and endurance in dangerous mine shafts (Ellapen, 2007). Presently, in most communities, women are generally validated by being passive and submissive to men. Often, in some African communities, a man is socially constructed as someone who uses violence to assert his maleness (Shefer, 2007). Masculinity was seen to describe a person who is happy to father children from different mothers (Sibiza, 2020), who often display anger to hide feelings of frustration and inadequacy (Shefer, 2007), who is possessive and obsessed in a relationship, with financial control and negotiating powers in a relationship that can abuse his ability to get what he wants (Thobejane et al., 2018).

To this end, masculinity and femininity refer to how individuals see themselves as masculine or feminine. Perceptions around masculinity and femininity are based on societal prescriptions and are not innate (Sandhu & Kaur, 2015). Society plays a role in deciding the requirements for one to be considered a man or woman. Gender identity is an idea and an experience of either masculinity or femininity rooted in typical gendered roles, stereotypes, and societal attitudes (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Thobejane et al., 2018). Masculinity and femininity are based on socially constructed gender rather than biological sex (Sandhu & Kaur, 2015). Therefore, a male person can see themselves as feminine, and a female person can see themselves as masculine.

There are three main mechanisms of gender differentiation: biological sex, sexual orientation, and socialisation (Sandhu & Kaur, 2015). Sex includes the genitals, male and female hormones, and secondary characteristics (Hellinger & Motschenbacher, 2015). Sexual orientation refers

to an individual's identity in terms of whom they are romantically attracted to, being either people of the opposite sex, same-sex, or both (Hall, 2015). Socialisation refers to social and cultural expectations about a person's gender from family, siblings, peers, and social institutions (Gallyamova et al., 2015).

Ideologies around masculinity in many communities worldwide validate men as competitive and aggressive. However, men who do not perform according to these scripts are often marginalised (Kiguwa, 2006). Masculinity is one of the critical issues that is discussed when focusing on the LQBTQ+ community. When masculinity is involved, being gay is often associated with being physically and emotionally fragile (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016).

Masculinity and femininity are gendered scripts that propel individuals to perform specific gendered roles (Kiguwa, 2006). Gender expectations from the community, especially in a collectivist space such as the rural community, is a prevailing issue (Dery, 2019). The rural community context is typified by adhering to typical cultural ways and expectations, such as expecting men to be strong and behave in specific ways. For example, there is a saying in the Sepedi language: "*Monna ke nku o llela teng*", which translates as, "Do not cry, just like a sheep when slaughtered, it does not make much noise". This means crying is seen as a sign of weakness (Thobejane et al., 2018). Heterosexuality, especially masculinity, is idealised in South African communities as a symbol of power, and homosexuality as a symbol of weakness (Burchardt, 2020; Shefer et al., 2015).

Bhana and Mayeza (2016) studied boys aged 10-13 who attended a 'Black', working-class primary school in South Africa. This study examined hegemonic masculinity to understand how power is involved in violence among African primary school boys. The study indicates that owing to hegemonic masculinity, boys distanced themselves from girls, femininity, and non-conforming boys. Participants in this study reported that their caregivers at home taught them that being gay was wrong and that culture did not allow it. The study revealed that violence is often seen as power and control. Homophobic violence can be seen in boys asserting themselves as real boys by ensuring all boys at school conform to gendered roles. Bhana and Mayeza's (2016) study indicate that boys were socialised to reject and punish homosexuality and non-normative gender expressions (Kiguwa, 2006). Ideas surrounding masculinity often result in bullying and intimidation of those perceived as weak (Francis, 2017).

In an African culture, women have cultural prescriptions regarding how they should behave and dress. People who identify as lesbians also experience different forms of violence, including corrective rape by unknown people or family members (Govender et al., 2019; Luvuno et al., 2019). Lesbians are not the only rape victims in South Africa. Gay men also experience rape (Mgolozeli & Duma, 2019). Non-conforming sexuality and gender expression are often seen as threatening culture and conservative religious beliefs (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021). Therefore, such perceptions about the LGBTQ+ youth fuel hatred, disgust, and homo- and transphobic acts from the community, which result in human rights violations (Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). In addition, some LGBTQ youth who seem not to conform to expectations of masculinity and femininity often experience internal conflict and distress for not meeting the community's expectations (Haas & Lannutti, 2019; McConnell et al., 2018; Toomey, 2021).

Resilience research seeks to explore masculinity and femininity because they often inform the capacity of individual LGBTQ+ youth to connect with the ecology when seeking resilience-enabling resources (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Ungar, 2011). The exclusion of LGBTQ+ youth from society because of how a man or a woman is supposed to act, or look may impact the ecology's willingness to supply resilience-enabling sources (Ungar, 2011). Therefore, examining how masculinity and femininity intersect with LGBTQ+ youth is essential to inform their resilience in adversity (McConnell et al., 2018; Toomey, 2021).

2.7.2 Structural Inequalities, Gender and Sexual Diversity

Research has established that young people, irrespective of gender and sexuality, can withstand adversity by depending on different forms of support from their ecologies (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; van Breda, 2018). However, LGBTQ+ youth continue to experience systemic oppression, discrimination, and marginalisation in different African community settings, including schools (Francis, 2017; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). For example, there is a lack of gender non-binary bathrooms in schools, school uniform policies encourage cis-normativism, and the school curriculum does not cover LGBTQ+-related topics (Francis, 2017, 2018; Francis & Kuhl, 2020). Higher education institutions (HEI) also do not offer an inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ youth (Jagessar & Msibi, 2015). In most African communities, there is a culture of compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity, which often stands as a barrier to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ youth (Lopang, 2014; Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015). Exclusion and marginalisation of LGBTQ+ people are not only an African challenge, as

heteronormativity also seems to be a global phenomenon (APA, 2021; Parmenter et al., 2021; Robinson, 2021).

LGBTQ+ youth limit their chances to access community resilience, enabling resources such as schools and health facilities (Bhana, 2014). The LGBTQ+ research in Africa has thus far uncovered systemic factors that often act against the implementation of LGBTQ+ rights across different communities and societal contexts. The African LGBTQ+ youth face discrimination owing to conservative community cultural and religious norms and hegemonic masculinity (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019; Mayeza, 2021). Considering different risk factors, LGBTQ+ youth demonstrate agency and thrive despite adversity (Daniels et al., 2019). Previous LGBTQ+ studies in Africa point to forces such as heterosexual privilege, religion, culture, race, and gender, which often stand against the implementation of LGBTQ+ inclusion policies in schools, universities, and communities (Bhana, 2014; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021; Rothmann, 2018; Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015).

Exploring the patterns and severity of risk exposure is the starting point for understanding and promoting resilience (Ungar, 2011). Access to resilience-enabling structural resources, such as social policies, significantly impacts individualistic resilience processes (Ungar, 2016). The literature shows that the macro systems remain heterosexist even in a progressive country like South Africa. For example, the South African education system, the curriculum, and school policies enforce compulsory heterosexist culture and cisnormativity (Francis & Kuhl, 2020). Teachers' training does not cover issues surrounding gender and sexual diversity (Francis, 2017). The health system seems reluctant to respond to the needs of LGBTQ+ youth. This is because the health personnel are not adequately trained to intervene in their gender and sexual-related health challenges (Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021). Despite the structural inequalities, the LGBTQ+ youth cope depending on individual resilience processes, most importantly, the limited relational and structural support (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Pinheiro & Harvey, 2019; Okanlawon, 2021). Francis (2017) emphasises that LGBTQ+ youth should not be seen as passive victims in their harsh environments who only need protection but as individuals with agency, sexual knowledge, and experience. Despite the statement Francis (2017) makes towards human rights, inclusion, and social justice, there is a need for intervention at a multisystemic structural level. Structural inequalities reveal those systems outside the rural ecology that enable or work against resilience in the rural ecology (Ungar, 2021).

2.7.3 Discrimination in Rural Community Structural Services Schools and Health Facilities

Discrimination and exclusion of LGBTQ+ youth in schools is a global issue, and research in the international community focused on promoting the inclusion and human rights of gender and sexual minorities. Research across many contexts globally links experiences of victimisation of LGBTQ+ youth in school with low performance, poor school attendance, and high school dropout (Daniels et al., 2019; Wike et al., 2022). In South Africa, schools in rural areas can foster resilience and educational experiences, including resilience-enabling relationships with teachers, which are thus the most valued in this context (Ebersöhn, 2017). Unfortunately, LGBTQ+ youth are not experiencing schools as resilience-enabling; hence, some drop out due to the discrimination they experience (Daniels et al., 2019). Other institutions, such as churches in rural communities, do not help enable LGBTQ+ resilience (Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). By examining the risk factors that LGBTQ+ youth in rural communities face, it seems impossible to start thinking of resilience.

A mixed-method study was conducted in two South African provinces (KwaZulu-Natal [KZN] and Gauteng Province [GP]) among 22 participants who were secondary school principals, deputy principals, and school heads of departments (Bhana, 2014). This study examined homosexuality and homophobia in South African secondary schools. The study revealed that there was sexual silence and denial in schools. Religious and cultural dogmas caused internal conflict between school managers concerning the stance they needed to hold concerning homosexuality. Queer sexuality was seen as a threat to traditional cultural norms. The study suggested that the battle against homophobia can be won using South African constitutional law and legislative policies to disrupt heterosexual power. Another study by Francis and Reygan (2016) used in-depth interviews with 25 South African Life Orientation teachers in the Free State's rural and urban schools. This study revealed micro-aggressions by teachers against LGBTQ+ learners. This study involved statements that showed disrespect, discomfort, and disapproval of LGBTQ+ lives and pathologising homosexuality. However, other studies (Daniels et al., 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021) have shown that despite the risk factors that the LGBTQ+ community faces, there are themes of coping with these risks and being resilient.

Francis's literature review (2017) comprised 27 publications on understanding experiences of teaching and learning sexuality education in South African schools. This review revealed that compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity permeate the curriculum, pedagogy, and

school culture; gender and sexually diverse youth experience school discrimination from school managers, teachers, and fellow learners. Additionally, higher learning institutions seem to discriminate against LGBTQ+ youth (Letsoalo et al., 2020; Tshilongo & Rothmann, 2019). Teachers are often not trained to address LGBTQ+ issues. Also, the curriculum for teaching educational psychologists does not focus on LGBTQ+ interventions (Brown & Njoko, 2019). The inclusion of LGBTQ+ youth in schools is prohibited by the larger macro context of systemic heterosexism despite the Department of Education's inclusion policies (Francis & Reygan, 2016).

LGBTQ+ youth living in rural areas fear stigma and discrimination, which harm their access to healthcare services. For example, a qualitative study that Mkhize and Maharaj conducted (2021) in KZN examined the utilisation of healthcare services among LGBTQ+ students at universities. In-depth interviews with 12 LGBTQ+ university students aged 18–24 were conducted. The findings from this study showed the stigmatisation of queer people, including in some health facilities. Furthermore, there seemed to be a generational gap between queer youth and older people working in the facilities. There was also fear of disclosing sensitive information to health personnel. Community structural resources may not be freely accessible and relevant to LGBTQ+ youth, so sometimes, they cannot depend on these resources for their resilience (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021).

South African LGBTQ+ health research has established that systemic discrimination may prohibit access to crucial community resilience-enabling structural resources such as the health sector (Scherf & Zanatta, 2021). Systemic issues in the health sector that could perpetuate the exclusion of LGBTQ+ youth range from a lack of training of health personnel in working with gender and sexually-diverse youth (Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021). Access to health care is often a problem owing to discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ youth in the cisgender health systems (Scherf & Zanatta, 2021). Health personnel training in South Africa seems not to focus on providing intervention to LGBTQ+ people. Also, there seem to be gaps in the literature, practice guidelines, and policies for LGBT healthcare in South Africa (Luvuno et al., 2019).

2.7.4   Rejection and Denial by Family Members

Families may respond to LGBTQ+ youth unsupportively by ousting the child from the house or denying their sexual identity (Gyamerah et al., 2019). Families in different societal contexts, such as in Western and American societies, often fail to provide an affirming environment for LGBTQ+ youth (Robinson, 2021). Rejection is frequently fuelled by conservative religious

beliefs and cultural ideologies (Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). The failure of a family system to accept a homosexual or transsexual young person can have a significant mental health impact on the young person (Robinson, 2021). Parents of LGBTQ+ children often realise that their gender expression differs from their sex from early childhood (Nichols, 2021). Therefore, denial by parents can be interpreted as a defence mechanism against the anxiety that comes with having an LGBTQ+ child.

A study conducted by Gyamerah et al. (2019) in Pretoria, South Africa, consisted of 81 men who had sex with men (MSM), who ranged from 20 to 39 years of age (M=25.16). This study explored diverse factors that mediated Black South African MSM's disclosure of their sexual practices and identity to their families. The study also examined how the families responded and how the family responses affected LGBTQ+ children. This study revealed that participants who did not disclose their sexuality to family feared it would lead to negative discriminatory responses. These responses could lead to discomfort, fear, and anxiety. Most of the participants who identified as masculine practised their sexuality secretly. Some of the participants in this study stated that their families already suspected, knew, or could see that their child was gay, but it was considered a family issue that was not open for discussion. Participants who disclosed their identities revealed that they experienced violence and discrimination in their families. However, some participants received positive responses from families; some were silent, while others received contradictory responses.

Families who accepted a child's sexuality also needed to deal with the shame that society was projecting on them (Nichols, 2021). Accepting the sexuality of a child can be difficult owing to societal norms and values (Gyamerah et al., 2019). However, the process may not be the same for transgender individuals who cannot hide their gender identity from their families (Daniels et al., 2019).

According to D'Augelli (1994, as cited in Gyamerah et al., 2019), there are six processes involved in coming out as a sexually diverse person. These processes include firstly, exiting a heterosexual identity; secondly, developing a personal LGB identity status; thirdly, developing an LGB social identity; fourthly, claiming an identity as an LGB offspring and developing an LGB intimacy status; and lastly, entering the LGB community. In an African context, several factors affect this process, such as heteronormativity, cultural expectations, African masculinities, LGB experiences of marginalisation and stigmatisation, and violence by the society (Francis, 2021; Harper et al., 2021; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). All these

intersecting variables often dictate whether an LGBTQ+ person will disclose their sexuality, whom they will reveal it to, and what disclosing their sexuality means to them (Epprecht & Mngoma, 2022; Mayeza, 2021; Semang et al., 2020).

An 18-month, multi-sited ethnography on LGBTQ+ youth homelessness was conducted by Robinson (2021) in the USA, which explored their needs, strengths, and everyday experiences. This study included observations and 40 in-depth interviews. This study revealed that these young people left their homes due to ill-treatment from their parents. Cultural and religious beliefs were often a motivating factor for the ill-treatment. Religion and culture are often essential to rural communities and adhering to shared moral standards. In a conservative context, such as the rural community, sexual diversity can often be misunderstood by families and the local community (Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019; Theron, 2017).

To this end, hetero- and cisnormativity is a prominent issue in rural communities. According to Broughton (2020), a case study of a homosexual couple residing in Richards Bay, KwaZulu-Natal Province (KZN), reveals that they encountered rejection from their local home affairs office due to multiple factors, one of which being the purported lack of training among marriage authorities to officiate same-sex unions. Subsequently, the officials asserted their adherence to the Christian faith, citing their inability to preside over a same-sex matrimonial ceremony. As a result, the couple experienced a delay of more than one year before their marriage could be officially recognised. Additionally, according to Khanyile (2020), the LGBTQ+ community continues to face homophobic assaults in rural regions of South Africa. The phenomenon of marginalisation experienced by LGBTQ+ youth in rural settings is observed on a global scale. LGBTQ+ youth continue to encounter discriminatory experiences in various global societal settings, primarily stemming from conservative religious doctrines, cultural conventions, and prevailing ideals (Rand & Paceley, 2022; Robinson, 2021; Schmitz & Tyler, 2019; Singh et al., 2014).

An overview of the risks faced by LGBTQ+ youth suggests that LGBTQ+ youth in Africa, including South Africa, face a range of violence and discrimination across diverse societal settings, including rural, semi-rural, and urban metropolitan communities. This issue has been documented in various studies conducted by Bhana and Mayeza (2016), Khuzwayo-Magwaza (2021), Gyamerah et al. (2019), and Mkhize and Maharaj (2021), among others. Extensive research has demonstrated that sexual and gender-diverse youth encounter safety challenges within rural communities. In contrast to urban and metropolitan regions, rural communities are

characterised by higher levels of violence and discrimination, as well as a lack of social support for LGBTQ+ youth (Daniels et al., 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). Moreover, existing research indicates that rural areas lack sufficient health, education, and social resources to effectively cater to the needs of LGBTQ+ youth (Francis, 2017; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021). Furthermore, it is worth noting that in metropolitan settings, as compared to rural regions, LGBTQ+ youth have greater availability of resources, including mental health support and gender-affirming medical procedures, such as gender reassignment surgery (Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021).

Moreover, rural communities can support LGBTQ+ youth resilience (Rand & Paceley, 2022). The existing body of evidence indicates that LGBTQ+ youth residing in rural areas exhibit resilience in overcoming various risk factors, enabling them to complete their secondary education and gain eligibility for higher education (Rothmann, 2018). Matsúmunyane and Hlalele (2019) argue that individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ can maintain resilience in the face of adversity within rural communities.

2.7.5 South African Rural Communities and LGBTQ+ Youth Risk Factors and Resilience

In South Africa, the legacy of the Apartheid regime left different societal imbalances, including the establishment of traditional rural homestands, townships, and urban places (Ratele, 2017; Shefer et al., 2015). Rural communities are typified by a culture of communalism (Theron et al., 2013). This culture strongly considers shared norms and values in the community (Theron, 2016). Communalism emphasises connectedness and interdependence between a person and the universe. Personhood in an African context is relational. Thus, "motho ke motho ka batho" means one cannot separate an individual from their family - living or dead - and community (Mkhize, 2022). Botho or Ubuntu, the Christian religion, and African cultural beliefs shape the culture and realities of most people living in an African rural community context (Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). The concept of Ubuntu is rooted in following shared community values, norms, and acceptable behaviours. Ubuntu or personhood can also be lost when an individual no longer follows community norms and values (Mkhize, 2022). Ubuntu is rooted in interdependence, co-existence between individuals, nature and ancestors, and the inherent dignity of all human beings (Theron et al., 2013)

It is frequently observed that rural communities tend to embody collectivist cultural principles, which might pose challenges to adopting LGBTQ+ inclusion policies in educational

institutions and society at large. These challenges are mostly due to the influence of conservative religious views, communal standards, and shared values, as highlighted by Matsumunyane and Hlalele (2019). Rural areas are commonly linked to poverty, material scarcity, dysfunctionality, and substandard health and education systems (Balfour, 2016). In the context of a post-colonial culture, namely the post-apartheid society in South Africa, there are prevalent hetero and cisnormative structural constraints that frequently hinder the effective implementation of policies and the promotion of inclusivity within rural communities, especially rural schools (Francis, 2017; Francis & Kuhl, 2020; Gyamerah et al., 2019).

Similar to the African context, rural communities in other contexts in an international community also hold conservative religious views about sexuality (Rand & Paceley, 2022). Conservative beliefs about sexuality in rural communities across the globe are mainly responsible for the exclusion and victimisation of LGBTQ+ youth in society (Wike et al., 2022). Furthermore, sexual relations in rural communities are only validated between a male and female who are married (Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). LGBTQ+ groups in rural spaces, including heterosexual unmarried youth, face corrective and devastating consequences for engaging in sexual relations. Rural communities in Africa still preserve traditional cultural ideals, including cultural teachings, ceremonies, and rites of passage for individuals at different stages of life (Mkhize, 2006a, 2006b; Mohlaloka, 2014). Incorporating Christian values into tradition and other colonial influences has brought a new dimension into how masculinities and femininities are performed, such as perpetuated risks to gender and sexual minorities (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Apner Ellapen, 2007).

Despite the prevailing risk factors found in rural communities, studies also record factors that promote resilience in these contexts. Few studies, such as Daniels et al. (2019), Haffejee and Wiebesiek (2021), and Matsúmunyane and Hlalele (2019), amongst others, indicate the risks and resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in a rural African community context. Significantly, Pasely (2020) proposed that there is a need for a paradigm shift for LGBTQ+ research in rural communities to detach from a deficit model to focus on strength and resilience perspectives.

2.8   The Ecological Study of Resilience

The study of resilience has received attention in various fields. However, there is a lack of transdisciplinary approaches in psychology and systems ecology due to the ambiguous definition of this concept (Ungar, 2020, p. 6). Resilience, as understood in various domains of

psychology and systems ecology, pertains to the mechanisms involved in adapting, recovering, and transforming in the face of adversity (Masten, 2014).

Human resilience is a process of adaptation influenced by interactions at various levels, ranging from the molecular to social and ecological systems (Masten, 2014). Early resilience studies have associated adaptation with completing typical developmental tasks. These tasks for young individuals in an African community include obtaining a secondary education and embracing community norms and values to establish their identity (Nyowe, 2017; Theron et al., 2022). The absence of psychopathology was also associated with adaptation (Masten, 2014). Nevertheless, evaluating resilience solely based on a limited interpretation of adaptation overlooks the unconventional and non-standard coping strategies that individuals employ in hazardous settings (Ungar, 2011).

Rutter (1987) defined resilience as the ability of individuals to respond differently to risk factors to prevent negative outcomes. Resilience research in psychology and related fields emerged due to clinical investigations into the likelihood of developing pathological conditions (Masten, 2014). The study of resilience emerged in the 1970s as researchers investigated the causes of psychopathology. They observed that certain individuals exhibited positive adaptations and development despite facing significant risk factors. During the initial stages of resilience research, scholars primarily emphasised intrapsychic and individualistic characteristics (Kumpfer, 1999). According to Rutter (2012), individuals vary in their cognitive assessment of the risk associated with their genetic characteristics and the circumstances in which they are situated. The initial conceptualisation of resilience is rooted in the notion that individuals should take responsibility for their well-being and cultivate adaptive strategies rather than being seen as passive recipients of their surroundings (Masten, 2014).

Masten et al. (2021) have identified four distinct periods of resilience research over time. The initial wave adopted a descriptive approach, focusing on identifying specific characteristics that distinguished individuals who fared poorly from those who fared well in the face of adversity. The emphasis of the second wave was on elucidating how specific characteristics and mechanisms resulted in favourable adjustment. The third wave specifically focused on the identified processes to facilitate improved adaptation among individuals encountering various adversities. The fourth wave of resilience research emphasised the adoption of more dynamic and systems-oriented methodologies.

Resilience has been defined in various ways, with different research studies emphasising different aspects (Kumpfer, 1999; Rutter, 1987; Ungar, 2011, 2021). In the early stages of resilience research, resilience was initially defined as the ability to adapt effectively in the face of challenges (Masten, 2021). The recognition of multisystemic factors in coping emerged during the early stages of resilience research. Early resilience research, exemplified by scholars like Rutter (1987), revealed that children's coping strategies are influenced by their personality traits, family cohesion, and external support systems. The definition transformed a systemic approach. Resilience, viewed through a socio-ecological system lens, encompasses two aspects. Firstly, it refers to an individual's ability to obtain and manage resources within their socio-ecological environment effectively. Secondly, it pertains to the socio-ecology's capability to supply resources significantly (Ungar, 2011). According to systemic theorisation, resilience refers to the ability of dynamic systems to adapt and evolve continuously based on their experiences. This concept recognises that living systems change as they develop. Resilience is characterised by its dynamic nature, as it is influenced by the ever-changing individuals and their surrounding environments (Masten, 2014). The living and non-living systems engage in interactions that develop resilience (Masten, 2014). An individual's position within a system, such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or disability, influences their ability to access resources that promote resilience (Ubisi, 2021; Ungar, 2016).

According to social-ecological resilience theorists, resilience is a process of both social and physical ecosystem support. Shifting the focus towards the socio-ecology of resilience diverts attention from the individual (Ungar, 2011). This study examines the intersection of individualistic, relational, structural, and spiritual resilience resources to understand their contribution to positive outcomes in adversity (Colpitts & Gahagan, 2016). From this standpoint, one analyses the role of family, friends, community members, and structural resources, such as schools and cultural factors, in promoting resilience (Theron, 2016; Ungar, 2018b). This approach promotes social justice by examining how contextual realities, such as LGBTQ+ risk factors, and cultural norms, such as the theorisation of gender and sexual diversity in pre- and post-colonial contexts, influence the process of resilience (Ungar, 2011).

The study of resilience in social ecologies aims to determine the most effective promotive and protective factors for individuals in a specific context (Ungar, 2016). Nevertheless, the multisystemic conceptualisation of resilience provides a comprehensive perspective on the process of resilience, recognising the interplay between various systems that influence an individual's functioning (Theron et al., 2022; Ungar, 2021). The durability of promotive and

protective factors, whether at the biological or psychological level, can often be achieved by involving interconnected social and physical systems (Ungar, 2021).

Resilience is the capacity to perform effectively despite potential harm or danger, encompassing internal and external adaptation abilities (Theron & Theron, 2013). Adaptation is frequently guided by the preservation of equilibrium across various areas of operation (Masten, 2014). Adapting effectively in difficult situations requires building defences against negative outcomes likely to hinder a person's life and abilities (Wright & Masten, 2010). The study of resilience represents a departure from solely examining the negative effects of difficult living conditions and instead focuses on exploring the mechanisms and strategies that contribute to overall well-being (Borge et al., 2016).

Ecology is crucial for interacting with other systems and offering valuable resources in culturally significant ways (Ungar, 2018b). Resilience is achieved by leveraging a complex web of interconnected resources from various systems, including cultural, environmental, relational, and structural resources (Höltge et al., 2021). The various systems of interpersonal engagement, encompassing familial, social, and broader sociocultural and ecological contexts, play a crucial role in the resilience process and its resulting consequences (Ungar, 2018b). The subsequent section of this review examines the influence of biological, psychological, relational, and environmental factors, as well as culture and spirituality, on the development of resilience outcomes (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021).

2.9 LGBTQ+ Resilience: A Multisystemic Ecological Approach

An ecological resilience approach seeks to locate resilience within a given ecology, such as rural spaces. This approach goes beyond the individualistic biological, psychological resilience traits and socio-ecology to look at the natural and built environment (Ungar, 2021).
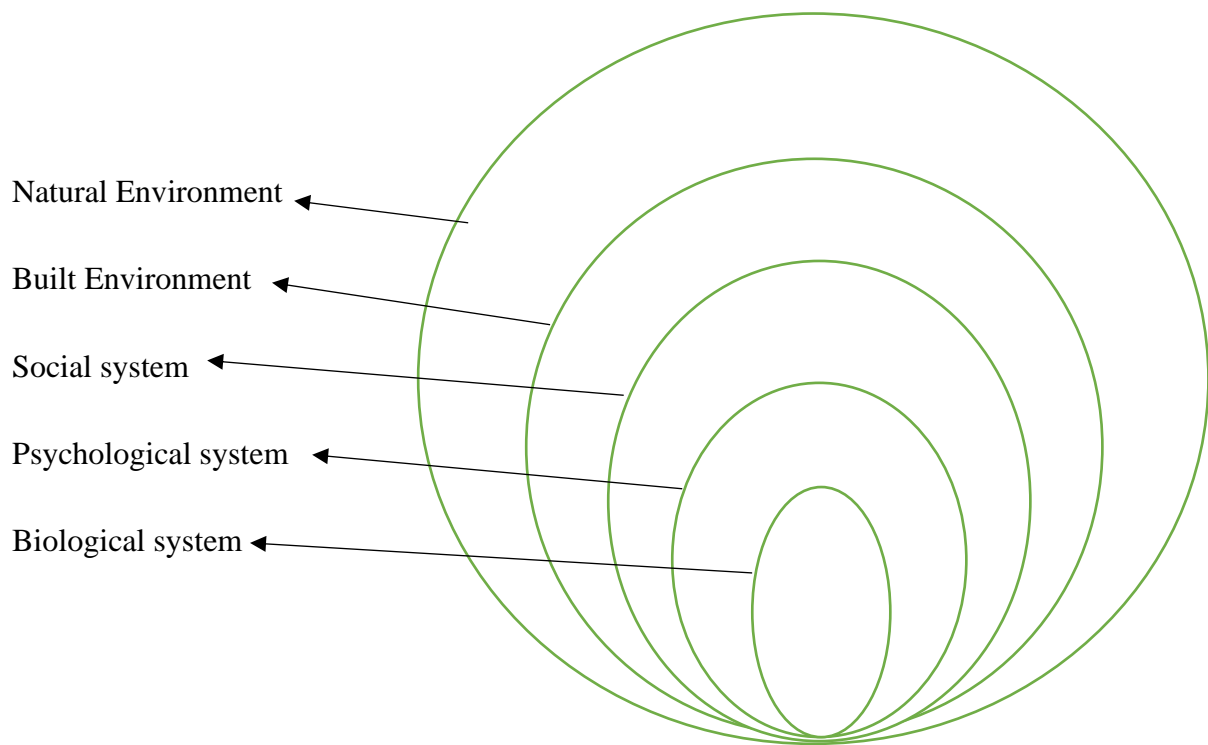
Figure 2.1: Intersecting scales within a biopsychosocial ecological system adopted from Theron et al. (2022)

Resilience is derived from various protective and promotive factors and processes that operate across multiple biological, psychological, social, and environmental systems (Theron et al., 2022). The concept of biological resilience encompasses factors and processes that pertain to an individual's physiological characteristics, such as their assigned sex at birth, as well as their physical condition, including factors like physical strength and illness (Theron et al., 2022). They also pertain to genotype or phenotype, encompassing temperament, personality type, and genetics (Ungar, 2016). The term "psychological system" encompasses various factors and processes associated with psychological functioning (Theron et al., 2022). These may consist of internal psychological processes that promote resilience, such as the ability to regulate oneself, set goals, gain mastery through experiences, solve problems effectively, and create adaptive meanings (Masten & Wright, 2010). For LGBTQ+ young people, these factors encompass the acknowledgement and validation of their sexual orientation, the cultivation of self-assurance and self-compassion, the affirmation of their religious or spiritual beliefs, the development of effective coping mechanisms, and the understanding of their legal entitlements (Harper et al., 2021). In non-affirming rural environments, individuals may employ intrapsychic processes to safeguard their ego against a harsh superego caused by minority stress. These processes include defence mechanisms like denial, avoidance, sublimation, and projective identification (Butler & Astbury, 2008).

The socio-environmental system encompasses various factors and processes associated with the social environment, such as interpersonal relationships, social networks, formal services, opportunities for economic autonomy, and societal expectations/gender stereotypes (Theron et al., 2022). These may encompass various connections, such as family, friends, associations with service providers, religious figures, community leaders, and relationships with pets and online acquaintances (Zhange, 2020). The components and mechanisms of the constructed environment encompass housing, pedestrian-friendliness, and particular amenities visited (Theron et al., 2022). These encompass various elements of the rural ecosystem, such as local rural schools, clinics, hospitals, social services, municipal buildings, post offices, local stores, and other infrastructure. The study of resilience in ecology is significant in understanding how organisms and ecosystems adapt, transform, and achieve positive outcomes in the face of adversity. This concept, which encompasses socio-ecology, is believed to influence these processes strongly (Ungar, 2011, 2016, 2018a, 2018b). Resilience is influenced by various factors, including the social environment and biological, psychological, social, and environmental systems (Ungar, 2011, 2021).

Resilience begins when there are risk factors that have the potential to harm people's well-being (Ungar, 2011). Put simply, the LGBTQ+ community residing in rural areas encounters distinct hazards associated with their gender and sexual orientations. Furthermore, the personal experiences of LGBTQ+ youth are influenced by challenging living circumstances such as racial and ethnic disparities, unemployment, limited access to resources, poverty, and the impact of pandemics such as HIV and AIDS and Covid-19 (Marnell et al., 2021). These experiences further complicate the comprehension of risk exposure and resilience in these marginalised sexual minority populations. Hence, the socio-ecological approach to resilience prompts investigation into the impact of the environment on the resources that individuals typically depend on to foster resilience (Ebersöhn, 2017; Theron, 2017; Van Breda & Theron, 2018).

Szymanski and Gonzalez (2020, as cited by Gonzalez et al., 2021) conducted a literature review on LGBTQ+ resilience research. They found that the ability of LGBTQ+ youth in the international community residing in the United States of America (USA) to bounce back from adversity is facilitated by their personal qualities of cognitive flexibility, determination, and optimism. Furthermore, the resilience of the LGBTQ+ community is facilitated by strong interpersonal connections, support from important individuals, and the positive nature of their relationships with these individuals. Furthermore, the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth at the

community level encompasses their ability to access resources and receive support from LGBTQ+ centres, affirmative policies, support groups, and role models. Resilience in minority groups is fostered by contextual and structural centres, as well as policies that cultivate a supportive environment for LGBTQ+ individuals. Research from the field of international literature suggests that transgender individuals' ability to define and conceptualise their gender, exercise agency, and access supportive educational systems are crucial factors in their resilience process. Additionally, connecting with trans-affirming communities, reframing mental health challenges, and navigating relationships with family and friends are important aspects of their resilience (Singh et al., 2014).

The prevailing literature on youth resilience has provided significant insights into the risks and resilience experienced by the overall youth population in the South African community, including rural areas. Van Breda and Theron (2018) found that various individualistic, relational, structural, and spiritual factors contribute to young people's resilience. The review identified various risk factors, including structural inequality, orphanhood, HIV and AIDS, poverty, and unemployment, that require resilience. In addition, research on young people's resilience, such as the study conducted by Van Rensburg et al. (2019), specifically examined the Free State province.

In the South African context, the resilience of young people is mainly characterised by their educational aspirations, hope for the future, and motivation (Daniels et al., 2019; Mosavel et al., 2015; Theron et al., 2022; Van Breda & Theron, 2018; Van Rensburg et al., 2019). Additionally, young individuals experience advantages from structural resilience, which encompasses resources such as financial stability, community amenities or services, community security, and the educational system (Van Breda & Theron, 2018; Van Rensburg et al., 2019). In addition, Van Breda and Theron (2018) document the inclusion of spiritual beliefs, cultural values, and practices that contribute to the development of resilience.

The resilience of LGBTQ+ youth is contingent upon the presence and ease of access to resources that promote resilience (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021). Culture and context determine whether resilience-enabling resources are considered relevant or irrelevant. A literature review by Szymanski and Gonzalez (2020) in a different context cannot fully apply to a rural context in South Africa. Nevertheless, LGBTQ+ individuals in the United States encounter comparable obstacles, including harassment, rejection, and societal stigmatisation, akin to their South African counterparts (Francis, 2017; Gonzalez et al., 2021; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019).

2.9.1 LGBTQ+ Individualistic Resilience Qualities (Biological and Psychological)

Individualistic resilience factors pertain to the biological and psychological systems (Ungar, 2021). Through the utilisation of personal resilience mechanisms, an individual can flourish despite challenging circumstances (Kumpfer, 1999). Moreover, the robust biological resilience exhibited by LGBTQ+ youth is closely associated with their engagement in sports and recreational activities, as well as their access to health services to maintain their physical well-being (Daniels et al., 2019; Lo et al., 2022; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021). Psychological resilience is commonly developed by normalising the LGBTQ+ identity, challenging hetero- and cisnormativity, fostering a sense of agency and confidence, cultivating self-reliant attitudes, nurturing a sense of mastery, and fostering hope and agency (Álvarez et al., 2022; Harper et al., 2021; Lo et al., 2022).

Studies conducted by Álvarez et al. (2022), Luvuno et al. (2019), Mkhize & Maharaj (2021), and Scherf & Zanatta (2021) primarily examine the biological aspect of resilience among LGBTQ+ youth. These studies underscore the significance of providing LGBTQ+ youth with access to various services, including sports and recreational activities, hormonal and gender reassignment services for transgender youth, MSM services, and antiretroviral treatment.

In studies on psychological resilience, researchers such as Daniels et al. (2019), Haffejee & Wiebesiek (2021), and Hillier et al. (2020) have shown that transgender youth exhibit agency by educating adults about their sexual identity, engaging in constructive arguments with individuals who oppose their sexuality, seeking support from their peers, and participating in sports activities. In addition, a comprehensive analysis conducted by Álvarez et al. (2022) of 14 studies identified psychological resources that contribute to resilience. This study identified resources promoting healing and mental health, including self-relying attitudes, a sense of mastery, a positive LGBTQIA+ identity, spirituality and religious beliefs, art, journaling, and perspective-taking.

According to Reid's (2022) findings, the act of suppressing one's LGBTQ+ identity results in a sense of detachment from the educational institution, subsequently leading to heightened levels of anxiety and depression. The individual developed resilience by participating in ballroom dancing as an extracurricular activity during their youth. This experience enhanced their confidence and ability to work towards healing. In contrast, Barsigian et al. (2023) conducted a study involving 20 LGBTQ+ adolescents between 16 and 19. The findings showed that these individuals utilise the internet to search for and exchange information about gender

and sexuality actively. They engage with both LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ audiences, thereby fostering a sense of queer community. Additionally, the internet allows them to make decisions regarding their visibility and permanence, as well as to raise awareness about the LGBTQ+ community. Furthermore, a study conducted by Lo et al. (2022) demonstrated that LGBTQ+ youth in North America between the ages of 19 and 29 discovered that their ability to bounce back from adversity is influenced by metacognitive thinking. This thinking involves critically examining established norms, promoting acceptance of LGBTQ+ gender and sexual identities, and engaging in acapella singing, music composition, journalism, language learning, and professional swimming.

According to Williams et al. (2022), resilience was characterised as the ability to be self-sufficient and self-aware in a qualitative study involving 17 individuals between the ages of 16 and 24. Participants also indicated that resilience is connected to advocating for and positively influencing others by serving as role models within the LGBTQ+ community. Furthermore, resilience was documented as a form of resistance against prevailing hetero- and cis-normativity. In a cross-country study, Vázquez et al. (2023) discovered that LGBTQ+ youth, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of social distancing measures, depended on psychological resilience attributes. The study revealed that even with external assistance, sexual and gender minority adults who viewed their LGBTQ+ identity as a positive aspect of themselves possessed a significant internal safeguard to rely on when confronted with the psychological consequences of social distancing amid the pandemic.

A study on resilience was conducted in Kenya, focusing on male gay and bisexual youth, to investigate intrapersonal resilience processes (Harper et al., 2021). The study documented various intrapsychic processes, including the acceptance of one's sexual identity, the development of self-confidence and self-love, religious or spiritual affirmation, adaptive coping strategies, awareness of legal rights, and economic stability. Intrapsychic resilience processes are crucial as they frequently dictate an individual's capacity to effectively navigate and secure resources that promote resilience (Ungar, 2011). Nevertheless, intrapsychic resilience qualities are not developed independently but are frequently influenced by the dynamic interplay between an individual and their socio-ecology (Ungar, 2015). Ecology can empower individuals by providing reliable, trustworthy, and significant resources (Ungar, 2011).

According to Asakusa (2016), LGBTQ+ youth achieve well-being by seeking out safe spaces, demonstrating personal autonomy, cultivating meaningful connections, actively participating in society, and participating in communal healing and activism. The research findings do not apply to a rural community in South Africa due to their lack of contextual and cultural relevance and failure to be framed in a multisystemic resilience perspective (Ungar, 2011, 2021). The research conducted by Asakura (2019) is connected to various African studies, such as Alessi et al. (2021), Daniels et al. (2019), Logie et al. (2018), and Matsúmunyane and Hlalele (2019). These studies partially emphasise how LGBTQ+ youth navigate their challenging surroundings to advocate for the acceptance of their gender and sexual identities, as well as other forms of support and resources that foster resilience.

Socio-ecology is crucial in promoting positive mental health outcomes among LGBTQ+ youth by offering resources within a particular ecological system, such as rural areas and other external co-occurring systems. Additionally, Lo et al. (2022) stated that engaging in support-seeking behaviours, networking, and conversations with professionals, friends, and family members are positively associated with resilience. Resilience-promoting factors within the family are a robust defence against mental health disorders, leading to a beneficial effect on physical health (Gyamerah et al., 2019).

2.9.2   LGBTQ+ Youth and Family Resilience

The family typically comprises the biological or adoptive parent(s), siblings, and additional relatives such as grandparents, uncles, and aunts (Theron & Theron, 2013; Raniga & Mthembu, 2016). Adolescents benefit from both tangible and emotional assistance provided by their families, which helps them develop resilience in the face of challenging circumstances in their surroundings (Van Breda & Theron, 2018). The family's reactions validate the LGBTQ+ youth's disclosure of their sexual orientation and encompass supportive actions such as offering encouragement, safeguarding against bullying, providing guidance, and offering emotional assistance (Gyamerah et al., 2019).

A study conducted in the metropolitan city of Tshwane in South Africa examined the reactions of parents to the sexual disclosure of LGBTIQ+ youth. The study found that some parents were supportive, while others were unsupportive (Gyamerah et al., 2019). According to this study, LGBTQ+ youth experience increased comfort when they receive support from their families. The backing they received from their families also impacted their self-assurance in expressing their sexual orientation to others. Participants experienced joy, a sense of accomplishment, and

gratitude as a result of their family's acceptance of their sexual orientation. Mothers, aunts, and sisters frequently provided support. The support also included guidance on condom usage. It appears that LGBTQ+ youth harbour a belief that they are undeserving of fair treatment. This is demonstrated by the experience of feeling fortunate, which highlights the negative consequences of minority stress on the mental well-being of the majority of young LGBTQ+ individuals (Gonzalez et al., 2021). When support primarily comes from female family members, it may indicate that due to dominant masculine norms, males, including those within the family, tend to create emotional and social distance from LGBTQ+ individuals (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016).

A separate qualitative investigation was carried out in the United States, involving a sample of seven individuals aged 16-18 who self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual (LGB), and White (Roe, 2017). The study participants expressed the necessity of disclosing their sexual orientation to their parents despite the initial lack of support from their parents. Gonzalez et al. (2021) observed that although religion may be an obstacle to parental acceptance, their support instilled a sense of worth and importance in them. Research conducted by Asakura (2019) has found that parental support plays a crucial role in decreasing the likelihood of depression, substance use, and suicidal thoughts among LGBTQ+ youth. The acceptance of one's religious affiliation by one's family is a crucial factor that protects LGBTQ youth, as stated by Miller et al. (2020). Internal factors do not solely determine family acceptance but are influenced by external societal factors (Epprecht & Mngoma, 2022; Mayeza, 2021; Semang et al., 2020).

A study conducted by McCurdy et al. (2023) examined a group of 12 transgender youth aged 14 to 25 years who identified as Latinx or Asian American. The findings indicated that the family environments of these individuals were marked by uncertain, contradictory, or unclear levels of support from their parents. The support provided to the youth was marked by a lack of consistency in using accurate names and pronouns. For instance, correct pronouns were used when addressing unfamiliar individuals, but incorrect ones were used when referring to old friends and relatives. Another contributing factor was the presence of support for the social aspects of transitioning, while there was a lack of support for gender-affirming medical care. This lack of support stemmed from concerns about the possibility of the child experiencing regret regarding the treatment in the future.

In addition, Matsuno et al. (2022) conducted a survey involving 93 parents of trans and nonbinary youth. Their findings indicate that parents who support and acknowledge their

child's sexuality encounter obstacles such as concerns about potential bullying, apprehension about disclosing this information to family or friends, and challenges in adapting to and understanding the transgender identity. Conversely, this study demonstrates that parents are provided with systematic assistance, including online videos, books/pamphlets, workshops/training, parent support groups, and professional psychotherapeutic support. Nichols (2021) conducted a qualitative study for their PhD project, examining the experiences of parents who supported their children's same-sex sexual orientation in terms of their involvement in school. Nichols' (2021) doctoral research focused on a cohort of six individuals who identify as sexually diverse, along with their respective parents. The study included participants from diverse societal contexts in the Gauteng Province (GP) and the Free State (FS) province. The study demonstrated that embracing a child who identifies with a different gender safeguards them from negative societal judgments. In addition, parents who expressed their backing for their LGBTQ+ child had to navigate through school environments that adhered to heteronormative and cisnormative standards.

Research conducted by Gyamerah et al. (2019), McCurdy et al. (2023), and Matsuno et al. (2022) demonstrate that the affirmation of family is contingent upon a multitude of interconnected risks and factors of resilience within the community. These studies illustrate families' need to address their apprehensions, disagreements, and prejudices regarding gender and sexual diversity. In addition, they are responsible for navigating cultural, religious, and social norms and values that diverge from LGBTQ+ gender and sexual identity. Furthermore, the ability of LGBTQ+ youth to recover from difficult situations is not solely reliant on their families but also their interactions with peers, friends, and allies (Okanlawon, 2021).

2.9.3 LGBTQ + Youth, Resilience Enabling Peer and Friend Relationships

A resilient-enhancing friendship is characterised by validating and providing emotional and tangible assistance (Flynn et al., 2014). Friendship relationships typically develop through an individual's attachment style, perceived support, and adherence to gender social norms (Graber et al., 2015). In Hillier et al.'s (2020) study, friends, especially those identified as gender diverse, offered exceptional support and understanding. Friendships among LGBTQ+ youth typically develop with other individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ as well as heterosexual peers who validate and support their sexual orientation.

Álvarez et al. (2022) conducted a literature review comprising fourteen Western studies. They discovered that the majority of resilience resources for LGBTQ+ youth are focused on the

social or relational aspects, while there are fewer resources available at the individual and community levels. According to the study conducted by Lo et al. (2022), the ability of LGBTQ+ youth in post-secondary school to handle difficult situations is enhanced by forming friendships with gay individuals and alliances with heterosexual peers.

Okanlawon (2021) conducted a literature review on studies that examined the first-hand experiences of LGBT students in schools and universities in Nigeria. The focus of this literature review was to examine the perspectives and reactions of heterosexual students, schoolteachers, and administrators toward LGBT issues. The evaluation was carried out utilising a total of twenty-eight publications. The study uncovered that instances of (1) familial rejection and (2) bullying and victimisation by peers and educators in educational institutions frequently lead to the development of internalised homophobia. The study demonstrates that heterosexual individuals who identified as allies of the LGBTIQ+ community actively defended them in instances of mistreatment. This review additionally demonstrates that allies and certain students expressed their intention to maintain their friendship even after discovering that their friend identified as gay. Allies additionally disclosed their appreciation.

Allies among heterosexual peers expressed a non-judgmental curiosity to explore the topic of sexual diversity further. Peer relationships among LGBTQ+ youth typically develop as a means of emotional support to cope with the negative consequences of marginalisation (Parmenter et al., 2021). The close presence and connections with peers are linked to elevated levels of self-esteem, lowered depressive symptoms, and anxiety among LGBTQ+ adolescents (Gillig & Bighash, 2021). The resilience of LGBTQ+ youth is primarily contingent upon the establishment of meaningful social relationships and connections with other LGBTQ+ individuals. These relationships promote the development of a positive sense of self, and crucially, accepting one's identity helps protect against the negative impacts of stress experienced by minority individuals (Robinson & Schmitz, 2021). The formation of an alliance or friendship between individuals who identify as sexual and gender-diverse and those who identify as heterosexual typically leads to a greater decrease in the prevalence of stigma and homophobia.

Johnston et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study among men aged 18-50 in Canada and the USA. The study encompassed 982 responses obtained from the qualitative section of the questionnaire. The study investigated the lifestyle behaviours of males and their correlation with social and sexual attitudes. The objective was to examine the intricacies of male cross-

orientation friendships, and utilising sexual script theory to assess how masculinity impacts men's propensity to engage in such friendships. The study found that male friendships based on gender and sexual orientation can provide opportunities for personal development and social unity. Additionally, they can offer chances to investigate and question societal expectations of masculinity and ultimately establish a solid understanding of contemporary manhood. Friendships between individuals who identify as gay or straight can contribute to the reduction of homophobic attitudes and the promotion of diversity.

In Johnston et al.'s (2021) study, heterosexual participants expressed the view that friendships should be founded on personality traits and shared interests rather than on gender expression and sexual orientation. Intersexual friendships or alliances are formed due to the perceived advantages of these relationships (Okanlawon, 2021). For LGBTQ+ adolescents, the presence of heterosexual friends and allies can provide a sense of security and protection against victimisation. Conversely, heterosexual individuals can view this as a chance to welcome diversity and seek emotional support from such relationships (Johnston et al., 2021; Okanlawon, 2021).

2.9.4 LGBTQ+ Youth and School Resilience

Theron et al. (2022) indicate that South Africa's youth benefits from school by being cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally engaged. Most South African schools, particularly in rural areas, subject LGBTQ+ youth to considerable emotional anguish due to their gender and sexual orientation (Francis, 2017). The marginalisation and discrimination of LGBTQ+ youth in educational institutions may result in their disengagement from school (Daniels et al., 2019). Various studies, including those conducted by Marraccini et al. (2022), McDermott et al. (2023), and Fernandes et al. (2023), have examined this topic.

A comprehensive analysis investigated the significant discoveries derived from a dialogue involving researchers, experts, and community members who took part in "The State of LGBTQ Youth Health and Wellbeing: Strengthening Schools and Families to Build Resilience," a public symposium conducted in June 2017 (Johns et al., 2019a). One of the topics discussed was the importance of schools implementing anti-LGBTQ+ bullying and harassment policies and providing support to LGBTQ+ students. These interventions were correlated with favourable mental well-being, outstanding academic achievement, and minimal school absenteeism among transgender students. Counselling and providing safe spaces could facilitate the development of resilience among LGBTQ+ youth in a school setting. Raising

awareness of LGBTQ+ issues, increasing visibility, and psychoeducation in schools and beyond is essential to challenge the hetero and cis-normative culture in schools (Francis, 2017). Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of school staff willing to advocate for advancing LGBTQ+ human rights in Africa (Okanlawon, 2021).

McDermott et al. (2023b) reviewed the literature using a realist review methodology. The review included 17 studies that reported on interventions implemented in schools. Based on this review, it has been found that implementing affirmative visual displays, providing standalone affirmative input, establishing school-based LGBTQ+ support groups, delivering curriculum-based education, providing staff training, and implementing inclusive policies can greatly enhance the mental well-being of LGBTQ+ students. The intervention seeks to address and modify the structural and cultural norms that favour heterosexual and cisgender individuals in the school environment. It employs various strategies to promote the psychological and social well-being, as well as the self-confidence, of LGBTQ+ youth. In a study conducted by McDermott et al. (2023), the researchers found that whole-school interventions had a beneficial effect on LGBTQ+ youth, school staff, and intervention practitioners. A comprehensive school approach entails the collaboration of all parties involved, such as senior executives, educators, all school personnel, parents, guardians, and the broader community. Nevertheless, in rural areas, the feasibility of implementing such interventions may be hindered by a dearth of awareness regarding LGBTQ issues (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021) and prevailing societal norms that promote hetero-cisnormativity (Daniels et al., 2019).

Marraccini et al. (2022) conducted a comprehensive review of the literature, focusing on interventions aimed at preventing suicide among LGBTQ+ students in schools. This review identified various school-related factors, including bullying, perceived safety, school climate, school processes, and school structure, that have an impact on suicidal behaviour. Therefore, no single intervention is implemented within schools. Instead, schools can serve as protective barriers by implementing comprehensive interventions. Fernandes et al. (2023) identified various protective factors and processes associated with schools, including extracurricular activities, inclusive school policies, family support, school support, community support, school connectedness, and internal protective factors.

The Department of Education (DoE) in South Africa recently introduced lesson plans for Comprehensive Sexuality Education. This initiative may be a hope to counteract hetero-cis normative discourse in the school curriculum. Moreover, The Western Cape Department of

Education has provided Draft Guidelines on Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation in Public Schools of the Western Cape Education Department (2020) to ensure inclusivity. According to the Western Cape guidelines on uniforms, neatness, cleanliness, and appearance were encouraged over specific gendered uniforms. Moreover, schools were encouraged to allow deviations from the school's uniform policy on cultural, medical, and gender diversity grounds. Also, the guidelines suggest that schools can provide unisex bathrooms if reasonably practicable – depending on financial resources and infrastructure. The guidelines also focus on excursions, hostels, and sports participation. Furthermore, the policy also touches on issues of support for LGBTQ+ learners, which encourages a safe school environment by tackling bullying and curriculum inclusiveness.

However, these guidelines received criticism from organisations such as the Equal Education Law Centre and Family Policy Institute, among others. Among other issues, criticism of the Western Cape DoE guidelines is that the guideline

> *uses words and phrases such as 'may', 'it is recommended', or 'it is encouraged' are used, diluting the potential obligations and responsibilities on role players such as governing bodies and principals, reducing them to mere recommendations and suggestions, as opposed to directives. (Equal Education Law Centre, May 2020, p. 3)*

Ubusi (2021) argues that schools still fail to implement the seven protective school policies that protect the human rights of LGBTQ+ learners. At the same time, Francis (2017) indicates a dire need to implement affirmative policies in South African schools. However, Ubusi (2021) also indicates that a flawed interpretation of school policies in each school code of conduct does not always resemble what is in the policy. Policy implementation is often successful through a collaborative stakeholder in the school ecology (McDermott et al., 2023).

Moreover, a school's ecology is connected to the community at large, including the environment in which the school is situated. The resilience of LGBTQ+ individuals in rural communities is contingent upon the accessibility of natural and constructed surroundings. The multisystemic view of resilience examines how the environment supports the resilience process by providing environmental resources.

2.9.5 Natural and Built Environment and LGBTQ+ Youth Resilience

The physical environment encompasses an ecosystem's geographical position, climate, soil composition, and other inherent and constructed attributes. Environmental factors encompass

various amenities, including educational institutions, community libraries, medical centres, and healthcare facilities. The environment encompasses physical aspects, such as the condition of buildings, and other ecological aspects, such as clean water and sanitation facilities. Environmental factors within specific contexts influence the resilience process of young individuals, as observed by Ungar in 2011 and 2021 and Van Breda and Theron in 2018. For LGBTQ+ youth, the term "environment" encompasses various supportive spaces they can access to receive validation and acceptance.

The LGBTQ+ resilience process is associated with a resourceful and affirming physical and natural environment. LGBTQ+ youth frequently encounter the need to advocate for recognition and acceptance and to obtain access to essential environmental resources that directly impact their overall well-being as both young individuals and as individuals with diverse gender and sexual orientations. The resilience qualities one will likely employ are determined by the physical and natural environment and geographic location. For instance, a study conducted by Schmitz and Tyler (2019) found that homeless and college LGBTQ+ youth often rely on intrinsic factors like confidence and extrinsic factors like social support, which are influenced by the physical environmental context.

Robinson and Schmitz (2021) highlight the significance of social support as a key factor in promoting resilience among young people. Additionally, they underscore the influence of space and place on the dynamics of social support. For instance, specific rural areas exhibit restricted social support systems (Wike et al., 2022). Research conducted by Asakura (2019), and Schmitz and Tyler (2019) demonstrate that in rural areas where access to gender-affirming spaces is limited, the presence of establishments like gay bars and LGBTQ+ drop-in centres can promote resilience by strengthening feelings of connection and identity. In the South African context, physical spaces are frequently associated with homophobic discrimination and victimisation (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Govender et al., 2019; Luvuno et al., 2019; Robinson, 2021), although this may not always be true. Although rural spaces are predominantly characterised by hetero- and cisnormativity, there exist a few facilities, such as netball tennis courts, that transgender individuals have been able to utilise to express their gender identity (Daniels et al., 2019).

Medical professionals and scholars have endeavoured to customise various approaches to address the unique difficulties faced by LGBTQ+ adolescents, encompassing biological, psychological, and social aspects (Gonzalez et al., 2021; Jordan, 2020). A strength-based

approach aims to investigate the origins of resilience to cultivate and enhance coping mechanisms in the face of adversity. Therefore, an exclusive concentration that disregards environmental factors may not always be productive. The physical environment continues to exhibit hetero and cisnormativity, which has a detrimental impact on the resilience of LGBTQ+ individuals. Simultaneously addressing psychological and social factors to enhance resilience while prioritising environmental factors for effective intervention is essential.

2.9.6 LGBTQ+ Youth Community Resilience

Community resilience in a rural township is typically facilitated by the community's religious leaders, community members, and local adults (Ebersöhn, 2017; Hope et al., 2017). They serve as exemplary figures and offer various forms of assistance, including emotional support. Research has shown that young people derive substantial benefits from community-based resilience resources, including social services, service providers, community leaders, and community members (Clements-Nolle & Waddington, 2019; Crush & Tawodzera, 2014; Fazel & Betancourt, 2018; Rahmati et al., 2017; Schelbe & Geiger, 2017; Van Breda, 2017). Service provisions targeting gender and sexual identity aim to mitigate the impact of internalised homophobia, thereby benefiting LGBTQ+ youth (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021). Enhancing community resilience among LGBTQ+ youth entails the utilisation of community resources and the promotion of well-being and coping mechanisms (Meyer, 2015). Resilience resources that empower LGBTQ+ youth involve fostering connections within their community. The resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in the community is demonstrated through acts of resistance, which include identifying with and connecting to the larger LGBTQ+ community to foster the positive development of their own identity (Parmenter et al., 2021).

Logie et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study in Swaziland, where they interviewed individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT). Same-sex practices in Swaziland are considered illegal. The study conducted by Logie et al. (2018) found that LGBTQ+ individuals exhibit resilience by reinterpreting and redefining societal norms that are pertinent to their personal experiences. They can enhance their internal resources, such as their distinctive skills, perception, assurance, and self-acknowledgement. In addition, they can prioritise the biblical narratives of love, adhering to gender norms in their attire, and establishing connections with fellow LGBTQ+ individuals. This study showcased the significance of uniting as a group to confront social exclusion and promote societal transformations. In environments where risks are prevalent and deeply ingrained in the social

and ecological systems, LGBTQ+ youth exhibit a remarkable ability to assert their power and take action, demonstrating resilience (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021). Television shows in South Africa demonstrate activism and efforts to promote inclusion by addressing gender-based violence and highlighting the connections between violence, racial disparities, and sexual inequalities (Pinheiro & Harvey, 2019).

A separate research investigation was carried out in Canada and the USA, specifically targeting individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ and belong to racial or ethnic minority groups (Parmenter et al., 2021). The research was carried out using semi-structured interviews with a sample size of 15 participants. The study sought to investigate the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community about protective factors within their community and the obstacles they encounter when trying to access resources that promote community resilience. This study unveiled that individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ and belong to racial minority groups engaged in the process of advocating for communal assets yet encountered compounded forms of oppression, including White supremacy and other racial concerns. These obstacles may hinder one's ability to establish connections with the broader LGBTQ+ community. In the South African context, LGBTQ+ youth may face obstacles in joining gender and sexual-affirming congregations due to the presence of heteronormativity (Mayeza, 2021). Certain LGBTQ+ adolescents opt to withhold their sexual orientation from their family and peers, resulting in a detrimental impact on their capacity to access support from the wider LGBTQ+ community (Epprecht & Mngoma, 2022; Mayeza, 2021; Semang et al., 2020). Nevertheless, a study conducted by Parmenter et al. (2021) demonstrates that the LGBTQ+ community's ability to bounce back from adversity may be enhanced by possessing collective accounts of challenges and receiving unwavering acceptance from other members of the LGBTQ+ community, which in turn fosters a sense of validation. Embracing and expressing one's gender and sexual identity and actively advocating for social justice promote meaningful connections and personal empowerment.

A study by Schmitz and Tyler (2019) in the United States sought to investigate the vulnerabilities and ability to recover LGBTQ+ adolescents within their distinct social contexts. The research was carried out on a sample of 46 LGBTQ+ youth aged 19-26 who were either experiencing homelessness or enrolled in college. The homeless individuals in this study developed resilience by embracing their experiences and having a strong sense of confidence in their distinct LGBTQ+ sexual identity. The study demonstrated that homeless and college students' life difficulties catalysed their resilience, closely linked to their social surroundings.

The study revealed that young adults who possessed a comprehensive comprehension of their distinct LGBTQ+ identity were provided with support and embraced within the campus community. Hence, the ability to bounce back from adversity is contingent upon the social environment and is a phenomenon that is influenced by specific circumstances (Ungar, 2018b). Hence, it is imperative to comprehend the contextual and communal aspects specific to rural regions in South Africa and how these distinct factors influence the development of resilience among LGBTQ+ youth. Furthermore, Pinheiro and Harvey (2019) conducted a study that examined the experiences of Black lesbians residing in Khayelitsha township in South Africa. The study revealed that these lesbians united as a group to actively promote inclusivity by confronting prevalent heterosexist ideologies and structures within the community.

The conventional approach to studying rural areas focuses on assessing risks. However, by adopting a resilience perspective, we can examine the inherent strengths present within the community (Balfour, 2016; Masinire, 2020; Rand & Paceley, 2022). Haffejee and Wiebesiek (2021) documented instances where LGBTQ+ youth could gain the attention and support of community elders in rural areas by actively asserting their rights and advocating for inclusion. Understanding the role of rural ecologies in facilitating competitive netball participation among transsexual youth is valuable (Daniels et al., 2019). Hence, it is imperative to shift away from a narrative that excessively focuses on risks associated with rural communities and instead delve into the potential opportunities in rural spaces to foster affirmation and inclusion for LGBTQ+ youth and the significance they derive from these experiences.

2.10 LGBTQ+ Youth, Communal Culture, Spirituality, and Resilience

In its contextual form, resilience is influenced by cultural and spiritual practices, norms, values, and worldviews (Ungar, 2011). Theron and Theron (2013) found that the resilience of African adolescents and young adults is closely linked to indigenous African values, including strong connections to immediate and extended family, community, African cultural values, African religion, and a sense of connection with deities such as God and ancestors. Rituals and religious practices enhance spirituality by fostering a deep connection to God and Ancestors, fostering harmonious relationships between individuals and the spiritual realm. Rituals encompass various practices such as ancestral ceremonies, rites of passage, prayer, and fostering a sense of connection with a spiritual community. Attachment to people, nature, ancestors, and God is crucial for physical and psychological well-being in an Afrocentric society (Theron, 2016). The process of being socialised to function in an Afrocentric manner is linked to the

development of resilience (Theron, 2013). African youth undergo a process of socialisation that places importance on their socio-ecological context, encompassing various support structures and available opportunities. The culture of interdependence motivates the community to participate in parenting children actively and supporting peers to foster cooperation (Theron et al., 2013).

According to Moagi et al. (2021), the communitarian African philosophy is a distinct and genuine existential worldview. Its purpose is to elucidate the origins of personhood. Therefore, in an Afrocentric framework, personhood is understood as being interconnected with others. The interdependence between living and non-living elements gives rise to this phenomenon (Mkhize, 2022). Communitarianism posits that participating in communal living is not optional; individuals are inherently cultural beings and should not live in solitude, as human nature is inherently inclined towards social interaction (Nwoye, 2017).

The aetiology of psychopathology is commonly attributed to a combination of biological, psychological, social, and spiritual factors. Psychopathology arises from the disturbance in the cosmic energy emanating from the "Nkulunkulu" deity in IsiZulu or the "Ramasedi" deity in the Sesotho language. An individual's disconnection or disharmony with cosmic energy disrupts its flow (Mkhize, 2022). An African worldview prioritises the interconnectedness and harmony among various cosmic elements, such as ancestors, immediate family, and the community, rather than focusing on individual psychological processes (Klaasen, 2017; Mkhize, 2022; Nwoye, 2022).

The interdependence and interconnectedness of cosmic elements facilitate the transmission of life-sustaining energy from a divine source. Furthermore, Nwoye (2017, pp. 49-50) asserts that human motivation in African indigenous thought is driven by practices such as honouring ancestors, overcoming past constraints to achieve success, and actively participating in the community.

McCann et al. (2020) reviewed the existing literature, specifically analysing ten studies conducted in both the United States and Israel. According to this review, LGBTQ+ youth can experience severe mental health consequences as a result of internalising negative religious messages. Supporting religious spaces can be beneficial in promoting resilience during challenging situations, while religious spaces that do not provide support tend to worsen minority stress and internalised homophobia. The endorsement of religious establishments is associated with reduced alcohol consumption and a decrease in mental health disorders, such

as depression. Seeking solace in a spiritual connection with God, religion assumes a significant function by providing individuals with a profound sense of acceptance and assistance from a divine entity. Due to the presence of prejudice, young LGBTQ+ individuals opt to depart from religious institutions; those who remain employ strategies such as reframing or rejecting detrimental narratives about their sexual orientation. Supporting LGBTQ+ youth in religious environments fosters the integration of their identity, resulting in balanced and positive mental well-being (Wood & Contely, 2013). The spiritual and religious aspects of LGBTQ+ individuals have a reciprocal influence on their experiences and portrayals of other aspects of their identity, including ethnicity, race, social class, and regional identity (Chan, 2017).

South African Black LGBTQ+ youth have found solace and protection in ancestral spirits. According to Khuzwayo Magwaza (2021), individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ within the context of African spirituality are frequently perceived as being under the influence of an ancestor of the opposite gender, who can also exert an impact on their sexual behaviours. Same-sex practices were prevalent in pre-colonial Africa and were considered integral to sacred African culture and spirituality, often associated with the belief in magical powers (Montle, 2021). Although Christianity introduced a new conceptual framework during the colonial era, there exist religious establishments that provide LGBTQ+ youth with a supportive environment to explore their spirituality. Although certain religious factions, such as the charismatic churches, engage in discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals, some individuals persist in attending these establishments to foster a connection with God and spirituality (Luvuno et al., 2019). It is evident that, like the broader youth population in Africa, as demonstrated by various studies (Brittian et al., 2013; Jefferies et al., 2019; Mhaka-Mutepfa & Maundeni, 2019; Theron, 2013; Theron et al., 2013; Theron, & Liebenberg, 2015; Van Rensburg et al., 2018), young LGBTQ+ individuals also derive strength from African values, culture, spirituality, and a communal way of life rooted in Afrocentric principles. Nevertheless, the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth is similar to that of the overall youth population (Colpitts & Gahagan, 2016).

African youth, as a whole, prioritise societal values such as education, religion, and spirituality, as supported by research conducted by Ebersöhn (2017), Theron (2013), and Theron et al. (2022). Studies indicate that South African adolescents may experience greater educational advantages by actively engaging their cognitive, emotional, and behavioural faculties within the school and other social environments (Luvuno et al., 2019; Theron et al., 2022). Furthermore, young individuals frequently experience advantageous outcomes from resilient relationships established with community religious and spiritual leaders (Zhange, 2020).

Nevertheless, LGBTQ+ adolescents frequently encounter severe mistreatment and prejudice, leading to feelings of marginalisation and societal invisibility, ultimately impeding their participation in communal activities (Daniels et al., 2019).

2.11 The South African Constitution and Laws and Rights of LQBTQ + Youth

The literature suggests that same-sex sexual orientations have long been present within South African traditional communities (Khuzwayo-Magwaza, 2021). These relationships were not accessible to the general public. The concept of same-sex identity and its categorisation as homosexuality is a notion that originated in Western culture. South Africa emerged from the oppressive era of Apartheid, characterised by racial segregation and discriminatory laws targeting non-white individuals (Bell et al., 2022). Apartheid encompassed a system of categorising South Africans based on their racial background, which included Black Africans, Coloured individuals, Whites, and Asians. In addition to their oppressive treatment of non-White individuals, certain laws also subjected the LGBTQ+ community to oppression (Marnell et al., 2021).

The study conducted by Moreno et al. (2020) investigated the historical progression of LGBTQ+ psychology across different contexts experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals. The data for this study was gathered in collaboration with psychologists from various countries, including South Africa, Russia, Greece, Colombia, and the province of Quebec, Canada. The study suggests that adopting a social justice framework is necessary to address the concerns of the LGBTQ+ community effectively. This can be achieved by incorporating the history of psychology into teaching, which will provide valuable insights into how religious beliefs and past legislation have shaped the prevailing attitudes of the broader community towards LGBTQ+ minorities. These teachings can help individuals recognise the impact of the past on present attitudes and behaviours towards LGBTQ+ individuals. Another suggestion was to incorporate LGBTQ+ topics into the curricula of training programmes, such as those for teacher training and professional growth.

Given the above, comprehending LGBTQ+ human rights entail an effort to separate ourselves from discussions surrounding topics such as masculinity, Christian principles, and prevailing cultural standards regarding sex and sexuality. Nonetheless, scholars and intellectuals can comprehend the controversies of sexuality by examining the historical context of African gender and sexual diversity, dating back to the pre-colonial era. The citation is from Khuzwayo-Magwaza in 2021. Additionally, it comprehends the influence of colonisation on

the conceptualisation of African sexuality and gender manifestation. From a human rights standpoint, every individual possesses inherent rights solely by being human.

The laws about LGBTQ+ rights in post-colonial societies are outlined as follows. The 1995 Labour Relations Act forbids any form of discrimination based on sexual orientation and marital status. The new South African constitution was adopted in 1996, along with several other laws. The constitution safeguards against discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation, among other forms of protection. The Health Professions Council of South Africa has issued guidelines for psychologists who work with individuals who identify as LGBTIQA+ (Moreno et al., 2020).

The Basic Conditions of Employment Act and Employment Equity Act of 1998, established in 1997, mandated protection against gender and sexual orientation-based discrimination. Consequently, LGBTQ+ individuals were granted the right to serve openly in the South African military. By 2002, individuals and same-sex couples within the LGBTIQA+ community were already granted the opportunity to adopt children. The 2018 version of the Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill incorporated sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (SOGI) as protected categories. In 2003, the Sex Description and Sex Status Act granted permission to alter gender markers and names. Nevertheless, this can solely be accomplished after undergoing surgery or receiving gender reassignment treatment. The enactment of the Civil Union Act in 2006 marked a significant milestone for the LGBTQ+ community. This legislation grants legal recognition to same-sex marriage and civil partnerships, ensuring that the LGBTQ+ community is entitled to the same privileges and advantages as heterosexual marriages (Moreno et al., 2020).

According to Education White Paper 6 in schools, inclusive education in South Africa means acknowledging and showing respect for the fact that all learners are unique in some way and have different learning requirements that are equally important and a normal part of being human (DOE, 2001, p. 16). The school environment's incapacity to cater to a child's distinct requirements is an obstacle to acquiring knowledge. This perspective enables us to identify abnormalities in individuals and recognise the importance of the environment in addressing the requirements of a wide range of learners. Researchers within the LGBTQ+ community have investigated methods for applying the inclusive education policy within various social environments (Francis & Kuhl, 2020; Gyamerah et al., 2019). The efforts to promote inclusivity were limited by various factors, including sexual stereotypes, particularly in rural

areas (Francis, 2017; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). It is crucial to prioritise human rights when confronting heteronormativity (Bhana, 2014). Emphasis on human rights is aimed for promoting inclusion of marginalised groups such as the LGBTQ+ community.

In Johannesburg, South Africa, Marnell et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study focusing on queer migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers who were involved in sex work. The study revealed that immigrants in South Africa typically perceive the country as a secure environment where they can freely express their sexual orientations without facing legal persecution from the government. The study participants benefited the government's non-condemning stance towards them despite the presence of intolerable individuals in the community. This study posited that individuals frequently perceive certain resilience resources as valuable, influenced by their history, cultural background, and surrounding circumstances (Ungar, 2018b; Van Rensburg et al., 2018). Rural LGBTQ+ youth hold divergent perspectives and require legislative measures and inclusive educational policies to safeguard their well-being within rural environments. It is imperative to address and eliminate discrimination, microaggressions, and hate crimes targeting this vulnerable population (Francis, 2021). Given the potential differences in their resilience narrative compared to immigrants, conducting a resilience study within a rural community context was imperative. Conducting research in a rural setting provided insights into how individuals' unique background, culture, and context impact their ability to bounce back from challenges (Ungar, 2021).

2.12 A Need for a Multisystemic Intersectional Approach to LGBTQ+ Resilience

There is paucity in the literature about the role of natural and built environment in supporting the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth. The current body of research appears to be increasingly documenting psychological and social systemic factors that are associated with the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth. The literature on LGBTQ+ youth focus primarily on how the socio-ecological context contributes to their resilience. It was imperative to examine the current social patterns of resilience and conduct a thorough analysis by considering the influence of co-occurring systems on the resilience process.

2.12.1 A Socio-Ecological Lens on LGBTQ+ Resilience

Socio-ecology encompasses three distinct levels: The micro, meso, and macro levels. The resilience of LGBTQ+ youth is influenced by the interaction of socio-ecology with culture and other contextual factors, which can either enhance or hinder it. In this regard, the current LGBTQ+ youth literature highlights the ecological resilience resources that facilitate their

well-being. The resources encompass a wide spectrum, including personal, relational, structural, spiritual, and cultural aspects. The identified resources have intricate interactions that contribute to understanding coping and resilience. A socio-ecological system exists in conjunction with other systems, including biological, psychological, built, and natural environments, to facilitate resilience (Ungar, 2021).

The existing literature, both international and South African, on LGBTQ issues (Gonzalez et al., 2021; López-Cañada et al., 2021; Rand & Paceley, 2022; Schmitz & Tyler, 2019; Singh et al., 2014; Brown, 2020; Brown & Njoko, 2019; Daniels et al., 2019; Francis & Kuhl, 2020; Francis & Reygan, 2016; Luvuno et al., 2019; Mayeza, 2021; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021), reveal that the response of society towards LGBTQ+ youth can be categorised in three ways: exclusion, marginalisation, and discrimination; inclusion, validation, and affirmation; or a fluctuation between affirmation and discrimination.

This review highlights that the environment or socio-ecology facilitates resilience (Ungar, 2011, 2015). This principle is further supported by diverse resilience literature (Ebersöhn, 2017; Theron, 2016). The LQBTQ+ studies (Gyamerah et al., 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019) emphasise the role of the environment in either sustaining distress or facilitating the resilience of the LGBTQ+ community. Family affirmation promotes elevated self-esteem in LGBTQ+ adolescents (Gyamerah et al., 2019). The level of connection an LGBTQ+ individual feels towards their school strongly indicates their academic success and the likelihood of graduating high school with high grades (Daniels et al., 2019). Understanding the intersection of interpersonal and structural resources, including social institutions and community members, is crucial for enabling resilience among LGBTQ+ individuals in a rural community setting in the Free State.

2.12.2 A Multisystemic Resilience Perspective and Research Gaps

Resilience researchers have recently promoted an inclusive multisystemic approach to comprehending resilience (Theron et al., 2022; Ungar, 2020; Ungar et al., 2021). This approach expands the scope of resilience research by investigating how interconnected systems impact the resilience of a particular system (Ungar, 2018b). It is widely believed that all systems can demonstrate resilience. However, the outcome heavily relies on the interaction between a single system and other interrelated systems mutually reliant on fostering well-being in the face of hardship (Ungar, 2021). An investigation was required to examine the impact of various factors on resilience in a rural ecosystem.

The literature on LGBTQ+ youth in South Africa (e.g., Bhana, 2014; Francis, 2017, 2019; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021; Soldatic et al., 2021) has identified various risk factors across different environments. Additionally, the literature has highlighted systemic factors that hinder the ability of these environments to provide resources that promote resilience among LGBTQ+ youth. The literature, including studies by Govender et al. (2019), Gyamerah et al. (2019), Haffejee & Wiebesiek (2021), Harper et al. (2021), Logie et al. (2018), Luvuno et al. (2019), and Okanlawon (2021), shows that rural socio-ecology can offer LGBTQ+ youth valuable resources that promote resilience in distinct ways. Although the rural ecology can still offer resources despite the existence of various threats, such as hetero and cis-normative health and education systems, it is important to prioritise the promotion of human rights and social justice within this system. The current guidelines provided by the American Psychological Association (APA) regarding psychological practice for LGBTQ+ individuals primarily rely on research conducted within the Western cultural framework (APA, 2021), which fails to encompass the intricate interconnections between LGBTQ+ youth and other concurrent identities, including those that are contextually bound, within an African rural community setting. Also, the Sexuality and Gender Division (SGD) of South African practice guidelines proposed by the Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA) focus on affirmative psychology toward gender and sexual minorities (Psyssa, 2017). Still, they do not seem to provide a framework for enabling resilience at a multisystemic ecological level. Utilising a specific collection of biological, psychological, social, and environmental resources would impact this (Ungar, 2021). It is necessary to propose a framework that focuses on the resilience of rural LGBTQ+ youth and considers various factors that contribute to their resilience to advance the cause of human rights. A framework could guide the development of effective intervention strategies for LGBTQ+ youth living in rural areas. The proposed model needs to be sensitive to biopsychosocial and ecological factors to offer an all-encompassing framework for intervention.

Most of these studies (e.g., Govender et al., 2019; Gyamerah et al., 2019; Harper et al., 2021; Logie et al., 2018; Luvuno et al., 2019; Okanlawon, 2021) were not carried out in rural regions and were not approached from the perspective of multisystemic resilience. Certain resilience studies have specifically examined a single system level, such as psychological or family resilience, to investigate coping, well-being, or resilience (Govender et al.,2019; Gyamerah et al.,2019; Harper et al.,2021). South Africa has established youth multisystemic and socio-ecological resilience frameworks, as evidenced by the works of Theron (2020) and Van Breda

and Theron (2018). While these frameworks may offer some advantages to LGBTQ+ youth, they are constrained by limitations due to their reliance on hetero and cis-normative frameworks (Colpitts & Gahagan, 2016; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021).

2.13   Summary of the Chapter and Conclusion

This chapter examined the literature that offers evidence and insights into the pre-colonial understanding and study of sexuality in an African context. The literature examined the influence of Western theoretical frameworks and their colonial consequences in South Africa. The exploration of masculinity and femininity, as well as contemporary theories on sexuality and gender expression, was conducted within the context of the rural community. In this review I have examined various risks encountered by LGBTQ+ youth within an African community, focusing on different communities in South Africa as a foundation for comprehending resilience. In addition, I examined literature to understand LGBTQ+ individuals abilities to withstand and recover from adversity, focusing on the influence of socio-ecological factors in promoting their resilience and analysing the effects of other interconnected systems, such as biological and psychological aspects. Furthermore, it examines how physical ecosystems contribute to their ability to withstand and recover from disturbances. Hence, in this chapter, it was crucial to pinpoint the areas of research that needed further investigation particularly considering that current studies on LGBTQ+ youth in South Africa do not adopt a multisystemic resilience theory framework.

In the following chapter, I discuss the conceptual framework for this study by utilising established theories and concepts from the literature review. The purpose of a conceptual framework is to integrate different theories and concepts to provide a holistic view of a phenomenon under study.

CHAPTER 3
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1   Introduction

In chapter two, I explored the literature surrounding the theorisation of gender and sexuality by analysing the historical and political patterns concerning same-sex sexualities and gender diversity. I followed up with a review to examine how pre- and post-colonial conceptions of masculinity and femininity influence gender expression while also looking at risk factors faced by LGBTQ+ youth. I then looked at various individualistic and systemic factors influencing the resilience of LGBTQ + youth. In this chapter, I discuss the underlying conceptual framework which guided the research. The framework integrates critical concepts derived from literature and theory, which serve as a guide to the data analysis of this study.

3.2   The Importance of a Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework comprises integrated theories and concepts (Creswell, 2014). It consists of a written or visual representation of an anticipated relationship between concepts and ideas in research. It integrates theories and concepts to provide a holistic view of the phenomenon under study. It also depends on principles relevant to the study resulting from a literature review (Fuertes et al., 2020). Consequently, I use a conceptual framework lens in this current study to make sense of and analyse the research data, as no theory or concept alone is sufficient to study a phenomenon (Creswell, 2014).

The conceptual framework used for this study was guided primarily by the multisystemic resilience framework (Ungar, 2021) as the main theory. Secondly, I incorporated aspects of the Socio-Ecological Theory of Resilience (SERT) (Ungar, 2011), because the resilience theory acknowledges the presence of risk factors that often threaten a system's functioning and development (Ungar, 2016). Hence, to better understand different risk factors faced by LGBTQ+ youth in a rural Free State community context, I adopted the minority stress model into the conceptual framework (Gonzalez et al., 2021; Meyer, 2003). Because African sexualities were affected by the past colonial system, it is important to move towards a post-colonial theorisation of gender and sexuality with a mandate to move away from oppressive colonial theorisation of gender and sexual diversity (Khuzwayo-Magwaza, 2021). As a result, critiquing a colonial hetero- and cisnormativity discourse, I adopted African perspectives on sexuality and relied on Afrocentric explanations of psychopathology and resilience (Khuzwayo-Magwaza, 2021; Montle, 2021; Msibi, 2014; Nwoye, 2022). An African perspective in this conceptual framework serves as a counter-narrative that affirms and

validates gender and sexual diversity in an African context. To this end, the aim of an Afrocentric pre-colonial perspective was also to challenge heteronormative notions and possibly capture the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in a post-colonial society.

An Afrocentric cultural-ecological perspective in the framework examines how humans interact with their culture, social, and physical environment to adapt to social and physical environments (Tudge et al., 2022). Indeed, culture is a dynamic component of any ecosystem, which shapes contextual experiences. A cultural-ecological perspective further explores the origins of certain cultural practices and patterns that characterise different areas (Cheung & Leung, 2020). In particular, this approach contributes to giving a holistic exploration by exploring the origins and ideologies behind the exclusion of gender and sexually diverse people sexuality in rural spaces (Gyamerah et al., 2019; Luvuno et al., 2019; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019).

Colonial ideologies foster a discourse that seeks to paint sexually and gender-diverse people as displaying deviant, unnatural, and un-African behaviour, which is not an accurate discourse (Khuzwayo-Magwaza, 2021; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). Hence, the conceptual framework is underpinned by a social justice perspective that promotes human rights and the inclusion of LGBTQ+ youth in rural communities (Balfour, 2016; Masinire, 2020; Rand & Paceley, 2022). In particular, social justice dismantles false beliefs, myths, and stereotypes; this approach advocates for social change, promoting human rights and transformation (Jackson et al., 2018; Mertens, 2017; Sankofa, 2021). The social justice stance in the current study focuses on the promotion based on principles such as access to resources, equity, diversity, participation, and human rights (Daum, 2019; Shriberg & Baker, 2019). Also, I included the feminist theory of intersectionality into the conceptual framework to capture intersection identity markers such as gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, race, disabilities, and socioeconomic with gender and sexual minority status (APA, 2021; Chan & Howard, 2020).

Different theories were used in this conceptual framework as one theory was insufficient to offer a more comprehensive and holistic view of risk exposure and the LGBTQ+ youth multisystemic resilience phenomenon. For example, the Meyer (2003) minority stress model offers a view of risk exposure in gender and sexual minorities, which stems from being exposed to stress owing to their stigmatised status. However, Frost and Meyer (2023) commented that despite the continued relevance of their model, scholars noted that it fails to address key components of resilience resources and positive well-being as well as aspects of

intersectionality. Also, when applying this model outside the Western context there is a need to incorporate culturally specific processes and components to improve its relevance (Frost & Meyer, 2023, p. 3). Moreover, the resilience mediating processes are embedded in culture and context; hence, context specific theorisation of health, resilience and psychopathology were incorporated in this framework (Ungar, 2018).

Feminist Theory of Intersectionality (Chan & Howard, 2020)

Non-normative gender expression and sexuality, interactions with sex, ethnicity, race, socio-economy, disability e.t.c

Socio-ecology as a facilitator of resilience process (Ungar, 2011).

Biopsychosocial resilience model (Ungar, 2021)

Biological

Psychological

social and

environmental (Built and Natural)

Minority Stress model (Meyer, 2003)

Distal stressors (hetero-cisnormativity) and proximal (Anxiety, depression, non-normative functioning) stressors

African perspectives (Nwoye, 2017, 2022; Theron &Theron, 2013).

Indigenous theorisation of Health, resilience, and Psychopathology

Figure 3.1:   Illustration of the conceptual framework in the study

At the centre of the illustration (Figure 3.1) are co-occurring systems influencing LGBTQ + resilience (Ungar, 2018b, 2021). Socio-ecology feeds resilience in a multisystem (i.e., biological, psychological, and environmental), thus serving as a core facilitator of the LGBTQ+

resilience process (Ungar, 2011). Furthermore, the socio-ecology is connected to Afrocentric and communal indigenous resilience pathways (Theron & Theron, 2013). Moreover, socio-ecology also consists of intersecting positionality variables such as ethnicity, race, sex, disability, and socio-economic status, which influence the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth. Furthermore, different variables of positionality interplay with resilience in that they perpetuate the distribution of risks (i.e., distal stressors), and such are better theorised using the feminist theory of intersectionality (Chan & Howard, 2020). Also, there is a mutually dependent relationship between risk exposure and resilience, and such exposure is better theorised by the minority stress model and multisystemic resilience framework (Gonzalez et al., 2021; Meyer, 2003; Ungar, 2021). The minority stress and how socio-ecology influences resilience are dictated by culture and context, such as African perspectives of health and psychopathology (Nwoye, 2017, 2022).

3.3   The Conceptual Framework Underpinning the Study

A summary of the key tenets and research assumption of the conceptual framework and how they relate to form a coherent whole is listed below:

A. LGBTQ+ resilience is a product of multisystemic co-occurring systems (biological, psychological, social, institutional, environmental) in rural ecology (Ungar, 2021; Ungar & Theron, 2023).

B. The resilience process (i.e., persistence, resistance, recovery, adaptation, and transformation) of LGBTQ+ youth is mostly facilitated by the socio-ecology through connectivity and participation, which should be seen as a vantage point to see and evaluate resilience (Ungar, 2011, 2018b).

C. Socio-ecology consists of the past, present, and future. It also consists of historical and political issues of power relations between the general population and gender and sexual minorities, integral to LGBTQ+ rural community resilience (APA, 2021; Ungar, 2016). The past relates to sexuality in the pre-colonial colonial era (Montle, 2021). The present refers to post-colonial realities in families, schools, and rural communities (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021). The future relates to opportunities for inclusion through advocacy and capacitating agency in LGBTQ+ youth (APA, 2021).

D. Adversity related to LGBTQ+ youth can be better explained through the minority stress model, which explains how external risks are internalised (Gonzalez et al., 2021).

E. Conceptualising risk exposure and creating pathways to well-being and resilience is mostly possible through exploring how gender and sexual identity intersect with race, ethnicity, religion, culture, and socio-economy, among others (Chan & Howard, 2020).

F. African indigenous knowledge offers an Afrocentric explanation of LGBTQ+ well-being and psychopathology, consistent with the minority stress model (Nwoye 2017, 2022).

G. Practitioners, community workers, and other professionals working with LGBTQ+ youth in rural areas need to be aware of complex intersections between sexual minority people and other forms of identities, such as religion and ethnicity (Francis, 2021; Govender et al., 2019; Gyamerah et al., 2019). They need to be sensitive to contextual factors and offer a responsive micro-level intervention while advocating for resilience, enabling resources from the macro- and mesosystems (APA, 2021; Daniels et al., 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019).

3.4 The Multisystemic, Biopsychosocial Resilience Model

Multiple intersecting systems inform the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth irrespective of the vantage point one chooses to look at the resilience process (Theron et al., 2022; Masten, 2021a, 2021b; Ungar, 2020; Ungar et al., 2021). Consequently, the study chose to look at the resilience of social systems/ ecology, which acknowledges the interaction between socio-ecology and other subordinate and superordinate systems in rural ecology (Ungar, 2018). The biopsychosocial resilience model extends the resilience research in the study by looking at socio-ecology and how co-occurring systems influence the resilience of the social system in rural ecology (Ungar &Theron, 2023). Moreover, socio-ecological resilience is informed, interacts, and is linked to other systems, such as the biological, psychological, and environmental systems and other systems outside ecology (Ungar, 2018b). Ungar (2021) stipulates that the seven multisystemic resilience processes are:

1 Resilience occurs in contexts of adversity.
2 Resilience is a process.
3 Trade-offs exist between systems when a system experiences resilience.
4 A resilient system is open, dynamic, and complex.
5 A resilient system promotes connectivity.
6 A resilient system demonstrates experimentation and learning.
7 A resilient system includes diversity, redundancy, and participation.

The processes described by Ungar (2021) relate to the resilience process of LGBTQ+ youth in rural ecologies. As a result, below, I discuss different multisystemic resilience processes can inform the resilience process of LGBTQ+ youth in rural ecologies.

3.4.1 Resilience in Contexts of Adversity

Adversity creates conditions for resilience. Adversity is viewed as a disruption that threatens the system's existence, function, and growth. A perturbation or disruption causes a system to employ coping and survival strategies, which could be typical and atypical depending on the context (Becvar & Becvar, 2014). From a system's perspective, a resilient system seeks to resist and maintain equilibrium following an atypical perturbation (Ungar, 2021). In psychological science, resilience is a process of recovery, adaptation, or transformation in or following contextually specific stressors (Ungar, 2011, 2018b). Thus, in the study, adversities that shape the resilience process of LGBTQ+ youth are mostly informed by heteronormative and cis-normative physical and social ecologies (Gyamerah et al., 2019; Luvuno et al., 2019; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). Furthermore, research has also established that LGBTQ+ youth face increased risk factors in rural areas owing to conservative cultural and religious systems (Rand & Paceley, 2022; Robinson, 2021; Schmitz & Tyler, 2019; Singh et al., 2014).

The contextual risk faced by LGBTQ+ youth in rural ecologies is more socially related. For example, they face discrimination, victimisation, prejudices, and marginalisation in communities (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). Non-affirming socio-ecologies are typified by non-affirming practices such as different micro and macro aggressions such as corrective rape, assault, and rejection (Govender et al., 2019; Luvuno et al., 2019). Furthermore, adversities faced by LGBTQ+ youth in rural ecologies are linked to different co-occurring systems in the ecology and other systems outside the rural ecology (Bhana, 2014; Francis, 2017; Ungar, 2021). I submit to the close examination of the different risk factors faced by Free State LGBTQ+ youth in rural areas to understand better how they negotiate their gender and sexual identities amid the presenting risks (Daniels et al., 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Rothmann, 2018). Moreover, exposure to risk dictates which coping strategies and resilience processes (i.e., resistance, persistence, recovery, adaptation, and transformation) will be suitable to thrive in adversity (Ungar, 2011, 2018b). Coping strategies can be normative, non-normative, or atypical, such as leaving school and abusing alcohol and substances (Ungar, 2011). In the case of non-normative functioning, resilience research seeks to understand how ecologies can be engaged to mitigate risk factors to promote the well-being of LGBTQ+ youth (Ungar, 2015, 2018b).

3.4.2 Resilience Development is a Process

Resilience development follows processes such as persistence, resistance, recovery, adaptation, and transformation for a system to research equilibrium or for a person to function in or after a threat or adversity (Ungar, 2021). Now, persistence in the resilience process of LGBTQ+ youth implies choosing to maintain their identity as a gender or sexually diverse person despite different risk factors in families and communities (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021). In contrast, resistance relates to behaviour that challenges hetero- and cisnormativity (Bhana, 2014). Resistance involves actively opposing external threats to prioritise the promotion of inclusivity within society. Thus, various studies (Bhana, 2014; Govender et al., 2019; Gyamerah et al., 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021) have emphasised the significance of resistance in foregrounding advocacy for inclusion.

Additionally, resistance is a system's mechanism before recovery, adaptation, or transformation (Ungar, 2018b). When LGBTQ+ youth are confronted with marginalisation, subordinate individuals (such as those exerting psychological agency and developing defence mechanisms) and superordinate systems (such as community-affirming environments and structures) must mobilise to resist marginalisation (APA, 2021) effectively. Presently, this perspective is supported by studies conducted by Butler and Astbury (2008), Daniels et al. (2019), and Haffejee and Wiebesiek (2021).

A system moves to recovery when its internal or external defences are insufficient to maintain its resistant functioning. Thus, recovery is a system's behaviour returning to its previous functioning level (Ungar, 2018b, 2021). Recovery for LGBTQ+ youth might mean moving from the effects of minority stress, such as internalised homophobia, poor academic performance, school dropout, depression, substance abuse, and anxiety, to optimal mental health functioning (Asakura, 2019). Such recovery depends on the individual as well as different systems, as a family of systems moving towards affirmation, provision of mental health services, and school ecology targeting homophobic bullying (Epprecht & Mngoma, 2022; Mayeza, 2021; Semang et al., 2020). Moreover, the intrapsychic psychological system (i.e., redefining the experience, developing agency, hope, and optimism) and biological systems (i.e., good physical health) are also vital in the recovery of LGBTQ+ youth (Harper et al., 2021; Ntombana et al., 2020).

Adaptation is a behaviour aimed at changing ways to make it possible to accommodate oneself to stress. For example, to adapt to adversity, LGBTQ+ youth may purposefully choose not to

reveal their sexuality to friends and family for fear of marginalisation (Epprecht & Mngoma, 2022; Mayeza, 2021; Semang et al., 2020). Furthermore, adaptive behaviours can include using defence mechanisms such as denial of sexuality and sublimation of sexual edges, including finding a heterosexual partner (Butler & Astbury, 2008). Atypical behaviours such as dropping out of school and abusing substances can be seen as adaptive depending on the family, school, or community context in which LGBTQ + youth find themselves (Daniels et al., 2019; Ungar, 2011). Atypical behaviours could be a possible way of coping in some rural areas where LGBTQ+ youth experience significantly higher micro- and macroaggressions than in urban and metropolitan areas (Daniels et al., 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019).

Transformation is a process that entails taking advantage of new strategies and resources to continue a previous function or start a new one (Ungar, 2018b). The transformation process for LGBTQ+ youth may be related to mental well-being, adaptive coping strategies, and actualisation, which results from gender and sexually affirming policies and practices in families, schools, local health facilities and the community.

Ungar (2021, pp. 20-21) stresses that "*Systems do not "choose" one coping strategy over another. They, instead, optimise their functioning by exploiting co-occurring systems for resources that make different strategies more or less feasible*". The statement Ungar makes means factors such as contextual-related risks and a person's evaluation of such risks adjudicate which coping strategy can be used (Daniels et al., 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Ungar, 2011). Hence, exploring resilience processes is necessary; one of the aims of exploring resilience processes in the research was to determine how multisystemic factors intersect to enable resilience in LGBTQ+ youth. Thus, I incorporated these resilience processes into the framework to unpack the processes employed by each system within the rural ecology. The research approach seeks to examine how a set of processes in superordinate systems (i.e., environmental and social) influence processes in the subordinate (i.e., psychological and biological) systems (Ungar, 2021). My approach goes with the systemic study of resilience, which seeks to decentralise resilience and look at the facilitating role of physical and social ecologies on LGBTQ+ youth's resilience (Ungar, 2011, 2015).

3.4.3 Trade-Offs Exist Between Systems When a System Experiences Resilience

Resilience is possible through reciprocal interaction between systems (Ungar, 2021). Additionally, different parts of a system may not always benefit when the system appears to be

stable. Defining which part of a system shows resilience is based on the observer's perspective and the merits used to assess improvements (Ungar, 2018b). In this study, ecology serves as a vantage point for evaluating LGBTQ+ resilience. Moreover, ecological theorisations evaluate resilience by assessing risk factors and externalising pathology to non-affirming social and physical ecologies (Bhana, 2014; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021; Rothmann, 2018; Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015). Furthermore, an evaluation goes into how social and environmental stresses influence the physical and biological well-being of LGBTQ+ youth (APA, 2021; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Haas & Lannutti, 2019; McConnell et al., 2018; Toomey, 2021). Examining compromises required between the superordinate physical and social environments to subordinate systems, such as the LGBTQ+ youth's physical and psychological system in risk exposure and resilience, is necessary to account for the complex resilience phenomenon (Ungar, 2011, 2015, 2018b).

Trade-offs can be affirming parents who advocate for the inclusion of their children in a heterosexist school system (Nichols, 2021). Likewise, LGBTQ+ youth who have accepted their sexuality and are confident can feed resilience into their socio-ecology through advocacy for inclusion (Daniels et al., 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021). Also, being mentally well-adjusted as a queer youth depends on relationships between friends and allies (Okanlawon, 2021). Additionally, the environment can also trade resilience in LGBTQ+ youth. For example, gender nonbinary bathrooms could create a safe space for transgender youth (Daniels et al., 2019; Letsoalo et al., 2020; Tshilongo & Rothmann, 2019).

Furthermore, infrastructural resources such as health facilities for queer youth in rural spaces could feed resilience by promoting physical well-being through offering services such as condoms and sexual education for HIV protection. Also, the provision of mental health services, including the availability of clinicians, could promote the mental well-being of queer youth (Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021). Moreover, observing the compromises required between the different systems of LGBTQ+ youth resilience in the Free State rural community was necessary as it promoted inclusion and social justice through interrogating available resources. To this end, examining the compromises could help advocate for relevant resilience, enabling resources from the ecology (Ungar, 2011).

3.4.4   A Resilient System is Open, Dynamic, and Complex

Ungar (2021) emphasises that integrating new information adds to the complexity of a system. Additionally, complexities in systems relate to interactions between youth, environment, and

factors such as belief systems and culture (Theron & Theron, 2013). Thus, an open system can negotiate the inclusion of LGBTQ+ youth; it is a system that can work in complex and dynamic ways to shift away from colonial hetero- and cis-normativity (Bhana, 2014; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021; Rothmann, 2018; Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015). Furthermore, open systems allow new information (Ungar, 2018b), for example, gender and sexual affirming policies, discussion on risk factors and promotion of LGBTQ+ youth, and a family affirming an LGBTQ+ child while working with the dynamics and tensions posed by conservative religious beliefs (Gyamerah et al., 2019; Walsh, 2003). Moreover, strength-based approaches to rural ecologies allow researchers to see such ecologies as dynamic, generative, and complex (Balfour, 2016; Masinire, 2020;). Thus, a rural ecology is believed to support the resilience processes of LGBTQ+ youth in complex, contextually bound ways (Rand & Paceley, 2022). Conceptualising the Free State rural ecology from strengths and resilience approaches allowed me to look at cultural and contextual factors that influence LGBTQ+ in the presence of risk factors identified by literature.

3.4.5 A Resilient System Promotes Connectivity

Rather than separation, resilient systems promote connectivity (Ungar, 2021). Connectivity refers to the interaction of different components of a system during adversity (Ungar, 2018b). Connectivity in LGBTQ+ youth promotes resilience in different ways. For example, family, peer, religious and community-affirming relationships LGBTQ+ youth have can buffer against the effects of minority stress. However, connectedness in non-affirming instances, such as macro- and microaggressions in families, schools, and communities, can also work against resilience.

The scholars using the minority stress model also emphasise the role of resilience factors such as connection to and deriving support from those with shared identities and experiences to mitigate the effects of minority stress (Haas & Lannutti, 2019; McConnell et al., 2018; Toomey, 2021). Connectivity in families is linked to other co-facilitating resilience processes such as family belief systems, organisational patterns in the family, and communication/problem-solving in the family (Walsh, 2003). In schools, it facilitates thriving at any given ecology through being cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally engaged (Daniels et al., 2019; Theron et al., 2022). At the community level, Kalb et al. (2020) emphasise that it comprises three components: in-group ties, perceptions of similarities, bonds, and belongings.

Moreover, a robust social identity can buffer the negative impact of minority stress (Frankel & Ha, 2020; Kalb et al., 2020; Tan, 2022). Social identity fosters a sense of belonging, enhancing meaningful navigation to resources and participation in ecology (Ungar, 2011). Thus, the research considered how LGBTQ+ youth in rural ecology connect to the physical and social ecosystems while also looking at biological and psychological processes that facilitate the apparent connection.

3.4.6   A Resilient System Includes Diversity, Redundancy, and Participation

Systems do better when they are more diverse and have complex coping strategies, allowing them to create redundancies (Ungar, 2021). Diversity relates to sufficient resources that allow a system to function amid adversity (Ungar, 2018b). For LGBTQ+ youth, diversity relates to both intrinsic (e.g., biological and psychological processes such as accepting their sexual identity, having self-confidence, self-love, religious/spiritual affirmation, adaptive coping, being aware of legal rights and being economically stable) and extrinsic resources such as family, peers, service providers and community support as well as LGBTQ+ relevant structural resources (Daniels et al., 2019; Gyamerah et al., 2019; Harper et al., 2021). When one system fails, other systems can take over (Ungar, 2021). Sustainability in LGBTQ+ youth is vital for understanding their resilience and for different forms of individualistic, family, and community intervention (Asakura, 2019). Thus, when one system is unable to support resilience, for example, a family system, another system such as schools, peers and allies, and health systems can take over (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021).

Gender and sexual diversity are deeply intertwined with historical and political marginalisation and the dominant discourse of hetero-cisnormativity. This prevailing discourse often disempowers certain systems, thereby curbing the resilience development of LGBTQ+ youth (Jones & Ferguson, 2020; Khuzwayo-Magwaza, 2021; Montle, 2021; Murray & Roscoe, 1998; Eppretcht, 2014). As a result, to foster resilience among LGBTQ+ youth in rural populations, it is crucial to strengthen and empower supportive systems. Empowerment of LGBTQ+ youth involves tapping into available resources while advocating for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ youth (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021). Likewise, the redundancy of a system, which refers to a system's ability to secure complex and interconnected elements, is key to resilience (Ungar, 2018b). In particular, creating redundant systems for LGBTQ+ youth necessitate collective activism and constitutional and legislative measures to advocate for their inclusion (Moreno et al., 2020).

Active participation in policy drafting and implementation is essential, as it allows for inclusive dialogues within various socio-ecological spaces in the rural community (Bhana, 2014; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019; Moreno et al., 2020). Consequently, diversity, redundancy, and participation play a vital role in informing and supporting the study on the multisystemic resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in a rural community within the Free State province.

3.5 Socio-Ecology as a Facilitator of LGBTQ+ Resilience

Although resilience is co-facilitated by multisystemic factors (Ungar, 2021), socio-ecology plays a pivotal role in the facilitation of resilience since the risk factors LGBTQ+ youth face regarding their gender expression and sexuality are primarily social risks (Gyamerah et al., 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). Moreover, socio-ecology offers individuals relevant resources to flourish (Theron, 2017; Ungar, 2018b), and such resilience resources should be available, accessible, appropriate, and stable (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021).

The socio-ecology of resilience relates to factors and processes in the social environment, for example, relationships (family, friends and peers, service providers, community), social networks, and legal services; they further include opportunities for financial independence, social expectations/gender stereotypes among others (Theron et al., 2022). Thus, in the research, the social system/ecology facilitates resilience primarily through participation and connectivity (Ungar, 2021). Furthermore, socio-ecology can influence, and it is influenced by other co-occurring systems within and outside the ecology (Ungar, 2011, 2021). Moreover, the socio-ecology can work in complex ways that both present affirmation and marginalisation of LGBTQ+ youth (Brown, 2020; Brown & Njoko, 2019; Daniels et al., 2019; Francis & Kuhl, 2020; Francis & Reygan, 2016; Luvuno et al., 2019; Mayeza, 2021; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021). Thus, socio-ecology is a system consisting of power relations between marginalised groups such as LGBTQ+ youth and the rest of the ecology norms (Bhana, 2014; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Ramcilovic-Suominen & Kotilainen, 2020).

Participation and connectivity in a social ecology imply the capacity of LGBTQ+ youth to negotiate for resilience, enabling resources and the rural ecology to provide resources in culturally and contextually meaningful ways (Ungar, 2011). Hence, the socio-ecological theorisation of resilience follows the social justice stance by placing responsibility on socio-ecology to support resilience (Ungar, 2015, 2018b). The social justice stance in LGBTQ+ youth resilience research is pivotal because structural inequalities need to be addressed to promote

their resilience (APA, 2021; Bhana, 2014; Lopang, 2014; Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015). Thus, resilience can be possible if socio-ecology provides resilience-enabling resources in meaningful ways (Ungar, 2011). However, an additional and crucial component is the individual's capacity to navigate the resilience resources (Ungar, 2015). This means individual or collective LGBTQ+ youth agencies are vital for their resilience (Ungar, 2011). It is noted by research that social support structures such as family, friends, community, and service provider relationships to structural resources such as schools, clinics, social service, and cultural and spiritual resources such as values and spirituality matter most in the well-being of LGBTQ+ youth (Daniels, 2019; Gonzalez et al., 2021; Gyamerah et al., 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Hillier et al., 2020; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021; Okanlawon, 2021). As a result, examining the interaction between individual, social, and environmental support structures should be the starting point when enquiring about LGBTQ+ resilience. The social structures are responsible for resilience in a subordinate system (i.e., biological and psychological). However, this theorisation does not reject the role of the superordinate systems (natural, built environment) in feeding resilience (Ungar, 2021).

Viewing LGBTQ+ resilience from a social justice stance involves advocating for resilience and enabling resources from their socio-ecology. One of the critical resources that socio-ecology needs to provide is the correct implementation of inclusion policies (Bhana, 2014; Francis, 2017; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021). Thus, from a systems theory's perspective, of interest is the reciprocity of resilience between an individual resilient LGBTQ+ youth and their resilience enabling environment (Becvar & Becvar, 2014). What qualifies a resilient system such as a rural community ecology is its liberal and dynamic ability to promote connectivity, diversity, and participation (Ungar, 2018). Furthermore, resilient LGBTQ+ youth demonstrate persistence, resistance, recovery, adaptation, and transformation during or following adversity (Ungar, 2018b). The socio-ecology in this study is seen as a facilitator in the biological and psychological resilience processes of gender and sexually diverse youth amid adversity (Ungar, 2011, 2018b).

Rural communities are known for the exclusion of sexually and gender diverse people, yet from the strengths and resilience perspectives, they may also be understood as dynamic, multifaceted, and productive (Balfour, 2016; Masinire, 2020; Rand & Paceley, 2022). In other words, rural communities that have a unique cultural and contextual way of supporting LGBTQ+ youth resilience can be discovered (Daniels et al., 2019). However, seeing rural

communities as capable of supporting LGBTQ+ resilience implies that they need to be freed from urban and metropolitan power (Mbabazi, 2015; Mbhiza, 2020; Rand & Paceley, 2022). Beyond the deficit view of rural communities is exploring pathways to resilience, which entails looking at strengths and opportunities available in rural spaces to influence LGBTQ+ youth resilience (Borge et al., 2016). Risk-saturated literature often seeks to problematise rural areas such as being associated with poor service delivery, inadequate access to education and healthcare resources, poor infrastructure, unemployment, HIV and AIDS, and different forms of violence and abuse (Mbhiza, 2020; Mbabazi, 2015). However, a counter-risk narrative was offered by a strengths and resilience theorisation of rural places (Balfour, 2016; Masinire, 2020; Rand & Paceley, 2022). This study's conceptual framework extended beyond examining individualistic resilience qualities among LGBTQ+ youth. It encompassed a broader perspective that emphasised the pivotal role played by their social and physical environments in fostering resilience (Theron & Theron, 2013; Theron, 2013; Theron et al., 2013; Ungar, 2011, 2015).

3.6 Minority Stress and Feminist Intersectional Models

Exposure to stress or adversity is the starting point of the resilience phenomenon (Ungar, 2015). The LGBTQ+ youth risk factors can be better understood using the minority stress model (Haas & Lannutti, 2019; McConnell et al., 2018; Toomey, 2021). According to this model, LGBTQ+ youth are not inherently pathological, but the different risk factors they face may result in the experience of unique stresses. There are two categories of stressors: distal and proximal (Gonzalez et al., 2021). The minority stress model allows the researcher to externalise risk exposure and explain how external stresses can be internalised.

The minority stress model rejects the notion that minority groups have inherent susceptibility to mental and other health problems (Haas & Lannutti, 2019; McConnell et al., 2018; Toomey, 2021). Rather, this perspective rejects social selection and accepts the social causation view that different social experiences, such as discrimination, can lead to different outcomes. Furthermore, the minority stress model based on the social causation hypothesis separates stress faced by LGBTQ+ youth into distal and proximal stressors (Gonzalez et al., 2021; Meyer, 2003). Distal stressors result from different risk factors such as structural inequalities, rejection and denial by family members, and discrimination in local schools and clinics (Bhana, 2014; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021; Rothmann, 2018; Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015). Ultimately, the mentioned risks are introjections that can be internalised or threaten a person's psychological

makeup (Gonzalez et al., 2021). Lastly, distal stressors can affect the mental well-being of the LGBTQ+ minority group, resulting in proximal stressors typified by internalised homophobia, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and physical health complications due to stress (APA, 2021; Gyamerah et al., 2019; Moagi et al., 2021).

The African literature I reviewed identified the following distal stressors:

- Hetero- and cisnormativity education systems (Daniels et al., 2019; Francis, 2017, 2019, 2020, 2021 Francis & Reygan (2016);
- The unpreparedness of the health system support sexual and gender-diverse people (Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021);
- Non-affirmative cultural and religious practices (Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019), Compulsory heterosexuality and hetero- and cisnormativity culture (Lopang, 2014; Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015);
- Rejection and denial from families and stigma, hate community (Gyamerah et al., 2019, Luvuno et al., 2019; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019);
- Non-affirming university environment (Jagessar & Msibi, 2015; Letsoalo et al., 2020; Tshilongo & Rothmann, 2019);
- Discrimination, micro, and macroaggressions in schools from teachers, peers and other school personnel (Daniels et al., 2019: Francis, 2017); and
- Criminalisation, victimisation, violence and death, Attacks on the property, "gay bashing", and hate speech (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Mayeza, 2021).

In the African literature I studied, the proximate stressors were discomfort, fear, and anxiety (Gyamerah et al., 2019). Anxiety and depression frequently lead to substance abuse, suicidal thoughts, and attempts at suicide (Moagi et al., 2021).

To this end, understanding risk factors is the first process in a resilience enquiry (Ungar, 2021). Thus far, the risk factors mentioned seem to be more inclined toward the socio-ecology but also affect other systems such as the biological (stress responses), psychological (internalised homophobia, depression, anxiety), built environment (lack of gender non-binary bathrooms in schools, no gender reassignment such as hormone therapy facilities in local hospitals) (Bhana, 2014; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021; Rothmann, 2018; Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015). All the risk mentioned works interchangeably to compromise the well-being of LGBTQ+ youth in rural ecologies.

Scholars using the minority stress model emphasise the role of resilience factors such as connection to and receiving support from those with shared identities and experiences, that Haascan mitigate the effects of minority stress (Haas & Lannutti, 2019; McConnell et al., 2018; Toomey, 2021). Moreover, the minority stress model shows the importance of the facilitation process of socio-ecology in either perpetuating stress exposure or promoting the resilience process. Hence, it was adopted in the framework for this study.

Then, the feminist intersectional theory in the conceptual framework is interested in how identity markers such as gender, sex, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and religion may benefit or disadvantage individuals (APA, 2021; Chan & Howard, 2020). This approach critically considers multiple forces impacting how LGBTQ+ youth negotiate their resilience in rural communities. The intersection variables are examined in terms of how they inform risk exposure and influence resilience processes (Ungar, 2011). The current study explores the complex effects of different forms of stressors and risks, for example, human rights violations, stereotypes, prejudices, micro-aggressions, and discrimination) Furthermore, resilience influences resources (for example, individual, relational, structural/institutional, environmental, and spiritual) and how these intersect to inform the ability to cope and well-being of LGBTQ+ youth (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019; Mayeza, 2021). This concludes that complex intersections inform the ability to cope and the well-being of LGBTQ+ youth, especially in risk-saturated contexts such as a Free State rural district.

3.7 African Perspectives on Gender and Sexual Diversity, Psychopathology, and LGBTQ+ Youth Resilience

Gender and sexual diversity, in addition to heterosexuality, are African phenomena (Khuzwayo-Magwaza, 2021). Across different African pre-colonial communities, the meaning and function of gender and sexual diversity depend on the space and context in which they occur (Jones & Ferguson, 2020; Khuzwayo-Magwaza, 2021; Murray& Roscoe, 1998). It is a useful feature consistent with African culture and spirituality (Msibi, 2014). Gender and sexual diversity also found their place in traditional African masculinity and femininity (Eppretcht, 2008, 2014). Moreover, it is a phenomenon that was threatened by the colonial imposition of new values and systems (Montle, 2021). As a result of colonial imposition, LGBTQ+ people were marginalised from communities through different micro- and macroaggressions, which resulted in significant psychopathology which is somewhat consistent with the minority stress model theorisation (Khuzwayo-Magwaza, 2021; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). Thus, an affirming theorisation of gender and sexuality which is rooted in African culture and spirituality

is necessary for the conceptual framework as resilience is strongly rooted in cultural norms and practices (Brittian et al., 2013; Jefferies et al., 2019; Mhaka-Mutepfa & Maundeni, 2019; Theron 2013; Theron et al., 2013; Theron, & Liebenberg, 2015; Van Rensburg et al., 2018).

Gender and sexual diversity, including same-sex relations, is an African phenomenon, a history which was erased by the colonial system (Kaoma, 2018; Khuzwayo-Magwaza, 2021; Lopang, 2014; McEwen, 2019). In pre-colonial and post-colonial societies, Africans maintained a communal existence that influences pathology and pathways to well-being (Nwoye, 2017). As a result, Indigenous pathways to healing and well-being not exclusive to therapy rooms and include restoring the relationship between the living and between the living and their ancestors (Viljoen, 2003; Nwoye, 2022). To this end, the relationship between youth resilience, Afrocentrism and a communal way of life has also been observed by African scholars such as Brittian et al. (2013), Jefferies et al. (2019), Mhaka-Mutepfa and Maundeni (2019), Theron (2013), Theron et al., (2013); Theron, and Liebenberg, (2015), and Van Rensburg et al., (2018). Lastly, the Free State province is a strong, bounded cultural context typified by communal culture (i.e., Jefferis & Theron, 2017; Theron, 2016; Theron & Theron, 2013), which is valued by both youth and adults; hence, indigenous pathways to resilience are part of the framework to understand LGBTQ+ youth resilience.

3.8 Resilience Enabling Biopsychosocial Ecological Intervention Model for Rural Community LGBTQ + Youth

LGBTQ+ youth may differ from their heterosexual peers because they often need to negotiate their gender and sexual identity in heterosexist meso- and macro systems (APA, 2021; Colpitts & Gahagan, 2016). The context of a South African rural community plays a critical role in constructing a more responsive intervention (Daniels et al., 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021). An intervention must be culturally and contextually relevant to promote resilience (Ungar, 2011). Also, a responsive resilience-enabling intervention is sensitive to the availability of relevant resources and the ability to navigate to resources (Ungar, 2015). Furthermore, the relevancy of resources is dependent on the level of risk exposure; for example, Ungar (2017, p. 1) argues that "greater *emphasis needs to be placed on the role that social and physical ecologies play in positive developmental outcomes when individuals encounter a significant amount of stress*".

Consequently, the availability to navigate to resources is dependent on intersectional co-existing identities with an LGBTQ+ identity, including race, ethnicity, gender, age, and socioeconomic background, among others. (Chan & Howard, 2020; Haas & Lannutti, 2019;

McConnell et al., 2018). Thus, resilience research should examine how LGBTQ+ youth thrive in the rural environment, including the support they draw when negotiating their sexual and gender identities to strengthen existing resources (Rand & Paceley, 2022). To this end, in employing the ecological approach to understand resilience and a responsive offering intervention to LGBTQ+ youth, it is essential to consider the compromises required between systems at the micro, meso-, and macro levels (Asakura, 2016). Figure 3.2 shows the compromises required between the macro, meso, and microsystems in enabling the resilience of South African gender and sexually diverse youth living in rural communities. This figure shows the connection between systems and how the macro- (i.e., constitution, affirmative legislation and policies, education and health systems) and mesosystem (i.e., community, schools, local clinics, social services) can both be influenced by and influence resilience into the microsystem (i.e., individual LGBTQ+ youth) (Asakura, 2016; Ungar, 2018b, 2021).

Macrosystem ecological trade-off:

Challenging hetero and cisnormativity through constitution, policy drafting, policy review, availing funding, and other resources for meso and microsystem interventions (Bhana, 2014; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021; Rothmann, 2018; Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015).

Mesosystem ecological intervention:

- Psychoeducation to families, school communities and communities at large (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Thobejane et al., 2018).
- Policy implementation, building facilities and availing LGBTQ+ youth health and social services. (Luvuno et al., 2019; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021)
- Advocacy and training on inclusion in schools and in the community at large (Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019)

Microsystem biopsychosocial Intervention:

Biological: sports and recreational activities, hormonal and gender reassignment services for transgender youth, MSM services, antiretroviral treatment (Luvuno et al., 2019; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021; Scherf & Zanatta, 2021)

Psychological: mental health services (individual therapy, support groups) and psychoeducation to cultivate self-acceptance/positive identity, coping strategies, self-relying attitudes, sense of mastery, hope and agency (Álvarez et al, 2022; Harper et al., 2021; Lo et al., 2022)

Social: LGBTQ+ support groups, allies, enhancing social support from service providers, peers and families (Epprecht & Mngoma, 2022; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Mayeza, 2021)

Environmental: LGBTQ+ centres, Gender non-binary bathrooms in schools, sporting, and recreational centres (Daniels et al., 2019)

Figure 3.2: Multisystemic Resilience Intervention Model for Rural LGBTQ+ Youth

Figure 3.2 depicts a framework for enabling LGBTQ+ youth resilience in a rural ecology that is sensitive to their biopsychosocial needs. This intervention framework aims to facilitate adaptation, recovery, and transformation in adversity (Ungar, 2021) to promote the culture of inclusivity and working towards promoting human rights and social justice of sexual and gender minorities in rural communities.

3.9   Summary of the Chapter and Conclusion

This chapter examined the resilience phenomena within a rural community context using a conceptual framework. The multisystemic resilience framework was used as the core theory in this underpinning conceptual framework. It highlights the interplay of multiple systems (biological, psychological, social, and environmental) within a rural ecosystem to encourage resilience. The socio-ecological perspective was included in the conceptual framework as a lens to understand the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth, as factors related to their gender expression and sexuality are predominantly social. These social risk factors affect biology, psychology, and various environmental systems. To better understand the risk factors, the minority stress model was explained, illustrating how distal stressors (environmental and social) can be internalised, thereby impacting an individual's psychological and biological well-being. Additionally, the feminist theory of intersectionality was incorporated to examine how various aspects of positionality, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status, shape the resilience process of LGBTQ+ youth. Finally, an Afrocentric perspective on well-being and psychopathology was embraced to provide an African-oriented framework for facilitating resilience.

In the next chapter I discuss the research methodology that guided this research. Explaining why qualitative research was used, detailing the research paradigms, methods followed, quality assurance and research ethics.

4.1   Introduction

In Chapter Three, I focused on the conceptual framework for this study's basis. This was developed and discussed using the multisystemic resilience framework, minority stress model, feminist intersectionality theory, and African indigenous perspectives on sexual and gender diversity, psychopathology, and wellbeing.

In this chapter, I elaborate on the research methodological processes I used to answer the research questions. I start by explaining qualitative research, which is my employed research approach. This explanation follows the discussion on how the study is situated within socio-constructivism and critical theory paradigms. I then expound on the use of phenomenology as the research design. Furthermore, I explained the methods l used: selecting participants, data collection, and data analysis. In this chapter, I also discuss how I ensured scientific rigour in this study. Lastly, I discussed the ethical considerations I followed while conducting this study.

4.2   Research Questions

The following are the research questions that guided the empirical questions asked In the study, the literature review questions and the research assumptions I brought to this study.

4.2.1   Primary Research Question

This study's overarching research question is: How do multisystemic factors in a rural community context in the Free State province influence LGBTQ+ youth resilience?

4.2.2   Secondary Empirical Research Questions

    a) What multisystemic factors intersect to threaten the well-being of LGBTQ+ youth in a rural Free State context?

    b) How do the multisystemic factors intersect to enable resilience in LQBTQ+ youth in a rural community context?

    c) How can knowledge gained from LGBTQ + resilience research be used to develop a framework that healthcare professionals, psychotherapists, and community service providers can use to promote the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in rural communities?

4.2.3 Research Sub-Questions Explored in the Literature Review

a) What is the pre-colonial historical, colonial, and contemporary political and social context of gender and sexuality in African communities?

b) How do colonial political ideology, religious beliefs, and misconceptions about gender and sexual diversity in Africa, as well as South African gender and sexuality, perpetuate risk factors for LGBTQ+ youth living in rural communities?

c) What personal, relational, and structural resilience-enabling resources do LGBTQ+ youth in various international, African, and South African communities rely on to build resilience?

4.3 Research assumptions

The research assumptions I brought into this study were:

- Individualistic intrapsychic processes and limited relational, structural, and environmental resources influence the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in rural areas of South Africa. Several prior studies (Daniels et al., 2019; Francis, 2021; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Harper et al., 2021) have indicated that LGBTQ+ youth frequently encounter limited relational support systems (e.g., family, friends, and service providers) as well as ecological resilience resources (e.g., healthcare facilities, educational institutions, and social services). LGBTQ+ youth residing in rural social contexts in Western community contexts likewise rely on a limited number of natural resources, as evidenced by the works of Asakura (2019), Rand and Paceley (2022), and Wike (2021). Numerous studies conducted at both local and international levels have provided evidence that LGBTQ+ youth frequently encounter heightened levels of victimisation and diminished social support within rural communities. These circumstances can be attributed to the prevalence of conservative religious practices and the adherence to shared cultural norms and values within these environments (Harper et al., 2021; Khuzwayo-Magwaza, 2021; Wike et al., 2022).

- LGBTQ+ youth residing in rural regions of South Africa, akin to their counterparts in other African societies as well as American and Western communities, tend to conceal their gender and sexual orientation until they deem it appropriate or secure to disclose it (Epprecht & Mngoma, 2022; Mayeza, 2021; Semang et al., 2020). This disclosure typically occurs when they have achieved a certain level of independence or have relocated from a rural area. Individuals choose to conceal their gender and sexual identity as a means of safeguarding themselves against perceived psychological and

physical risks associated with disclosing their true identities. Epprecht and Mngoma (2022), McCormick (2015), and Semang et al. (2020) have also raised concerns regarding the problematic nature of the rhetoric around the act of coming out in some sociocultural situations. As an individual hailing from a rural town in my adolescence, I have personally observed the presence of stigmatisation and victimisation experienced by LGBTQ+ youth. The existing body of literature also highlights that in numerous Western and American civilisations, LGBTQ+ youth conceal their sexual orientation as a result of perceived risks associated with disclosing their sexual identity to various others, such as family members and peers (Robinson, 2021; Schmitz & Tyler, 2019). Heteronormativity is a pervasive global phenomenon, leading to the victimisation of individuals within the LGBTQ+ community across diverse sociocultural contexts (Francis, 2017).

- In rural communities, LGBTQ+ youth who have openly disclosed their sexual orientations and gender identities often establish friendships with peers who share similar identities, as well as with heterosexual peers who possess open-minded attitudes, to foster a sense of security. This assumption is based on the findings reported by Johns et al. (2019b) and Okanlawon (2021), which suggest that LGB youth in schools and communities primarily rely on their heterosexual and homosexual peers for emotional and social support.

Table 4.1: Summary of the design and the methodology

Title	The multisystemic resilience of gender and sexually diverse youth in a rural community context in the Free State Province
Research Approach	Qualitative research
Research Paradigm	Socio-constructivism and critical theory perspectives
Research Design	Interpretive Phenomenology
Population and sampling	Purposive and snowball sampling
Data collection	Individual semi-structured interviews, drawings with narratives
Data analysis	Interpretive Phenomenological analysis (IPA)
Considerations	1. Quality assurance
	2. Ethical principles

4.4 Paradigmatic Standpoint

A research paradigm is a theoretical lens on which research is based; it mirrors the worldview of the researcher, which comprises the ideologies that shape how a researcher sees and interprets acts in the world, which informs other research processes such as collection and meaning or interpretation of research data (Creswell, 2014; Sefotho, 2015). Thus, Collings et al. (2000) emphasise that a paradigm defines what should be studied and how it should be studied, which entails the type of questions asked and the rules used to interpret the answers obtained from the study. A paradigm offers a conceptual lens about what consists of the truth and how the truth can be discovered (Creswell, 2014).

A paradigm seeks to make sense of the world's complexities, a set of belief systems that guide research action (Patton, 2015). According to Nieuwenhuis (2016, p. 51), a paradigm refers to a "*theoretical/philosophical orientation to an enquiry. It serves as the lens or organising principles by which reality is interpreted.*" The three components of a research paradigm are ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Sefotho, 2015). Ontology is assumptions and beliefs about how reality exists and what we can know about it (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Ontology involves making assumptions to believe knowledge is real (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Epistemology concerns how we know the truth, reality, or knowledge, meaning ways in which it can be acquired; it influences researchers' approach to discovering the truth (Creswell, 2014). An epistemological question critically examines the acquired knowledge's objectivity, subjectivity, causality, validity, and generalisability (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). The methodology concerns how knowledge is produced (Creswell, 2014). Rehman and Alharthi (2016) emphasise that methodology is a strategy that informs research methods and guides the researcher about the type of data required for a study and which data collection tools will be most appropriate for the study. The four main pragmatic standpoints of research, often defined in the literature, are positivism, post-positivism, constructivism, and critical theory (Nieuwenhuis , 2016).

Table 4.2: Paradigmatic Standpoints

Paradigm	Ontology (nature of reality)	Epistemology (what can be known)	Methodology (how knowledge is acquired)	Products (forms of knowledge produced)
Positivist	Reality is out there to be studied, captured and understood.	How the world is ordered; the knower is distinct from the known	Experiments, quasi-experiments, surveys, correlations studies	Facts, theories, laws, and predictions
Post Positivist	Reality exists but is never fully apprehended, only approximated	Approximation of reality: The researcher is a data collection instrument	Rigorously defined qualitative methods, frequency counts, low-level statistics	Generalisations, descriptions, patterns, grounded theory
Constructivist	Multiple realities are constructed.	Knowledge as a human construction, researcher's and participant's construct understanding	Naturalistic qualitative methods	Case studies, narratives, interpretations, reconstructions
Critical/feminist	The apprehended world makes a material difference regarding race, gender and class.	Knowledge is subjective and political. Researchers' values frame inquiry	Transformative enquiry	Value-meditated critiques that challenge existing power structures and promote resistance

Adapted from Hatch (2002, p.13)

4.4.1 Paradigm Perspectives in this Research: Socio-Constructivism and Critical Theory

In this section, I discuss the paradigm used in the study. The research explored the rural community risk factors faced by LGBTQ+ youth, which are shaped by the historical, political, and social context in which they find themselves (Gyamerah et al., 2019; Lopang, 2014; Luvuno et al., 2019; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019; Montle, 2021; Ungar, 2021). My research also examined how they negotiate their resilience regarding the multisystemic factors that enable resilience amid their adversities.

4.4.1.1 *Socio-Constructivism*

I used the socio-constructivism perspective as my research paradigm to deepen my enquiry about LGBTQ+ youth multisystemic resilience in rural ecology. Resilience is a cultural and contextual bound phenomenon (Ungar, 2011). Socio-constructivism strongly emphasises the construction of knowledge embedded in culture and context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Gergen, 1999). In this study, the culture and context relate to a Free State rural community, in which LGBTQ+ resilience should be studied as unique and free from metropolitan or urban standards (Rand & Paceley, 2022). It's a free exploration of what resilience means to them and their multisystemic resilience supports relevant to their context.

Tylor (2021, pp. 35-36) argues that Knowledge is built through interactions between human beings. Social processes that are historically and culturally specific consist of what is conceived as the truth, which is interpreted in different ways. According to Boyland (2019), this approach goes with the notion that individuals construct their world of experience cognitively through their interactions with the world and methodologically hermeneutics and logic to interpret the world of participants using verbal and non-verbal language. Thus, In the realm of socio-constructivism, the researcher's role is pivotal. We interpret the research data using a hermeneutical process, striving to understand the intersubjective meaning that participants derive as they interact with their world (Priya, 2020).

This research studies complex interactions LGBTQ+ youth have with their physical and social ecologies and how these interactions either perpetuate risk exposure or promote their resilience.

Reality emanates from human cognition, which results from interactions with the real world (Boyland, 2019). Therefore, the mind constructs reality and is interpreted subjectively (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In practice, researchers turn to asking open-ended questions, positioning themselves within the context. Research focuses on single phenomena. Such research has an agenda to reform and is collaborative work between the researcher and participants (Boyland, 2019; Priya, 2020; Tylor,2021).

Holding the abovementioned views, the socio-constructivist approach in my research allowed participants to co-construct meaning to their risk and resilience experiences in their unique rural community context in the Free State province.

Furthermore, socio-constructivism, in the way of searching for the truth, acknowledges the subjective meanings of people's experiences. Thus, the researcher is mainly interested in exploring the participants' views rather than relying on the objective knowledge derived outside the knower (Becvar & Becvar, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For example, the literature by Gonzalez et al. (2021), López-Cañada et al. (2021), Rand and Paceley (2022), Schmitz and Tyler (2019), and Singh et al. (2014) has pointed out various resilience protective factors of LGBTQ+ youth particularly in the western community; however, this existing knowledge could not fit the constructions of the meaning of LGBTQ+ youth in the South African rural community context in the Free State province. Thus, it is necessary to investigate how South African LGBTQ+ youth construct the meaning of their risks and multisystemic resilience support.

Socio-constructivism contradicts a positivist view that knowledge is objective, unbiased, and universal. However, it acknowledges the contextual and cultural specificity of understanding and the critical role that cognition, language, and discourses play in constructing meaning co-owned by individuals in specific sociocultural spaces (Becvar & Becvar, 2014; Creswell, 2014). The socio-constructivist approach was helpful in the study because it acknowledges the social and community context of meaning by focusing on the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ youth. Socio-constructivist epistemology gives a voice to marginalised groups (Creswell& Cresswell, 2018). This means that stories of the LGBTQ+ youth are viewed as valid rather than only focusing on the narratives and validating the existing heteronormative narrative.

In socio-constructivist research, data collection is a collaboration between the researcher and the research participants. The researcher must be transparent during data collection and analysis (Burr, 2015). Findings from socio-constructivist research are not presented objectively but subjectively to show how people conceptualise their experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The socio-constructivist epistemology believes knowledge is embedded in linguistic, historical, and cultural contexts (Burr, 2015).

4.4.1.2   *Critical Theory*

I also adopted critical theory into my paradigm to deepen my understanding on constructions of how different aspects of positionality influence participants reality. The critical theory looks at historically created reality and discourses resulting from existing structures resembling shifting social power fields (Jackson et al., 2018; Mertens, 2017; Sankofa, 2021). Critical theory bases its assumptions on a number of principles: social reality is historically created,

consciousness and reality exist in a political field of knowledge, history dictates what is validated as scientific fact, the theory is constructed by revealing relations of dominance, and research is aimed at revealing the oppressive nature within a system (Nieuwenhuis, 2016, p. 64-65). The critical theory approach allows researchers in LGBTQ+ studies to look at history to account for how colonial hetero- and cisnormativity are accountable for existing structural oppression, discrimination, and victimisation in different ecologies such as rural communities.

The role of critical research is to advocate for social justice in marginalised groups (Mertens, 2017). It also examines the aspects of power and privilege in a quest to promote social justice and human rights (Jackson et al., 2018; Mertens, 2017; Sankofa, 2021). The critical theory paradigm acknowledges that reality is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by history, society, and culture and constructed based on sociality (Sankofa, 2021). Thus, a researcher needs to examine power, politics, and social issues to understand reality (Mertens, 2017).

This research helped me uncover post-colonial power relations in a conservative environment such as rural communities using critical theory. I conducted this research from my proposed lenses of understanding that LGBTQ+ resilience research should uncover and dismantle power, politics, stereotypes, myths, false knowledge, and prejudices to advocate for social change and transformation (Sankofa, 2021). These approaches offer hope in addressing community inequalities and highlight community strengths and resilience (Jackson et al., 2018; Mertens, 2017; Sankofa, 2021). The literature shows that despite a false belief that gender and sexual diversity is a pathological, Western, and White illness (Montle, 2021), this phenomenon is African (Murray & Roscoe, 1998). However, owing to the effects of cultural decay during colonialism, gender, and sexual diversity were rejected by African communities (Amusan et al., 2019; Khuzwayo-Magwaza, 2021; Lopang, 2014). Non-affirming political ideologies prevent communities from working towards promoting the human rights of sexual and gender minorities. Thus, structural and rational risk factors are prevalent in most communities (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019; Mayeza, 2021). Therefore, critical theory can be used as a tool to expose false ideologies and advocate for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ youth in rural communities, which is linked to their resilience.

To this end, in this research, I employed critical theory suggesting positionality in exploring the intersectionality between positionality (e.g., gender, ethnicity, race, socio-economic factors) and resilience (i.e., biological, psychological, social, environmental and structural factors) supports. Aspects of positionality inform and influence an individual's experiences

and subjective interpretations of risk exposure and resilience process (Sankofa, 2021: Ungar, 2011).

4.5   Research Methodology

For this study, I employed a qualitative research methodology, as qualitative research is a research strategy that focuses on the discovery and construction of knowledge. It relies on subjective knowledge co-constructed by the researcher and participants (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). Qualitative research usually takes place in a natural setting. The researcher is a key instrument for collecting data (Creswell, 2014). This research looks at participants' meaning of their experiences, and it relies on multiple data sources, which undergo a data analysis process. The research process also involves reflection throughout to ensure the validity of research findings and seeks to give a more holistic account of a phenomenon under study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Qualitative research holds an ontological viewpoint in which reality is a multifaceted and subjective experience that is knowledgeable through the human mind and consists of socially constructed meanings (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). The advantages of a qualitative research enquiry are that it taps into a deeper understanding of contextual experiences of a phenomenon being studied; this approach is more flexible, and it only bases research on a smaller sample, which makes it convenient to conduct research.

Additionally, data is collected in the form of thick, rich descriptions (Merriam, 2002). I found the qualitative approach suitable because it gave me an in-depth inquiry to describe my participants' lived experiences better. I could ask, clarify, summarise, and observe my participants during interviews, which helped me immerse myself in their past and daily experiences as LGBTQ+ youth in a Free State rural community. This approach facilitated the subjective understanding process by providing rich, detailed data on a phenomenon under inquiry (Creswell, 2013). Patton and Cochran (2002) advised that qualitative research was suitable for questions like "How?", "What?" and "Why?" rather than "How many?" or "How much?" This approach allowed me to interact with my research participants to obtain in-depth descriptions and interpretations of their worlds, thus allowing a researcher to have an open-ended conversation with participants in the co-generation of data (Creswell, 2018).

The disadvantages of qualitative research include the fact that it can filter out contextual sensitivities (Rahman, 2016). Additionally, policymakers often need more credibility for

qualitative research; since qualitative research collects data from a small sample, findings cannot be easily generalised. Furthermore, a small sample means that it is nearly impossible to develop a theory based on the results of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research interpretation and analysis follow a complex process (Rahman, 2016). Additionally, the qualitative approach can make it difficult for the researchers to remain aware of their power, cultural bias, and poor listening skills during data collection (Creswell, 2014).

To counteract these potential shortcomings, I debriefed with my supervisor to reflect on my positionality and how this could influence my interpretation and analysis of the participants' statements. I immersed myself deeply in the data to familiarise myself with the language and culture of my participants. As a point of departure, I have stated my assumptions based on what I know from the previous studies I have reviewed and my experience as I stayed in a rural township in Free State. My beliefs allowed me to engage in a meta-reflection process, reflecting on my initial thoughts and perceptions later. The meta-reflection process helped me to see if my presumptions have polluted my findings (Maree, 2016). I also conducted member checking to ensure that my research analysis represented my participants' views.

Nonetheless, a qualitative approach was suitable for my research focus. I chose this approach because it would help me enquire about the narratives of LGBTQ+ youth living in a rural community of FS. Their narratives included lived experiences, especially how they thrived in everyday hardships. The study aimed to develop a framework for the intervention and promotion of resilience and well-being in LGBTQ+ youth in a rural context.

4.6   Research Design

According to Nieuwenhuis (2016, p 72), "*a research design is a plan or strategy that moves from the underlying philosophy to specifying the selection of participants, the data-gathering methods to be used, and the data analysis to be done*". Research designs act as a bridge between the research questions and the execution of research, which integrates the research purpose, the paradigm, the research context, and the techniques used to collect data (Durrheim, 2016). Qualitative research follows five possible approaches regarding the research design: narrative studies, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Table 4.3: Characteristics of the Five Major Approaches to Qualitative Research

Dimension	Phenomenology	Ethnography	Case study	Grounded theory	Narrative inquiry
Research purpose	To describe one or more individuals' experiences of a phenomenon	To describe the cultural characteristics of a group of people and describe cultural scenes	To describe one or more cases in depth and address the research questions and issues	To inductively generate a grounded theory describing and explaining a phenomenon	To inquire into people's lived and told stories that can add to our understanding of people's experiences
Disciplinary origin	Philosophy	Anthropology	Multidisciplinary roots, including business, law, social sciences, medicine, and education	Sociology	Historically found in multiple human storytelling disciplines.
Primary data collection method	In-depth interviews with 10-15 people	Participant observation over an extended period	Multiple methods (e., interviews, observations, documents)	Interviews with 20-30 people; Observations are also frequently used	Multiple conversations with a participant and enquiry into artefacts and documents.
Data analysis approach	List significant statements, determine the meaning, and identify the phenomenon's essence.	Use holistic description and search for cultural themes in data	Use holistic description and search for themes shedding light on the case. It may also include cross-case analysis	Begin with open coding, then use axial coding, and end with selective coding.	Attending to the place, time, and relationships, the researcher and participant co-construct stories using narrative threads, tensions, and plotlines.
Narrative report focus	Detailed description of the essential or invariant	Detailed description of context and cultural themes	Rich description of context and operation of the cases; discussion	Description of the topic and people being studied end	Showing participants' evolving and complex stories

Dimension	Phenomenology	Ethnography	Case study	Grounded theory	Narrative inquiry
	structures (i.e., the common characteristics or essences) of the experience		of themes, issues, and implications	with a presentation of the grounded theory. May also list propositions	over time, relationships, and place

Adopted from Johnson and Christensen (2019, pp. 424-425).

4.6.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenological research seeks to understand how one or more people experience a phenomenon (Johnson & Christenson, 2014). It seeks to explore conscious formations of meaning relating to experiences, meaning how people think and feel about their experiences (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Phenomenology refers to lived experiences, the inner world of consciousness and experience. According to Miller et al. (2018), Edmund Husserl's transcendental (Descriptive/classical) phenomenology and Martin Heidegger's hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology are the two broadest categories of phenomenological research. Descriptive phenomenology focuses on a description of universal transcendental experience. Interpretive phenomenology is interested in a particular context, such as the cultural, demographic, and personal characteristics of how a particular context influences the meaning people attach to their experiences in contrast to searching for universal experiences (Johnson & Christenson, 2014). In the current study, the focus of research is LGBTQ+ youth risk and resilience experiences, in the Free State rural community context. The community context of my research was unique, as indicated under Section 4.5 Research setting – Free State Province.

4.7 Interpretive Phenomenology

In this research, I used phenomenology, particularly interpretive phenomenology, to research the multisystemic resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in the Free State rural community context. This research approach looks at how people interpret and make meaning of their everyday experiences rather than describing transcendental experiences (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Interpretive phenomenology entails studying emotions and exploring how people cognitively engage with the world by interpreting their experiences through their unique historical and social context (Miller et al., 2018). Thus, phenomenology aims to explore, describe, and interpret how individuals perceive situations they are facing and make sense of their individual

and social world. A complete understanding of a phenomenon, including affective, cognitive, bodily, and behavioural components, needs to be reported in interpretive phenomenology (Engward & Goldspink, 2020; Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; Miller et al., 2018).

Creswell (2007) stipulates that researchers start looking at a phenomenon, then reflect on essential themes of what constitutes the nature of a lived experience, and then write the description thereof. Moreover, phenomenology taps into processes that support an enquiry by interpreting the meaning of lived experiences. Interpretive phenomenology is based on a constructivist research paradigm in interpreting participants' perceptions (Lincoln et al., 2018). This study aimed to understand how multisystemic factors in a rural Free State Province (FS) community influence LGBTQ+ youth resilience. To achieve this, this research engages in the process of phenomenological reduction, which is the "epoché" in Greek, meaning "stop" or "hold back", which is achieved by bracketing and suspending any preconceived ideas about the phenomenon (Gray, 2014). After bracketing and suspending preconceived ideas, the process of eidetic intuition is aimed at uncovering the meaning of a phenomenon under question (Cox, 2010).

The concepts of epoché and eidetic intuition place the phenomenon under scrutiny. It also presents the researcher as an objective person who can now view it holistically (Cox, 2010). However, Heidegger (1927, as cited in Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016) contends that human interpretation cannot be guaranteed to bring an undistorted truth because people bring their experiences and assumptions to view a phenomenon to interpret it (Chan et al., 2016; Gray, 2014). Thus, I have adopted a phenomenological research design informed by Edmund Husserl's (1859-1938) concepts (Smith & Osborn, 2015; Piekiewitz & Smith, 2014; Cox, 2010).

Interpretive phenomenology analysis rests (IPA) on three qualitative research pillars: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Rose, 2013; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). The following discussion describes the theoretical foundation of IPA found through phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography.

Phenomenology provides a rich and detailed description of what and how individuals experience the phenomenon under study. The experience is subjective and results from a person's interaction with their world, which brings a unique perspective and meaning out of their experience (Smith et al., 2009). In my research, I used cases of twelve participants who

co-constructed meaning about multisystemic resilience as rural gender and sexually diverse youths.

Hermeneutics is concerned with meaning in the descriptions of people's experiences. Hermeneutical researchers interpret what the participants are saying, which goes beyond the explicit claims of participants (Rose, 2013). Interpretations of what participants may be experiencing are derived within the context of the whole interview (Smith et al., 2009). I had to pay attention to each interview to understand who my participants were, where they came from, and their family and community living conditions, which enabled me to immerse myself in their living context. In this research, I interviewed some participants in their home environment, which facilitated an in-depth analysis of their narratives.

Idiography ensures that data analysis in each case is valued in its own right before a cross-case analysis. It considers the context when understanding the perspective of particular people. It then moves from the experiences of research participants to make abstract generalisations about the phenomenon studied (Smith et al., 2009). I adhered to this principle by ensuring that I first immerse myself in each interview to look at the emerging themes within a single case before I could move, not looking at themes across cases.

In this research, I explored, analysed, and described the ecological context that shaped the LGBTIQ+ youth's lived experiences of resilience, for example, their biological and psychological resilience enabling attributes, the social, environmental, and structural support they have/need from which they draw support to build their resilience. Additionally, interpretive phenomenology furthered my enquiry and understanding of how LGBTQ+ youth attach contextual meaning to their resilience experiences. Such went further into exploring the essence of their experiences.

4.7.1.1 *Advantages of Interpretive Phenomenology*

The advantages of interpretive phenomenology are that it affords a deeper understanding of an experience by considering culture and context. It also does not require researchers to bracket their preconceived ideas (Millar & Dowling, 2016). This approach attends to people's moods, sensations, and emotions. Lastly, it allows a researcher to approach research with openness, empathy, and reflexivity (Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015). The phenomenological analysis does not simply report experiences; instead, it draws mainly from the meanings people attach to their experiences (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; Van Manen & van Manen, 2021). When

conducting phenomenological research, one must be aware of mental embodied and experimental dimensions of meaning often exhibited in actions and gestures. I recorded everything my participants said and did during the interviews, including my observations of their community and home environments.

In phenomenological research, the purpose of experiences is usually embedded in feelings, cognitions, practices, and language. Meaning-making processes are communicated through spoken language, drawings, and paintings (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; Wilson, 2015). In the current study, I incorporated participants' narratives and drawings in the process of meaning construction. Moreover, Creswell (2007, pp. 60-62) emphasises that phenomenological research serves the purpose of understanding several individuals' common or shared experiences of a phenomenon to understand these common experiences to develop practices or policies or a deeper understanding of features of the phenomenon. Also, information about common experiences can be valuable for teachers, therapists, health personnel, and policymakers. Thus, this phenomenological research is an important move towards social justice by uncovering multifaceted intersecting risks the LGBTQ+ youth face in rural ecology.

4.7.1.2 Potential Limitations of Interpretive Phenomenology

One of the limitations of an interpretive phenomenological approach is that the researcher cannot form a generalisable theory from the data (Adams & Van Manen, 2017). However, a researcher can draw implications for practice using this approach. This approach requires reflexivity throughout the gathering and interpreting of data to prevent preconceptions from clouding the findings (Adams & Van Manen, 2017; Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016). To counteract the potential limitations that came with interpretive phenomenology, I had to reflect on the interpretations I made from my research findings.

4.8 Research Setting – Free State Province

The Free State province is primarily rural, with one metropolitan city of Mangaung. The Mangaung Metro is home to the capital of the province - Bloemfontein, also known as the "City of Roses" (Municipalities of South Africa, n.d.). In 2016, the total number of Free State residents recorded was 2,8 million, with a total of 946,639 households. The FS has 83,6% formal and 12,8% informal dwellings (Statistics South Africa [Stats SA], 2016). The FS residents have challenges with access to services; only 37,8% of households in the FS had access to piped water inside their houses (Stats SA, 2016). In 2019, the FS was declared a drought disaster area (Dean, 2019).

In the first quarter of 2021, 35.6% of the FS' working population was unemployed (STATS SA, 2021). Access to health, education, improved living standards, and economic activity remain challenging in the FS. As such, 5.5% of households are poverty-stricken, with a 41.7% poverty intensity (SA Gateway, 2021). Despite different education-related risk factors, the FS' Department of Education has attained the number one position in the country on its matric results from 2013 to 2021, with 85.7% being its standard pass rate. It only failed to achieve this position in 2018 (Mafolo, 2022).

Figure 4.1: A map of the Free State Pprovince

Source: https://www.sa-venues.com/maps/freestate/physical.php

The Free State province is situated in the centre of South Africa, bordered by Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape, Eastern Cape, Northwest, KwaZulu-Natal provinces, and Lesotho. The Free State is predominantly a rural province with mountains, goldfields, farmland, and broadly separated towns. The Free State province has four districts: Mangaung Metro, Xhariep District, Lejweleputswa District, Thabo Mofutsanyane District, and Fezile Dabi District. The Free State province is further segmented into 18 local municipalities. Two-

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thirds of its population speak Sesotho, followed by Afrikaans, and less than 10% of inhabitants speak isiXhosa. The economy is dominated by agriculture (i.e., crop production, meat, sorghum, potatoes, red meat, groundnuts, and wool), mining, and manufacturing (Municipalities of South Africa, n.d.).

4.9   Data Generation

In this section, I discuss the data generation techniques for the study. I used purposive snowball sampling to select participants for the study. Data was collected using in-depth interviews and participant drawings. I also explained how I used interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to analyse the data I obtained from my participants.

4.9.1   Sampling Procedure for the Study

Involving the entire population in a study is often impossible, given time and cost as the main restrictions. Sampling involves selecting suitable participants for a study design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, I used non-probability purposive and snowball sampling to select participants (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Nieuwenhuis (2016) reports:

Qualitative research usually uses purposive sampling; participants are purposefully selected to represent a phenomenon under study. Choosing a sample is based on the conceptual framework and questions to be addressed, the generation of rich information about the phenomenon understudy and the transferability of research findings. Purposive sampling is a selective or subjective sampling that the researcher uses to decide on the population members suitable for a study. (p. 85)

The purposive sampling method is cost and time effective. However, it's prone to high researcher bias and may be less reliable (Creswell, 2014). Purposive sampling, unfortunately, also has a potential shortcoming in that it is not necessarily representative of the whole population of people under study, as it would be possible for other participants to have contradicting evidence or views (Bryman, 2001; Diaz, 2015). It is necessary to adhere to quality assurance (see Section 4.9) to overcome this challenge and ensure that the results of a study are trustworthy, transferable, dependable, conformable, and authentic.

I researched a sensitive topic and could only reach out to a few participants (Berndt, 2020). LGBTQ+ youth living in rural communities generally live in fear of their safety owing to micro and macro aggressions related to their gender and sexual identity and lack of social support in this context (Daniels et al., 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele,

2019). As a result, some may be hesitant to participate in research fearing that this may out them as gay or bisexual. Therefore, I used purposive sampling to recruit initial participants personally through social media. I further employed snowball sampling to recruit more participants. The snowball sampling method allowed me to ask my participants to nominate any LGBTQ+ youth they may know from the community (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Snowball sampling means that the researcher or other participants use an opportunity to choose the sample instead of randomly selecting it. This implies that only some population members are equally likely to be selected for the study (Creswell, 2014). A disadvantage of snowball sampling is that the recruitment of participants largely depends on whether participants will recruit others, which may take time (Creswell, 2014). A printed or digital leaflet of the study information was given to my initial participants to counteract this, so that they could distribute it to other potential participants that they might identify and who might be interested in participating (Gyamerah et al., 2019; Mayeza 2021; Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015).

4.9.2 Study Participants

Following purposive and snowball sampling, I selected a homogeneous sample based on age, gender, sexual orientation, and geographic location (Etikan et al., 2016). For this study, I selected 14 young people because the study is a qualitative phenomenological study, which typically consists of a smaller sample (Creswell, 2014). The initial inclusion criteria in the study were that my participants should come from a rural community in the FS. Initially, I invited ten participants who identified as cisgender (five males and five females). I required four of my research participants to identify as gender diverse. I stipulated in the research flier that they should either currently live in or originally come from a rural community in FS. My participants were aged between 16 and 30 years (Louw & Louw, 2014); they were either enrolled in Grades 11-12 or post-school youth who completed Grade 12 and were either unemployed or working at institutions of higher learning. Youth aged between 16 and 30 years are in different stages of development and often negotiate different developmental roles and transitions (Louw & Louw, 2014). I concur with researchers who state that part of showing resilience in an African context is being committed to education and finishing school despite hardships (Daniels et al., 2019; Ebersöhn, 2017; Theron et al., 2022).

However, owing to the sampling methods used and realising that the data reached saturation I ended with twelve participants. I selected the first eight participants through an LGBTQ+ non-profit organisation called Rainbow Seeds, which works in the Free State. I provided my contact

details in a flyer so that participants could contact me to negotiate a feasible way to conduct the interviews. The flyer (Appendix J: Study Pamphlet) also included a description of the study, why this study was conducted, and an inclusion criterion. Rainbow Seeds posted my flier on their Facebook page, and interested participants could contact them. They then forwarded me the contact details of interested participants so I could set up face-to-face interviews in a space where they would feel comfortable. They recruited eight participants altogether. Two participants were interviewed in their homes, while seven were interviewed at local parks; I also interviewed one participant at a local library and two participants at their workspace. Thereafter, two participants recommended that their friends participate in the study. I interviewed eight participants, wrote their transcripts, and analysed their data. Upon analysing the data, I realised that the data I had collected was already well saturated. I interviewed four more participants, resulting in twelve participants to ensure that saturation was indeed obtained. According to Urquhart (2022, p. 194), "*saturation is the point in coding when no new codes occur in the data*". Also, according to Given (2016, p. 135), "saturation is where additional data do not lead to new emergent themes".

4.9.3   Data Generation Methods

In this section, I explain how I gathered data using semi-structured interviews and drawings and indicate my reasons for selecting these methods.

4.9.3.1   *Semi-structured Interviews*

I used semi-structured interviews to gather data from the LGBTQ+ youth in an environment where they would feel safe. An interview in qualitative research is aimed at seeing the world through the eyes of a participant; this is a two-way conversation in which a researcher asks about the ideas, beliefs, views, and opinions of participants (Nieuwenhuis, 2016).

I collected data primarily using semi-structured interviews. The interviews started by asking participants to produce drawings (discussed in detail in Section 4.6.2.2.) and to narrate their story of discovering and working through their gender and sexual identity. I then asked follow-up semi-structured interview questions (See Appendix I: Interview Protocol). A semi-structured interview consists of pre-prepared questions followed by probing and clarification questions to get information related to the focus of the study (Kelly, 2014). Participants were asked to tell a story : "*Take me on your journey towards discovering, dealing with/ working through, or accepting your gender and sexual identity*". I then asked them my semi-structured interview questions as they related their stories. Narratives or stories in an African community

have been a cultural tool through which cultural heritage, norms, and values are passed from generation to generation (Ngoepe & Setumu, 2017). This means that telling stories or a narrative in a semi-structured interview to give knowledge was not foreign to most participants as its part of rural communities' culture. However, narratives are also helpful in research as they allow participants to relate their lived experiences and tap into hidden meanings of experiences (O'Toole, 2018).

Semi-structured interviews allowed room for follow-up questions, enabling me to probe further for clarity and cement the meaning of my participants' risks and resilience process accounts (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Also, participants get to reflect on their experiences during a semi-structured interview process, and greater meaning to their experiences as more elaboration and meaning are from memories of their experiences (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005). The disadvantage of semi-structured interviews is the cost, time, and trustworthiness of the events and experiences recalled by participants (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). Moreover, a participant can offer multiple viewpoints around the events, emotions, social actors, and contextual surroundings that affected their interpretation of their constructed experiences (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). However, my research endeavour was not to accurately describe resilience but to represent how participants perceive different intersecting systems surrounding them in a rural ecology (Creswell, 2013). Also, when I suspected participants were not certain about specific details of an event, I asked questions for further clarity. Moreover, I also relied on paying attention to verbal and non-verbal clues such as gestures during the interview and facial expressions such as laughs, sorrow, distress, and pauses to understand their verbal responses better. I relied heavily on my clinical interview skills while adhering to the psychological ethical guidelines (Allan, 2011). Also, I could form a rapport with participants since I am fluent in Sesotho, a language all my research participants spoke. Some participants were happy that they could express themselves in their mother language. Moreover, following my participants' consent, I digitally recorded the interviews. A tape recorder helped me to record the interviews for later transcribing and analysis (Bryman, 2001; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The recordings also helped me to go through the interviews numerous times to obtain a deeper understanding of the subjective world of my participants (Bryman, 2001; Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

4.9.3.2 Drawings

I asked my participants to show what resilience in adversity meant to them and what promoted them being resilient/strong inside their families, schools and community, including different

physical and social spaces important to them, using drawings. However, drawings served as a secondary data collection technique in this study (Clark, 2017; Haffejee & Theron, 2018, Glegg, 2019). I asked my participants to draw different places or people who supported them when they faced hardships related to their living context and sexual and gender identity. Then, I asked the participants to explain the content of their drawings to me (Ellis,2013). I assured them that I was not looking for excellent or perfect drawings, but only their representations would be essential. My focus was on analysing the participants' narratives of their drawings.

The drawings mainly gave me access to my participants' non-verbal meanings; they acted as metaphors that enhanced my abilities to express abstract concepts about the explored phenomenon. (Ingebrethsen, 2013). During the interview, participants used drawings to plan and think of what they were going to say during the interview. They referred to their drawings while they were speaking, and some also, in the process of enquiry, mentioned additional spaces or people or things that supported their coping and resilience. Using drawings and photos in qualitative research helps to elicit the conversation between a researcher and participants. They allowed my participants to express thoughts, feelings, and experiences, which could be more easily communicated (Brailas, 2020). Thus, I could access deeper meanings from the participants to add value to their verbal communication that I accumulated through interviews. Using drawings appeared to have helped the participants explore aspects of their lives that they would previously not have been aware of (Brailas, 2020). Also, I used drawings because resilience studies such as Haffejee and Wiebesiek (2021), Jefferis and Theron (2017), and Pretorius and Theron (2019) used drawings with an emphasis that they helped participants to express their thoughts. Despite the advantages of drawings, some participants still felt that their drawings were not good enough. I had to remind them that I was not necessarily asking for perfect drawings. Rather, they could use what they drew or even labels/markings or words to remind them of what they would discuss during the interviews. During the interviews, participants used drawings to prompt conversation. Participants employed the drawings as a strategy to prepare their verbal responses for the interviews, consistently referring to their drawings throughout the interview process. Following the interviews, as illustrated in Chapter 5, I used the drawings to introduce the participants and provide an overview of the themes discussed in their interviews. Moreover, I utilised the drawings to highlight the different forms of resilience support portrayed in them, as reported by the participants themselves.

4.9.3.3   Field Notes

I also recorded field notes in a research journal to record my participants' observations and context. Field notes gave me a detailed description of the participants, their context, and the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2014). My field notes consisted of detailed summaries of site observations and feelings, such as surprises, defences, or contradictions, observed during the interview (Emerson et al., 2001). Thus, they helped me to clarify the meanings participants attached to their experience; this aids in reflecting critically and deeply on what participants are saying (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Field notes included helpful information that helped interpret the data set, such as their physical environment and the participant's observed emotional state throughout the interview (Creswell, 2014).

Following each interview, I journaled my thoughts, perceptions, and feelings during sessions with my participant. The purpose of including my research observations in a journal is to enhance the quality of interpretations by linking the verbal and the non-verbal clues (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). I had to scribble my thoughts, feelings, and observations shortly after each interview before I could forget. I followed this procedure because I tried to overcome the possibility of forgetting important details about each interview (Tessier, 2012). I also included a research journal that detailed interactions with my supervisor and other scholars in LGBTQ+ and resilience, which influenced my approach (see Appendix K) to the study. I also journaled the major processes I took in conducting this research, from my conference presentation to data analysis processes.

4.10   Data Analysis

Data analysis is a process of putting the collected data into order. The order involves classifying the data into categories, facilitating a better understanding. I opted to use interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a data analysis strategy where researchers try to make sense of participants' lived experiences by developing an interpretive account that analyses a phenomenon as experienced within a specific context (Callary et al., 2015). An Interpretive Phenomenological data analysis is divided into two phases. The first phase aims to develop a descriptive account of phenomena. This phase seeks to identify participants' comments, emotional expressions, and infrequent linguistic patterns (Engward & Goldspink, 2020). The second interpretation phase explores participants' meanings of aspects of their stories. The second interpretation is achieved by adding explanatory comments when discussing each theme (Miller et al., 2018). I used the

following six interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) strategies (Engward & Goldspink, 2020):

- **First step: Reading the transcript several times**

This process entailed immersing oneself in the original data, making initial notes, making free associations, and exploring semantic content, including non-verbal utterances (Engward & Goldspink, 2020). I read and re-read my data to fully comprehend what my participants would have said, how they felt, and the meanings they attached to their experiences. Free association and exploring semantic contents became significant at this stage (Miller et al., 2018).

- **Second step: Developing emergent themes**

The second step focuses on transcripts and developing codes that later develop into themes. I used ATLAS. Ti 23.2, computer software to generate codes from the data. ATLAS Ti 23.2 is software that is used in qualitative data analysis. It helps the researcher to manage, organise, and code data more effectively. I ensured the research and initial codes aligned with the underlying theoretical assumptions (Engward & Goldspink, 2020). Thus, the constructivist meta-theoretical paradigm required me to explore the meaning and experiences in my data set. This process involved me focusing on chunks of the transcripts and analysing notes I clustered into themes (Miller et al., 2018).

- **Third step: Searching for connections across developing themes**

This step entailed conceptualising and combining themes by sorting my codes to develop themes. I did this after familiarising myself with the data (Engward & Goldspink, 2020). I developed themes by examining the summaries from my participants related to a particular topic. This stage involves abstracting and integrating themes by searching for connections in emergent themes (Miller et al., 2018).

- **Fourth step: Moving to the next case**

In this step, I bracketed previous themes and remained open-minded to do justice to the individuality of each new case (Miller et al., 2018). Reviewing themes entailed reanalysing data already in themes so that themes could be clustered into one theme. This refining process yielded a good thematic map of my data (Engward & Goldspink, 2020).

- **Fifth step: Looking for patterns across cases**

This step entails sharing higher-order qualities across issues, noting idiosyncratic instances. Once I was satisfied with the thematic map of my data, I refined and clearly defined what each theme would be focusing on. A detailed analysis of each theme was produced to examine what each theme reports on and how those fit in the overall message of my data (Engward & Goldspink, 2020). This process also yields subthemes within some significant themes. The subthemes emerged from finding patterns of shared qualities across cases and noting unique instances (Miller et al., 2018).

- **Last step: Taking interpretations to a deeper level**

I deepened the analysis by employing metaphors, historical referents, and other theories to view the data analysis. I wrote up my data analysis using data extracts from my themes to provide a complete account of what each theme will entail. This aligned with the study's epistemological position or meta-theoretical paradigm (Engward & Goldspink, 2020). This stage involved deepening my data analysis by utilising metaphors and temporal referents and importing other theories as a lens through which I viewed my research (Miller et al., 2018).

4.11 Atlas ti Data Analysis Process

Firstly, I read manuscripts separately and made notes on each manuscript to understand each participants' unique experience. I had to read each transcript more than two times to immerse myself in each transcript. This immersion is necessary because IPA takes a close examination and seeks an in-depth understanding of the unique experiences of each participant (Eatough & Smith, 2008). I then had to write down the emergent themes from each case. Moving to the second case and the remaining data, I had to be open to discover new themes in the subsequent transcripts.

Secondly, I uploaded the twelve transcripts into ATLAS—Ti 23.2, which assisted me in further analysing them as a collective whole. ATLAS Ti is a computer software program that is used to organise, retrieve, and analyse data during the qualitative data analysis process. This software saves time, makes the data analysis process easier to manage and enhances the credibility of research by making the analysis process more transparent (Meyer & Vosgerau,

2023). I then had to go back to the first transcript and code it according to the emergent themes I derived while reading. This led to the second transcript, where I linked some of the narratives from the second transcript with the emergent themes I had already coded from the first transcript. Thereafter, I had to derive new codes based on the unique emergent themes in the subsequent transcripts. This was a back-and-forth process, which ultimately resulted in 103 codes. Figure 4.2 shows my PhD project, which was loaded into ATLAS—Ti 23.2, which consisted of twelve transcripts, 103 codes that were my emergent themes, and 552 quotations.
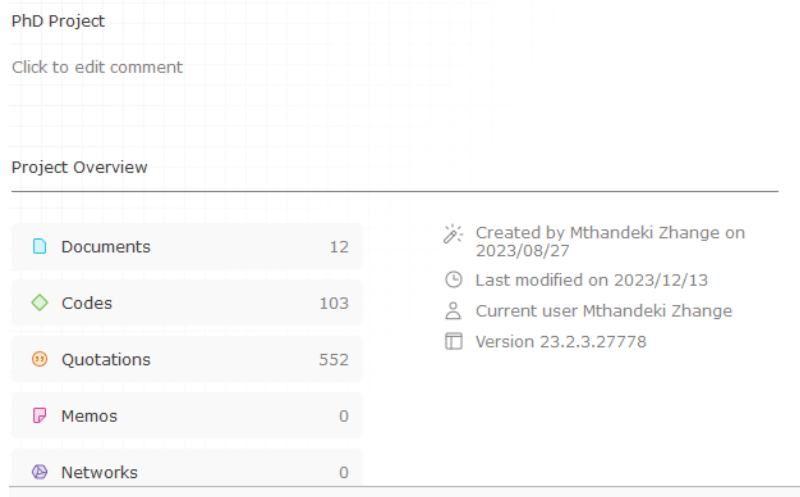
Figure 4.2: Atlas Ti Excerpt Indicating the Documents Uploaded and the Number of Codes and Quotations

The third step was to group the 103 codes into code groups, which formed categories of data that later had to be grouped into the sub-themes in my research. Figure 4.3 is an excerpt from ATLAS—Ti 23.2, which shows the codes and the number of times the code or emergent theme was reported (variable "grounded") across different cases. The table also indicates the code groups.

Code	Grounded	Density	Code Groups
Existing LGBTQ+ organisations support	9	0	Community based supports
Families affirming gender and sexual identity	16	0	Family acceptance and advocacy
acceptance of LGBTQ + identity by family	15	0	Family acceptance and advocacy
family acceptance- affirming clothes	1	0	Family acceptance and advocacy
family acceptance as crucial to wellbeing	3	0	Family acceptance and advocacy
family advocating for inclusion	3	0	Family acceptance and advocacy
family affimation and emotional wellbeing	4	0	Family material and emotional support
family microagressions	6	0	Non-Affirmation in Families
Family pro affirmative gestures-spoken language	10	0	Family acceptance and advocacy
fear of alleniation	2	0	Internalised homophobia
fear of rejection from family	2	0	Internalised homophobia
feeling alleniated from God	1	0	Internalised homophobia
feeling appreciated at local tarven	7	0	Community based supports
financial support for LGBTQ+ events	1	0	Community based supports
financial support from family	3	0	Family material and emotional support
forming relationships with other LGBTQ+	4	0	Supportive networks friends, partners and Allies
Gay pride	3	0	Supportive networks friends, partners and Allies
healthy parent relationship	4	0	Family acceptance and advocacy
helpful nurses	1	0	Professional intervention
heteronormativity in families	2	0	

Figure 4.3: Atlas Ti Except Illustrating the Different Codes and Their Assigned Code Groups

I clustered codes into code groups, defining each code group, which were later clustered into subthemes. Each code group represented different codes under one category, as indicated in the ATLAS—Ti 23.2 excerpt depicted in Figure 4.4:

Figure 4.4: Screenshot from Atlas Ti Illustrating Codes, Code Groups and Quotations From Each Code

Fourthly, I then manually clustered the code groups to develop themes; four themes emerged from my code groups, as illustrated in Table 4.4:

Table 4.4: Themes, subthemes, and their Related Code Groups

Theme 1: Distal, proximal stressors and resources LGBTQ+ youth need	
Subthemes	**Code Groups**
Subtheme 1.1: Distal stressors in families, schools and communities	Non-Affirmation in families
	Community-based risks
	Non-affirmative practices in churches and schools
	Poor and unresponsive health system
Subtheme 1.2: Structural inequalities in schools, health system, non-affirmation in church structures and unemployment	Lack of structural resources in schools, clinics and community
	Resources needed
Subtheme 1.3: Psychological risk factors - Internalised homophobia and atypical coping mechanisms	Internalised homophobia
	Atypical coping mechanisms
Theme 2: Individualistic qualities that foster resilience	
Subtheme 2.1: A sense of spiritual connection	Religion and spirituality
Subtheme 2.2: engaging in recreational activities	Sports, arts, and recreational activities
Subtheme 2.3: Positive and atypical psychological qualities to thrive	Assertiveness, pride and self-acceptance
	Sense of agency and advocacy for inclusion
Theme 3: Relational and structural supports within the rural ecology cultivating self-acceptance and coping with minority stress	
Subtheme 3.1: Experiences of Immediate and Extended Family Affirmation	Family acceptance and advocacy
	Family material and emotional support
Subtheme 3.2: Supportive relationships with teachers, peers, and friends	School-Based Supports
	Supportive networks
Subtheme 3.3: Wider community relational and structural supports	Community members support
	Community-based supports
	Professional intervention
Theme 4: A sense of connection with the environment	

I described each code group and, following that, clustered similar code groups together, which formed the four themes in the study. For example, the first theme had three subthemes; under Subtheme 1.1, there were three code groups: Non-affirmation in families, community-based risks, and non-affirmative practices in churches and schools.

4.12 Quality Assurance

To ensure that the study meets rigorous qualitative research standards, I paid attention to my research's trustworthiness, transferability, dependability, conformability, and authenticity (Cope, 2014; Gunawan, 2015). I discuss how I ensured these in this section.

4.12.1 Trustworthiness

Credibility in the study will involve establishing that my findings are believable. I conducted member checking with five of my research participants who were available to participate in this process. As advised by McKim (2023), participants were asked to review the findings of the research; thereafter, they were asked to give their general thoughts, comment on the accuracy of findings, and advise if anything needed to be removed from the data analysis. Transferability refers to how the research findings are transferable to other contexts or participants. To ensure that my conclusions will be appropriately transferable, I provided a detailed description of the participants: their age, gender, ethnicity, preferred pronoun, employment status, and educational qualifications. Concerning gender, I also specified whether the participants identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, or intersex. Furthermore, I detailed the context of the study (Bryman, 2001; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). I also journaled my research activities, such as setting interview appointments and providing samples of this evidence at the end of my dissertation (see Appendix G: Research Journal).

4.13 Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which the findings of this study can be generalised or transferred to other similar contexts or settings (Bryman, 2001; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). I described the FS rural community and the research context (See Section 4.5 - Research setting – Free State province). I also described other sexuality issues in a rural South African context in detail.

4.13.1 Dependability

Dependability concerns whether the same findings can be obtained if the study is repeated (Gunawan, 2015). Dependability requires the researchers to provide comprehensive details of all the methods they used in the research process until they reach the outcomes they report. To

ensure dependability in the study, I provided transcripts and an audit trail consisting of an excerpt from ATLAS.ti 23.8. This will show how I coded my data and induced the themes from the data (Cope, 2014).

4.13.2 Confirmability

Confirmability concerns other researchers being able to confirm the research findings. This process proves that the researcher's interpretations of the findings are not figments of their imagination but that all the findings are derived from the data (Gunawan, 2015). Authenticity refers to whether the research findings are honest and represent the core of the idea. To ensure that my research is confirmable and authentic, I immersed myself in the data to deduct themes. I had regular consultations with the study supervisor. I continually reflected on my position as a researcher to monitor my biases that might influence how I interpret my data. I also ensured an audit trail was available to show how I generated my themes. Following my data analysis, I conducted member checking with my participants to ensure that my data interpretation fits with how they experienced the resilience phenomenon. As part of the member-checking process, I gave participants their transcripts and presenting a brief analysis of the themes to them.

4.14 Ethical Considerations

This section discusses the ethical standards that I complied with to safeguard my research participants' human rights and welfare. In this section, I discuss informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, privacy, and protection from harm (Bryman, 2001; Kvale, 2008; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Lichtman (2012, p. 54) commented, "*Ethical behaviour represents a set of moral principles, rules, or standards governing a person or a profession*". As a registered Psychologist in South Africa, I had to adhere to ethical rules as stipulated in Annexure 12, Chapter 10, pp. 41-44, which includes getting institutional approval before conducting research (see Annexture A: UNISA Ethics approval Letter), obtaining consent ensuring credibility of research publication, as well as debriefing the research participants.

4.14.1 Informed Consent

To ensure that I adhere to ethical standards, I ensured that my participants were are aware of the following: Any physical or psychological harm or discomfort participants might experience, benefits for my participants or other LGBTQ+ youth in rural communities from participating, how the research findings would be kept confidential, the number of participants expected in the study, and the right of participants to withdraw from the study at any time (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). The information from the consent form was communicated in my participants' preferred and understood language. Lastly, I told my participants to ask

questions if they needed clarity (Allan, 2011). I also asked permission from my participants to record the interview sessions and explain the purpose of the recording. I also included these details in the consent form (see Appendix F: A blank copy of the consent form). I read these details in the consent form and asked my participants to sign before they could participate in the study. For participants who were minors, a consent form needed to be filled out by parents (Appendix G: A blank copy of consent forms for minors), and participants could give their permission (See Appendix H).

At the interview intake, I highlighted potential risks and benefits of the study, including the study possibly triggering recollection of negative events encountered around different risks/challenges they have or are facing as gender and sexually diverse youth in a Free State rural community context.

4.14.2 Confidentiality and Privacy

Privacy in research means controlling access to information about other persons; confidentiality means an agreement on what can be done with the obtained research information (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). To ensure confidentiality, I did not use the names of the youth I interviewed but rather provided them with the option of using a preferred pseudonym (see Section 5.3). For privacy, participants were advised that no personally identifiable information would be included in the thesis or any future publications (Allan, 2011). I explained to my participants that only my supervisor and I would have their audio recordings and transcripts, which would be saved on password-protected computers. After analysing and writing my report, I also highlighted that these audio recordings would be destroyed after five years in storage. The participants will be given the final research dissertation upon its examination if they request this option (Allan, 2011).

4.14.3 Protection from Harm

Harm to participants can include physical and psychological harm such as irritation, anger, emotional stress, harassment, and invasion of privacy (Allan, 2011, 2016). To ensure that my participants were protected against harm, I conducted the interviews at a place they felt comfortable in. After the interview, I gave them an option of attending a debriefing session or seeking psychological help (through a local counsellor/ online by an LGBTQ+ organisation) should they request it.

4.15 Summary of the Chapter and Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed overview and explanation of my research design and methodology. The chapter outlined my research paradigm and the phenomenological research design used for the study. I discussed the data collection techniques that were followed in conducting the study. In addition, the chapter presented a discussion on sampling and data collection, as well as how I analysed the data generated. Finally, the chapter outlined the ethical considerations underpinning how I conducted the study.

In the next chapter, I introduce my research findings derived from the semi-structured interviews I conducted with twelve participants in this study.

CHAPTER 5
PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I report the results according to thematic areas that emanated from the thematic content analysis of the data. Four themes were developed from an analysis of the patterns in the data. To add rigour to the study, I supplemented the discussions with direct participant quotations during the semi-structured individual interviews. Furthermore, I provide excerpts from research participants to help substantiate and enrich the discussions.

5.2 An Overview of the Research Questions

5.2.1 Primary Research Question

This study's overarching research question is: How do multisystemic factors in a rural community of the Free State province (FS) in South Africa influence LGBTQ+ youth resilience?

5.2.2 Secondary Empirical Research Questions

a. What multisystemic factors intersect to threaten the well-being of LGBTQ+ in a rural Free State context?

b. How do the multisystemic factors intersect to enable resilience in LGBTQ+ youth in the rural community context?

c. How can knowledge gained from LGBTQ + resilience research be used to develop a framework that healthcare professionals, psychotherapists and community service providers can use to promote the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in rural communities?

5.2.3 Research Sub-Questions Explored in the Literature Review

a. What is the pre-colonial historical, colonial, and current political and social context of gender and sexuality in African communities?

b. How do colonial political ideologies, religious beliefs and myths on gender and sexual diversity in Africa and South African gender and sexuality perpetuate risk factors faced by LGBTQ+ youth in a rural community?

c. What personal, relational, and structural resilience-enabling resources do LGBTQ+ youth in different international, African, and South African communities rely on for their resilience?

5.3 Participants' Profiles and Drawings

This section provides an overview of my participants. I start by providing their demographic information, consisting of their gender and sexuality, age, economic activity, race and ethnicity, and area and family circumstances (See Table 5.1). Furthermore, I introduce each participant using the drawing they drew, my observations during the interviews, and a summary of themes that emerged from their interviews.

Table 5.1: Participants Details and Demographic

Participant No, Gender and Sexuality	Age	Economic Activity	Race & Ethnicity	Area	Family Circumstances
P1-Lesbian	27	Unemployed, Diploma in HR	Black, Sotho	Vredefort	Living with both parents
P2 -Gayman	19	Grade 11	Black, Xhosa	Sasolburg	Living with a single parent (Mother)
P3- Transwoman	21	Completed G12, Unemployed	Black, Sotho	Ventersburg	Single parent, poverty
P4 -Gayman	25	Unemployed, dropped out of university owing to finances	Black, Sotho	Botshabelo	Orphan, staying with older brother
P5- Transwoman	25	Completed Gr 12, HIV & AIDS Lay counsellor	Black, Sotho	Ladybrand & Tweespruit farms	Orphan, raised by Grandmother and Uncle
P6-Non-binary	23	Completed Gr 12, Unemployed	Black, Sotho	Welkom	Living with a single parent (Mother)
P7- Transwoman	17	Currently in Grade 12	Black, Sotho	Bethlehem	Orphan, raised by her Aunt
P8- Transman	30	Completed Grade 12, NGO worker	Black, Zulu	QwaQwa	Living with both parents
P9- Lesbian	30	Completed Grade 12, unemployed	Black, Sotho	Odendaalsrus	Living with partner
P10-Lesbian	29	University student	Black, Sotho	QwaQwa	Living with a single parent (Mother)
P11-Lesbian	24	Completed Grade 12, a Machendiser	Black, Sotho	Parys	Raised by grandmother
P12- Gayman	22	University Graduate, Educator	Black, Sotho	Parys	Raised by a single parent (Mother)

The utilisation of drawings in this study facilitated the elicitation of dialogue between the researcher and participants, thereby offering a comprehensive framework for understanding the narratives on resilience expressed by the participants (Ingebrethsen, 2013). This study involved multiple participants who offered distinct viewpoints on the resilience of gender and sexually diverse youth in the rural community setting of the Free State province. Including each profile and a concise overview of emerging themes aims to provide the context for the subsequent sections' findings and conclusions.

The following sections depict the drawings participants drew at the beginning of their interview. Participants were asked to draw a picture of anything that supports their resilience (i.e., to do well in life despite the different challenges they experience as LGBTQ+ young people), including people, spaces, and places in their community. The purpose of these drawings was to elicit the conversation, providing participants time to think about how they were going to approach the questions which appeared in the interview schedule. The drawings were also used as an aid/tool in the data collection process.

5.3.1 Participant 1

Figure 5.1 indicates the resilience that enabled Participant 1 to gain support from her nuclear family and the community environment.
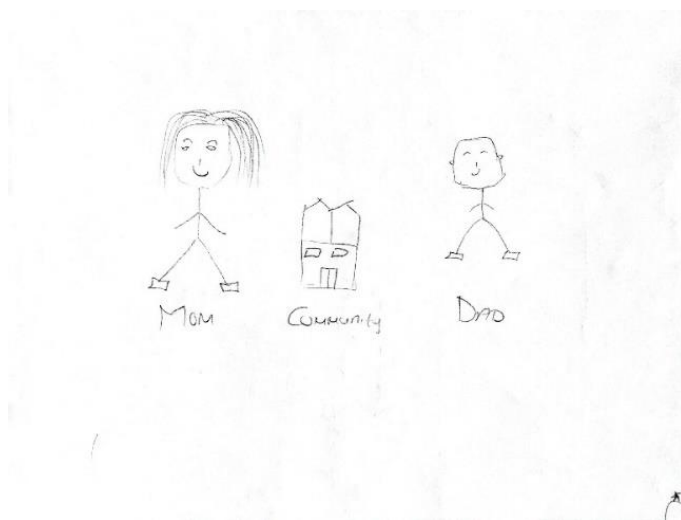
Figure 5.1: Participant 1 drawing

Participant 1, a 27-year-old individual, self-identifies as a lesbian and resides with both of her parents. The individual in question is currently not engaged in any form of employment and possesses a diploma in human resources. The individual originates from a household that

adheres to conservative Christian values and actively participates in religious services. The resilience narrative of the individual commences with the potential consequence of familial exclusion upon the revelation of her sexual identity. Following this revelation, her aunt assumed temporary guardianship until her parents reconciled with her sexual orientation. The resilience narrative she presented encompassed the themes of acceptance within her educational setting, which involved not only teachers but also heterosexual peers and community members. The individual perceives the community as a secure environment, encompassing nearby taverns. However, they express concerns regarding the well-being of lesbians within their community, citing apprehension stemming from reports of macroaggressions occurring in other South African communities.

5.3.2 Participant 2

Figure 5.2 indicates the resilience-enabling support identified by Participant 2 in his community, which mainly entailed his family.
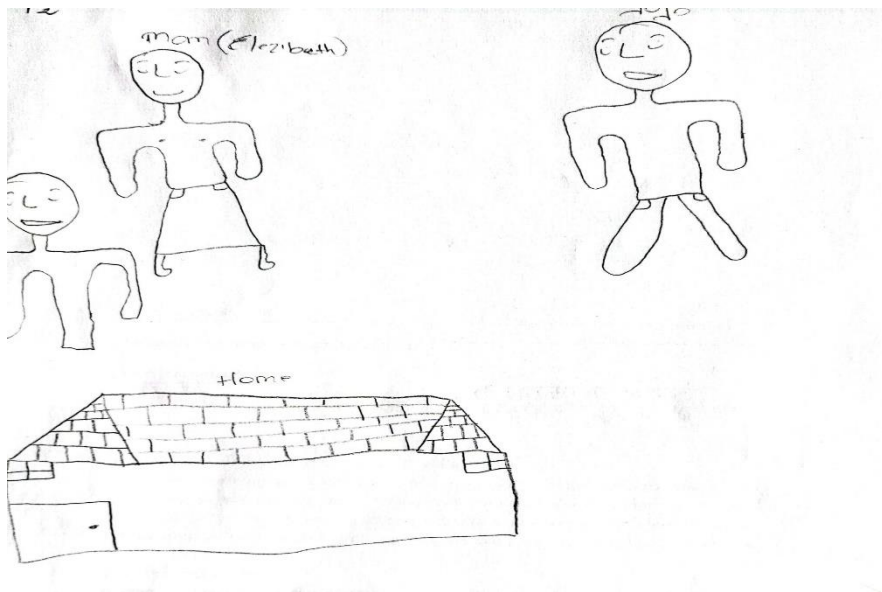
Figure 5.2: Participant 2 Drawing

Participant 2 is a male individual who identifies as gay and is currently 19. He is enrolled in Grade 11 at a secondary educational institution. The individual in question possesses a mother who provided unwavering support, even when experiencing sexual assault. At a certain juncture, he experienced suicidal ideation but subsequently underwent a psychological intervention. Despite experiencing a sense of insecurity within the community, the individual perceives the nearby tavern as a secure and inclusive environment. The individual in question

has cultivated a profound bond with his paternal figure, who has presently come to embrace his sexual orientation. The individual's resilience narrative encompasses finding significance amidst challenging circumstances, receiving assistance from heterosexual peers, establishing relationships with homosexual friends, and receiving support from teachers and the school principal despite experiencing microaggressions, such as verbal insults, from fellow students.

5.3.3 Participant 3

As indicated in Figure 5.3, Participant 3, identified numerous places in her drawing, such as a friend's place, a local library and a tavern. She drew rough sketches of her mother, herself, and her best friend.
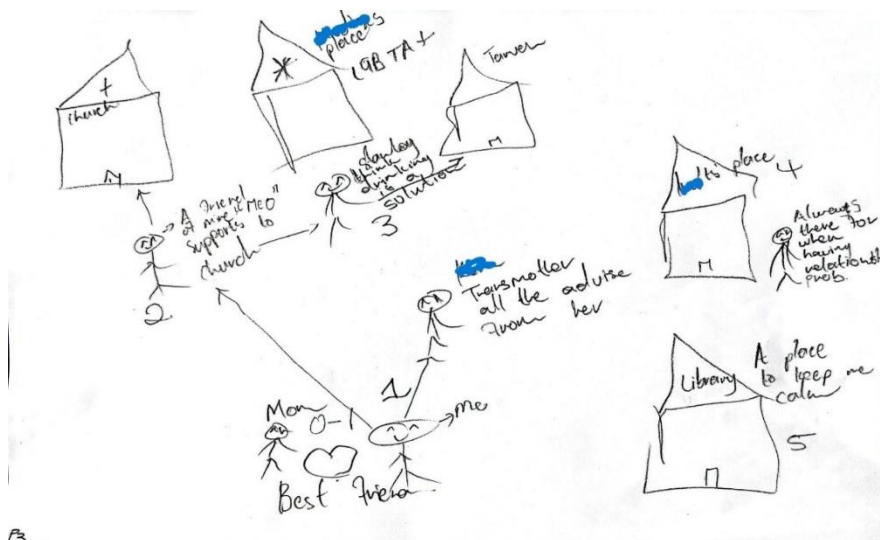
Figure 5.3: Participant 3 Drawing

Participant 3 is a 21-year-old transgender woman who is currently not employed. The individual faced familial difficulties stemming from her mother's refusal to acknowledge her gender identity. The individual in question was designated male at the time of birth, and due to being the sole male offspring within the household, their mother expected that she would eventually produce grandchildren. Notwithstanding this, she obtained material guidance and emotional assistance within her household, particularly from her paternal relatives. Moreover, the individual recounted instances of validation from members of the community and a teacher who actively supported the principle of inclusivity within her educational institution during her final year of secondary education. The individual exhibited resilience by navigating and confronting health systems that adhere to heteronormative and cisnormative standards. Additionally, she actively promotes inclusivity by collaborating with a non-governmental

organisation focused on LGBTQ+ issues, utilising their influence to advocate for marginalised communities.

5.3.4 Participant 4

As indicated in Figure 5.4, Participant 4 drew a picture of a church, his home and an old age home as initial places he could think of that supported his resilience at the onset of the interview process.
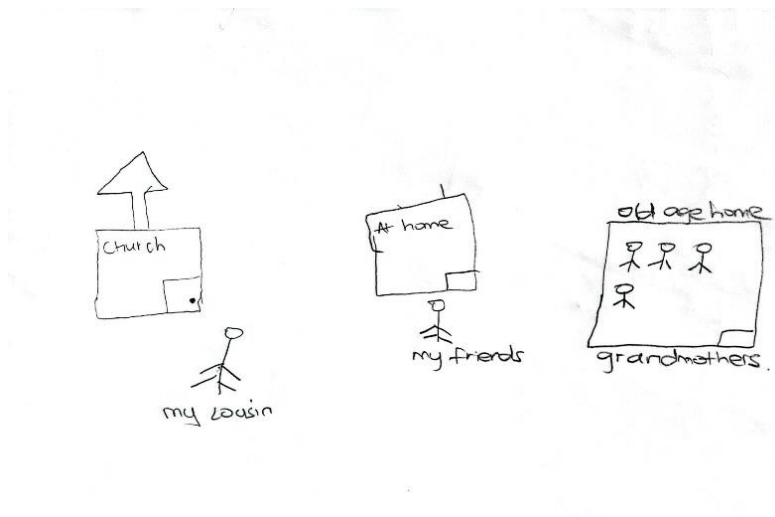
Figure 5.4: Participant 4 drawing

Participant 4 is a 25-year-old gay man who is an orphan and resides with his sibling. The individual discontinued his enrollment at the university in 2020 due to contracting the COVID-19 virus, which subsequently led to academic difficulties in certain modules and financial disqualification. The individual in question has encountered uncomfortable treatment from his father and brothers within the confines of his household. His mother took the initiative to address this during a family gathering to ensure his integration and acceptance. After the conclusion of the meeting, the entire family began to embrace and acknowledge his sexual orientation. The individual in question has received tangible assistance from their neighbour and validation and assistance from his sibling. In addition, he engages in voluntary work at a nursing home facility. Following his encounter with exclusion within a charismatic church, he sought solace in attending a clandestine night vigil church known as "kereke ya sephiri," which is a spiritual support system for him. Additionally, he has garnered assistance from his school principal and teachers in addressing homophobic bullying.

5.3.5   Participant 5

As indicated in Figure 5.5, Participant 5 drew two farms where she lived during her childhood; she included sketches of her friends as well as their houses. She also drew pictures of her grandmother and uncles and their respective homes. Her drawing had a tree outside the house.
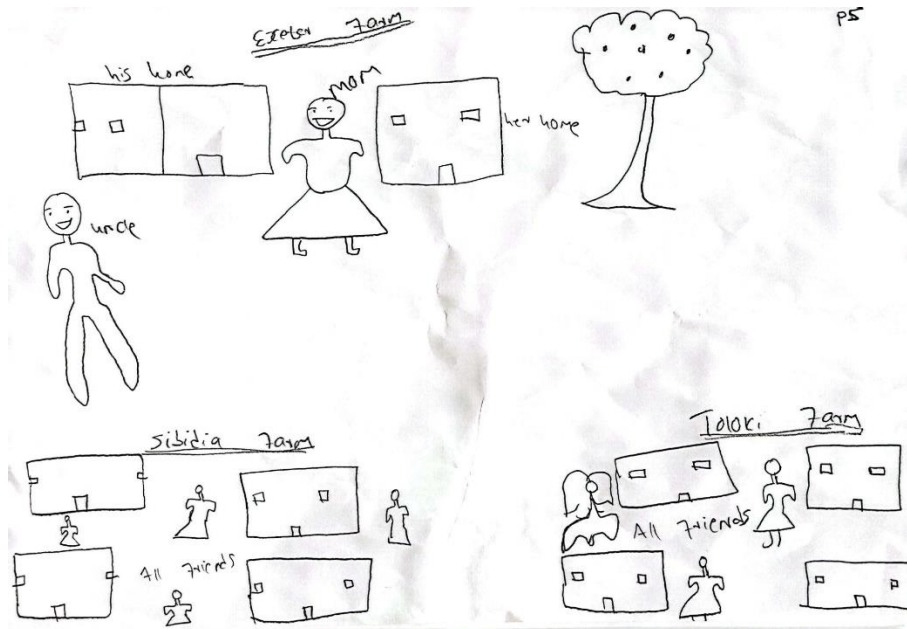
Figure 5.5: Participant 5 drawing

Participant 5 is a transgender woman raised in rural areas, specifically on two farms. During her upbringing, she was primarily cared for by her grandmother, who struggled to comprehend her gender identity and often attributed it to supernatural influences. The individual in question enrolled in a residential educational institution, where she encountered social exclusion and acceptance from her male peers residing in the hostel. The school environment in which she found herself was characterised by a sense of warmth and inclusivity. Furthermore, she encountered a hospitable and validating atmosphere at the tavern. The individual's family gained an understanding of her sexual orientation after an intervention conducted by an LGBTQ+ organisation. As a result of this intervention, the family undertook reparative actions, such as returning to the farm to engage in educational and advocacy efforts to promote her inclusion.

5.3.6 Participant 6

As indicated in Figure 5.6, Participant 6 drew a picture consisting of themselves and of a mountain in their local community. They also drew childhood friends and the street they were staying in, which included a few houses.

Figure 5.6: Participant 6 Drawing

Participant 6 self-identifies as non-binary and is currently 23 years of age, with an unemployed status. The individual in question was raised in the town of Welkom, where they encountered a lack of support from their extended family members, except for the support provided by their mother. As a means of coping, individuals frequently resort to engaging in fantasy. They have experienced episodes of extreme emptiness, a lack of interest in daily activities and seem to be struggling with self-esteem, they also appeared to be depressed. Participant 6 attributes their current state to a lack of support from their home environment and school. Resilience-enabling resources, such as supportive peer and gay friends' relationships and the local mountain, have been identified.

5.3.7 Participant 7

As indicated in Figure 5.7, Participant 7, drew a picture of her school classroom. Her picture consisted of classroom desks and learners sitting in pairs on their respective chairs.
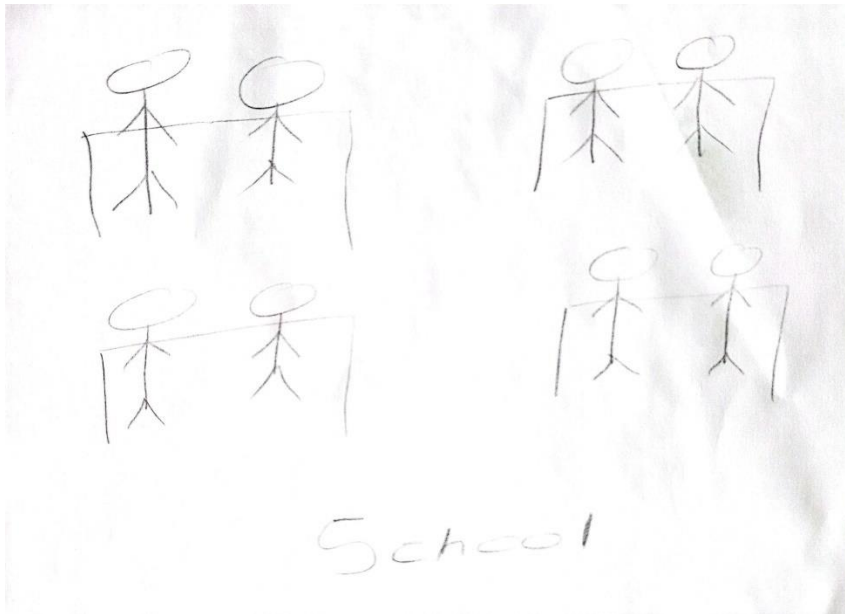
Figure 5.7: Participant 7 Drawing

Participant 7 self-identifies as a transgender woman, currently 17 years old and enrolled in the twelfth grade. The participant experienced the loss of her mother at approximately the age of ten and subsequently resided with her aunt and other caring and supportive extended family members. Despite receiving support from her family and members of a collectivist community, the individual expressed recurring themes related to self-reliance, confidence, and assertiveness. Although she acknowledged the risk factors her friends face in her community and local clinics, she perceives her school environment as predominantly positive and supportive.

5.3.8 Participant 8

As indicated in Figure 5.8, Participant 8 drew numerous spaces, such as his grandmother's and parents' houses. He also drew a picture of his high school. He further indicated LGBTQ+ support groups, local community poetry sessions, his own space, hiking, and being involved in or being at a local Non-Profit Organisation (NGO) space in his drawing.
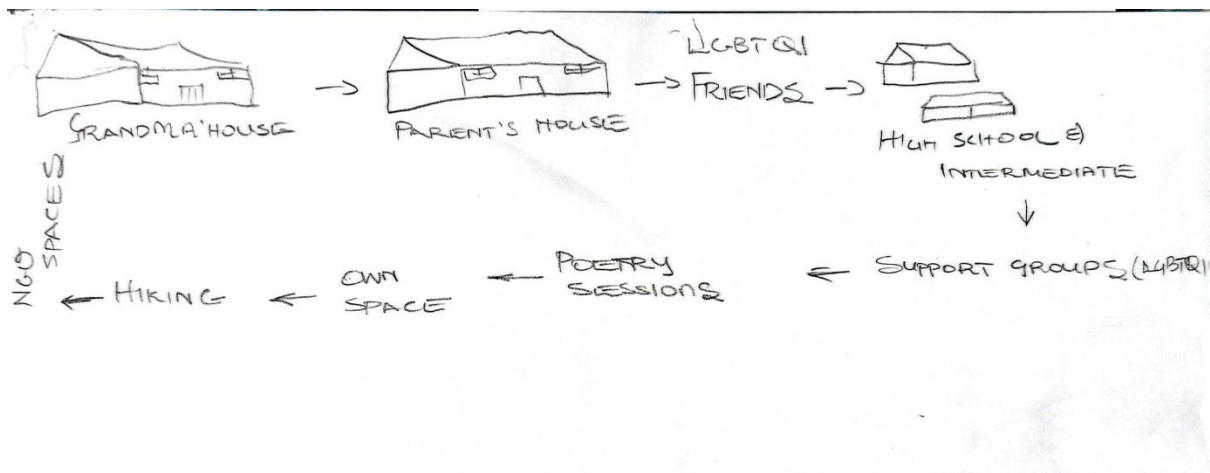
Figure 5.8: Participant 8 Drawing

Participant 8 is a 30-year-old transgender male currently employed in a non-governmental organisation (NGO). The participant was provided with affirmation from multiple family members, including his grandmother, mother, father, and siblings. Despite encountering verbal insults from certain students, he has had predominantly positive experiences within the school environment. Throughout his academic journey, he has been fortunate to have encountered supportive teachers, peers, and individuals within the LGBTQ+ community, fostering meaningful relationships that have contributed to his overall well-being. The individual in question has identified various activities, namely engaging with poetry, mountain hiking, and being involved with a non-governmental organisation (NGO), contributing to his resilience. Additionally, he is currently undergoing the process of gender reassignment with the support of both his parents and friends.

5.3.9 Participant 9

As indicated in Figure 5.9, Participant 9 drew a picture consisting of a local church, a community hall, an internet café, a local tavern, and rough sketches of friends and family.
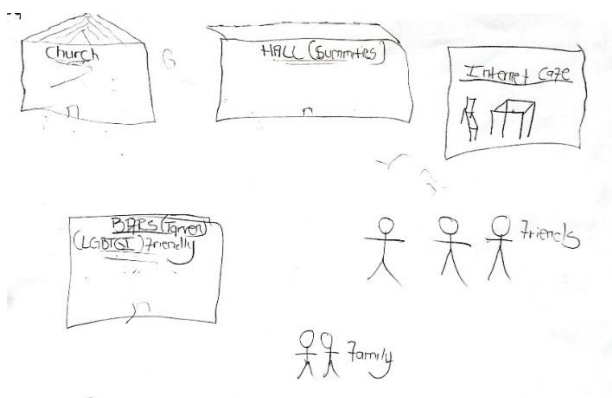
Figure 5.9: Participant 9 Drawing

Thirty-year-old Participant 9, identifying as a lesbian, is in a committed relationship. She concealed her sexuality until matriculation to avoid educator discrimination. The person's Christian family initially opposed her sexuality. Afterwards, her family became more accepting. By founding an NGO with her peers, the person showed her commitment to community inclusivity. At her parents' house, they founded an LGBTQ+-supportive NGO. The individual reported micro and macro aggressions in her community and from neighbours. She also found resilience in local taverns. In addition, she documented a church in her community that had a dialogue with an NGO about accepting LGBTQ+ people to attend church services without changing their identities. The church also officiated LGBTQ+ weddings.

5.3.10 Participant 10

Participant 10 drew a picture of different resilience enablers in her environment, which included her mother, siblings, and friend. She also drew a local tavern, school, church, and a local tribal parliament. Figure 5.10 depicts her drawing.
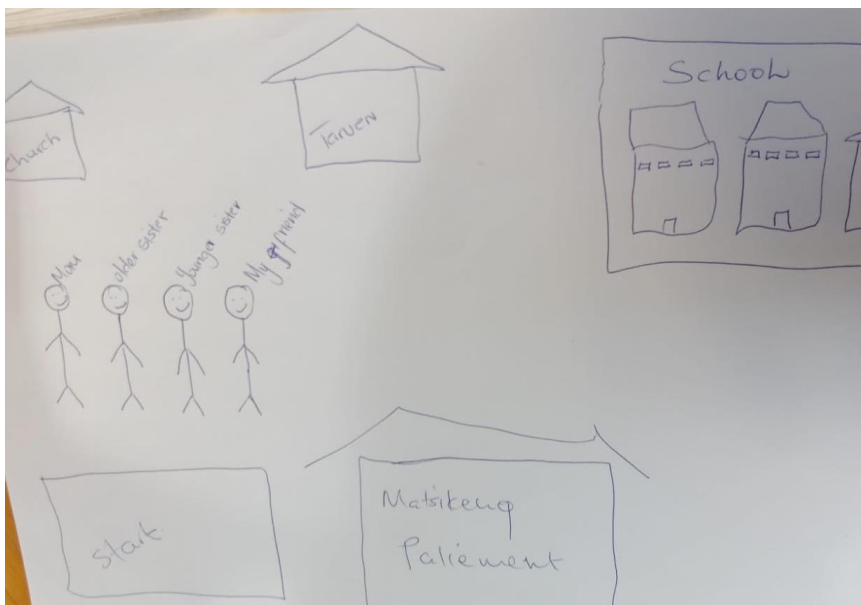
Figure 5.10: Participant 10 Drawing

Participant 10, a 29-year-old lesbian, said their teacher molested her as a teenager. She then embraced her sexuality despite living in a heterosexist community, which limited her career options and forced her to attend university. Her resilience narrative explores hegemonic masculinity and LGBTQ+ identity education. The individual described positive and nurturing relationships with her mother, who provides emotional and financial support and can advocate for her inclusion in a heterosexist school environment. The person also has a partner and

LGBTQ+ friends. She also finds strength in her work with a non-governmental organisation (NGO), where she helps lesbians and listens to their stories.

5.3.11 Participant 11

As indicated in Figure 5.11, Participant 11 drew a picture of her bedroom at her parents' home; she also indicated her relationship with her friend, which enables her resilience, in the picture.
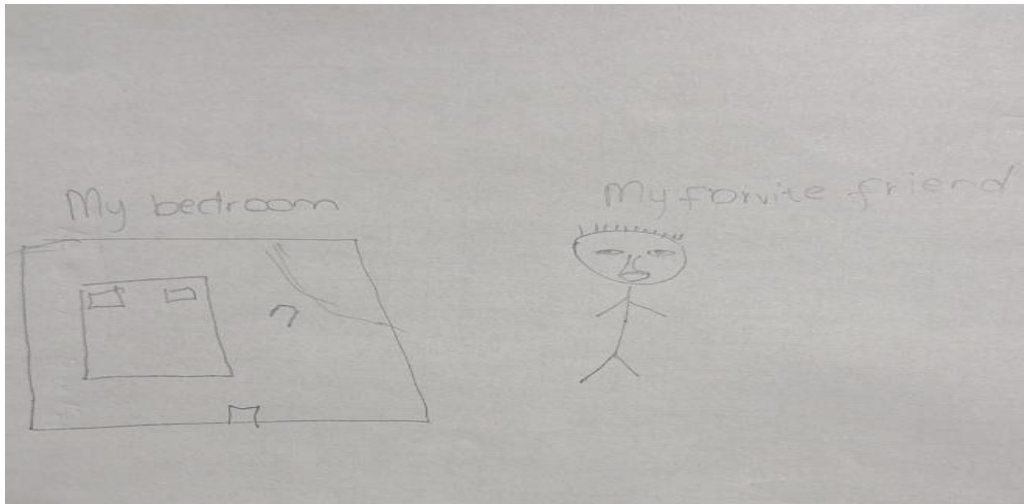
Figure 5.11: Participant 11 Drawing

Participant Eleven, a 24-year-old individual, identifies as a lesbian and sought refuge with her grandmother following her mother's rejection. The subject's mother adheres to conservative Christian beliefs and possesses a charismatic disposition, leading her to express disapproval towards her daughter's sexual orientation. The individual successfully navigated a school environment characterised by heterosexist attitudes, endured episodes of depression, and experienced suicidal ideation, all while steadfastly maintaining her self-identified lesbian orientation. The individual in question has successfully cultivated interpersonal connections and possesses a companion who offers assistance, albeit with a preference for personal solitude within the confines of her residence. Despite attempts from her mother to make reparations for their relationship, she still feels emotionally distant from her owing to her mother's prevailing ideologies surrounding her sexuality.

5.3.12 Participant 12

As indicated in Figure 5.12, Participant 12 drew a picture of his best friend, his home, a school, a church, and a local park.
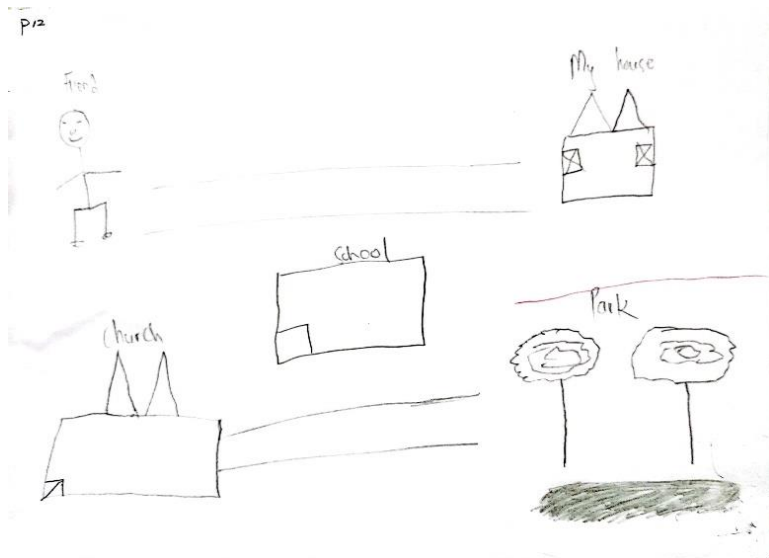
Figure 5.12: Participant 12's Drawing

Participant Twelve is a 22-year-old gay male who has recently completed his undergraduate studies and is currently in his inaugural year as a teacher. The individual originates from a family background that does not provide affirmation or support. He reported engaging in attention-seeking behaviours during childhood to compensate for a profound lack of familial affection. The individual assumed a leadership role within his local school and demonstrated exceptional academic performance, contributing to their sense of inclusion within the school community. This sense of belonging was maintained despite encountering instances of microaggressions from both teachers and fellow students during his primary school years.

The data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews, and participants were interviewed in various places such as their home environments, at local parks, in libraries, and along the street in my car. I had to first listen to the audio records over and over again to capture the overall message of my participants. Thereafter, I transcribed all the interviews. Following the transcription, I analysed my data, which resulted in four themes and their respective subthemes, which I will discuss in the next section.

5.4   Description of Themes and Sub-Themes

Table 5.2 depicts my discussion of the four themes that were developed after I gathered data from the twelve semi-structured interviews with my research participants and completed the data analysis process.

Table 5.2: Themes and Sub-Themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Theme 1: Distal, proximal stressors and resources LGBTQ+ youth need	• Distal stressors in families, schools and communities and proximal stressors • Structural inequalities in schools, health system, non-affirmation in church structures and unemployment • Internalised homophobia and atypical coping mechanisms
Theme 2: Individualistic qualities that foster resilience	• A sense of spiritual connection • Engaging in sporting and recreational activities. • Possessing positive psychological qualities that enable thriving in adversity
Theme 3: Relational and structural supports within the rural ecology cultivating self-acceptance and coping with minority stress	• Experiences of Immediate and Extended Family Affirmation • Wider community relational and structural supports • Supportive relationships with teachers, peers, and friends
Theme 4: A sense of safety and connection with the environment-	

5.4.1   Theme 1: Distal, Proximal Stressors and Resources LGBTQ+ Youth Need

Experiences of distal risk factors in the families, churches, local clinics, and school community include both micro and macro aggressions. Such behaviour is fuelled by hetero- and cis-normative culture, often enforced by non-affirmative Christian sentiments and practices and cultural prescripts lacking an indigenous perspective. Table 5.3 reflects the parameters for Theme 1, Sub-Theme 1.

Table 5.3: Parameters for Theme 1 Sub-Theme 1

Theme 1_Subtheme 1: Distal stressors in families, schools and communities and proximal stressors
Distal stressors are hetero and cis-normative education systems, non-affirmation in families, and non-affirmative cultural and religious practices. Distal stressors include homophobic comments and the use of derogatory names and terms as verbal threats. These also include denial and rejection from families. They also refer to macroaggressions such as rape, murder and physical attacks.

Theme 1_Subtheme 1: Distal stressors in families, schools and communities and proximal stressors	
Inclusion criteria: Any mention of distal stressors experienced by LGBTQ+ youth in a rural community context	**Exclusion criteria:** Any reference made to proximal stressors faced by LGBTQ+ youth in a rural community context

Experiences of exclusion and marginalisation in families, schools, churches, and the community at large negatively affect the well-being of LGBTQ+ youth. In families, the main risk factors reported by participants seem to be rooted in non-affirmative Christian religious ideologies and heteronormative cultural expectations. As illustrated in the excerpts that follow, LGBTQ+ youth receive painful, non-affirmative messages from families that seem to be propelled by parents' Christian religious beliefs surrounding homosexuality and prominent cultural expectations parents hold surrounding bearing offspring, as reflected in the comments of various participants.

> P6-NONBINARY: *"My dad started taking me to church to be prayed for, and he used to feed me Christianity, demanding I read a bible he hoped it will change me"* *(P6: 2:20 ¶ 107 – 113 in Transcript 6.)*

Participant 6 was referring to their experiences following their parents discovering that they were not heterosexual. They received painful treatment from their father, which also entailed forcing them to perform spiritual rituals to alter their sexuality and gender expression.

> P 9-LESBIAN*: I was in the closet, and I grew up in Jehovah's Witnesses church, and my Mom is super homophobic even now; she just…. I'll tell you as time goes by, she still believes that one day I will come with a boyfriend or I will say I'm pregnant.* P6:20:1 ¶ 3 in Transcript 9

> P11-LESBIAN: *"She used to tell me that at her place* (referring to her sexual partner)*, they believe that a lesbian is a person who is possessed with an evil spirit; that is how they believe"* (22:21 ¶ 84 in Transcript 11).

As illustrated in the above excerpts, the findings show that non-affirmative religious ideologies may see gender and sexual diversity as a sin and LGBTQ+ youth is often seen as demon-possessed, which disempowers families to accept their LGBTQ+ child. Also, parents feel

disappointed in their children as they have cultural expectations about their children, mainly concerned with reproduction and bearing children in future.

LGBTQ+ youth often feel pressured by families to perform such scripts for validation and a need to be accepted and loved unconditionally by their families. As illustrated in the excerpts that follow, parents may find it challenging to accept children's sexuality owing to their idealised heteronormative cultural scripts of bearing offspring and dressing code, as expressed in comments from various participants.

> P4-GAYMAN: *Yoh, being insulted every day, my Dad will want to hit me every day when he finds me doing dishes, cooking, spring cleaning, he will call me to the garden and make the garden; I will be like, I am not part of that I know nothing about the garden. I only know how to clean and cook.* (5:18 ¶ 82 – 83 in Transcript 4)

> P5-TRANSWOMAN: *I tell myself that, number one, you are not going to have children, that one (having children) forget about it even my grandmother knows that she won't have great-grandchildren; I am not going to do that…she used to say, I want Ngwetsi (a daughter-in-law).* 6:45 ¶ 204 – 206 in Transcript 5

> P3-TRANSWOMAN: *"Ohh, my grandfather, you! Last year, when I was turning twenty, we had a conflict; he said you are my grandson, I am expecting grandchildren from you, and the next thing, you are gay "* (4:38 ¶ 174 in Transcript 3).

Referring to her mother, P5 reported:

> P5-Transwoman: *She used to say don't wear those things; they are meant for girls….sometimes I will only be wearing a long shirt covering myself; she used to tell me that I should not wear like that its only girls who are allowed to wear woman's clothes.* 6:2 ¶ 26 in Transcript 5

The findings demonstrate that the heteronormative cultural and Christian prescriptions and norms may result in experiences of feeling excluded and rejected in families. Participants' experiences of marginalisation in families are illustrated in the excerpts that follow.

P4 related a story where his male siblings used to mistreat him; he said:

> P4-GAYMAN: *They had their own way of treating me, though sometimes I would try to talk with them, and they would ignore me (referring to his male siblings) … they will finish the food before I eat, and I will complain about that. They will start*

shouting at me and hitting me until my mother sees it with her bare eyes. 5:20 ¶ 91 –
94 in Transcript 4

P 3, referring to her mother, reported that:

P3-TRANSWOMAN*: "She told me once I brought girls' clothes, saying, since you
decided to wear girls' clothes, I won't be buying you clothes anymore" (4:22 ¶ 112 in
Transcript 3).*

P12 added that:

P 12- GAYMAN: *From Grades 8 and 9, I was this miserable, immature, naïve young
boy, traumatised, gay, black, and poor; there were just many things happening. Being
queer sometimes was difficult because of the economy…After all, in the family I come
from, my mom was married to someone* (Referring to his stepfather) *with lots of kids;
how we were treated I could feel it because of that, and I knew deep down, even when
we were together like tension, you could feel it.* 23:12 ¶ 26 in Transcript 12

Participant P12 highlighted how LGBTQ + identity intersects with ethnicity, socioeconomic
status, and other family dynamics. Similarly, P2, P3, P11 and P10 were raised by single parents.
P5, P7 and P4 are orphans, and P3, P4, P8, and P10 reported that they were negatively affected
by poverty-related living conditions. Participants face intersecting family-related risks. For
example, P12 was raised by his stepfather, who is homophobic, and other participants, such as
P4, P5, P9 and P11, had challenges with their families as they showed non-acceptance of their
gender expression and sexuality in the past. Non-acceptance was typified by negative
statements, inappropriate pronouns and physical attacks.

In schools, LGBTQ+ youth often receive microaggressions from teachers who are not willing
to affirm their gender expression and sexuality, mainly owing to religion, as illustrated in the
excerpts that follow:

P2-GAYMAN*: "Personally about me, No, never, but a friend of mine, there was this
teacher who made fun of her in front of school children" (1:24 ¶ 98 in Transcript 2).*

P11-LESBIAN*: "There will be other people like peers and teachers who will say you
are a girl and need to wear a skirt. God created you as a girl, so why do you want to
be a boy*?" (22:16 ¶ 62 in Transcript 11).

Referring to his teacher, P12 said:

> P 12-GAYMAN: *This behaviour of yours is not right. This is wrong. It is not according to God, and she started to reference the bible… they* (Referring to primary school teachers*) would call me to the staff room and tell me I should be like this and so on, only to find out that outside school.* 23:7 ¶ 18 in Transcript 12

LGBTQ+ youth often face micro- and macroaggressions in communities. Microaggressions often entail verbal insults, such as derogatory words like "Trassie" and "Stabane."[1]Microaggressions seem to be the leading experiences faced by all the participants in the study. Degrading words that families and communities use to refer to LGBTQ+ youth in the study were indicated in *excerpts that follow:*

> P2-GAYMAN: *"I remember this boy. I even saw him yesterday. He used to call me names such as "stabane", "moffie", and gay. Those are the words I wouldn't handle personally" (1:1 ¶ 26 in Transcript 2).*

> P3-TRANSWOMAN*: When they [referring to community members] were passing the whole street from corner to corner, they used to say, hey bitch, how can you wear makeup wares? You are a man. You have to stand firm and be the man you came to earth to be ..."* 4:4 ¶ 30 in Transcript 3.

> P3-TRANSWOMAN: *"The other thing is that this Ousie (Sister) has a dick (a penis), and she also has breasts. What is going on?"* (4:61 ¶ 275 in Transcript 3).

> P5-TRANSWOMAN: *When I cried, I used to feel that my heart sore; I was hurt, like why would the gents [referring to peers at the boarding school] speak hurtful words like this, like "Tarasie", you know, in Sesotho language, it bad at least if you say gay, it's better, that was the most thing that used to hurt me like that name … like hey "Tarasie" you are a man come and play the ball … but at night skat! They come knocking at my door to want some.* 6:7 ¶ 60 in Transcript 5

> P7-TRANSWOMAN: *"I will give an example; if you are gay, they will say "Stabane", "boys to girls." You need to know that this is usual to show them that whether you say it or not, it doesn't matter"* (7:30 ¶ 253 in Transcript 7).

LGBTQ+ youth faced macro-aggressions in rural communities ranging from physical attacks to rape and murder. Participant 2 was raped, Participant 10 was sexually molested by her

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[1] The words Trassie and Stabane are derogative and are used to refer to gender and sexually diverse youth.

teacher, and Participant 11 was bitten by a man at the local tavern. Other participants related stories of other LGBTQ+ youth they know or heard of in their communities who experienced brutality in their communities, as illustrated in excerpts that follow:

> P2-GAYMAN: *"You know, I'd say, you know, I don't like talking about this, but it's fine; after I got raped"* (1:12 ¶ 54 in Transcript 2).

> P11-LESBIAN: *I went through a lot of difficult things; I hadn't healed from some, like when I went to a party in Parks* (local entertainment centre), *so my girlfriend arrived, we kissed, then I went outside, not realising that there was a guy who followed me outside and told me how I am disrespecting him so yes they have accepted that girls date but as for us kissing in front of him. Then he hit me, and I haven't told people about it.* 22:23 ¶ 108 in Transcript 11

Relating her painful experience of being sexually molested by her teacher, who invited the participant to her house, P10 said:

> P10-LESBIAN*: Ahhm … you are not introduced to sex, but you are not ready, so this thing of being in something you never thought you'd be in, you have to be ready for sex…..Even the sex was rough, and she [referring to her teacher] wanted me to be like a man. I was slow and fragile things like that; she'd say, "You do it wrong; let's start again. It's done like this.* 21:2 ¶ 8 – 16 in Transcript 10

> P3-TRANSWOMAN: *One thing I knew for sure is that in Welkom, there were scandals that there was a gay person who was killed in Welkom, a gay person was raped, a gay person was mugged, a gay person was hanged on the tree with handcrafts.* 4:19 ¶ 96 in Transcript 3

Given the macroaggressions faced by LGBTQ+ youth in communities, particularly lesbians, most families fear for the safety of their children, for example:

> P11-LESBIAN: *I asked the reason why she fears (referring to her grandmother), and she told me that one of her relatives was a lesbian and was killed brutally; she was actually raped then killed, and they inserted bottles in her vagina, so she doesn't want to experience such with me.* 22:17 ¶ 144 in Transcript 11

Participants also reported experiences of bullying from peers due to religion and prevalent hetero and cis-normative cultural scripts. For example:

> P3-TRANSWOMAN: *They are full of discrimination. They are so, so, so homophobic those people I could tell one of the stories they used to say, having conversations about other gays from social media, they would say, how can a male wear J string? Where are the balls(testicles).* 4:7 ¶ 35 – 36 in Transcript 3

Also, commenting about being being bullied at school, for example,

> P4-GAYMAN: *I remember the day I wanted to go to the boys' toilet, then there was this gang; I don't remember what they were smoking, then they tried to insult me and asked me, what do you want here, you gay?* 5:14 ¶ 51 in Transcript 4

The risk factors extend to other places of care other than schools and local clinics offering primary health care, which is crucial to the health of LGBTQ+ youth. Microaggressions in clinics often result in feeling excluded from these facilities. Often, such feelings result in less use of this critical facility. LGBTQ+ in the study reported instances of insults experienced either by her or their friends in a local clinic, for example: *"He asked me to escort him, then we went; I still remember that nurse's face; she said, what were you doing as boys sleeping with one another, then I laughed because my everything"* (P7-TRANSWOMAN: 7:36 ¶ 353 – 355 in Transcript 7), relating experiences of her gay friend at a local clinic. Participant 10, who used to work at the local NGO, reported:

> P10-LESBIAN: *That client I got stayed in Lusaka; when I asked her why she didn't attend? As we were attending cases of why people don't come to collect their medication. She told me that, honestly those ladies don't treat us well; they say words that are not sitting well with us.* 21:32 ¶ 131 in Transcript 10

Relational risks are often produced by Christian ideologies and cultural norms that discourage LGBTQ+ gender and sexual identity, which community members hold. The hetero- and cisnormative ideologies and norms are often reflected in community structures such as schools and churches, which resemble compulsory heterosexuality, and furthermore create complex intersecting risk factors that compromise the well-being of LGBTQ+ youth living in the rural community context.

Table 5.4: Theme 1 Sub-Theme 2 Parameters

Theme 1_Subtheme 2: Structural inequalities in schools, health system, non-affirmation in church structures and unemployment
Marginalisation is reflected in local schools' infrastructure, practices, curriculum, and policies. Also, feeling excluded from participating freely in church life owing to hetero- and cisnormative ideologies, sentiments, and prescriptions from a local church. Experiences of exclusion and marginalisation are often aggravated by unavailable resilience-enabling resources not realised in the rural ecology. Also, there are unavailable opportunities in the community to create awareness, visibility and psychoeducation for families, schools, and communities about sexual and gender diversity.

Inclusion criterion: Any reference to structural and systemic factors that perpetuate the exclusion of LGBTQ+ youth based on sexuality and gender expression	**Exclusion criterion:** Any reference to general discriminatory practices, structural and systemic factors that are not necessarily based on sexual identity or gender expression

Hetero and cis-normative uniform policies often lead to non-affirmation in schools. Lesbian participants in the study reported not feeling comfortable wearing skirts, but their school could not affirm their need to wear trousers. As illustrated in the excerpts that follow, participants in the study related experiences of not feeling comfortable with uniform policy and overall heteronormative culture in local rural community schools; for example, as related by participants.

Reporting an incident that happened at school at an assembly, P2 related:

> P2-GAYMAN: *"Yes; so they asked boys to take off their hats, and he didn't, and he just shouted out of 1000+ children, "(calling participant 's name), you know that you are a boy; take that hat off"* (1:26 ¶ 103 in Transcript 2).

> P5-TRANSWOMAN: *"There is a gay at Thabanchu who left school. He is a friend; I asked why he left school, and he said no, they were forcing me to wear trousers"* (6:55 ¶ 231 – 243 in Transcript 5).

P10-LESBIAN*: Let me start with the principal was… I don't know what to call it, but she was way too bad. I think it was in 2011, when I was in grade 11, that she introduced the idea that every girl could wear trousers since it was winter and skirts for all the girls during summer.* 21:13 ¶ 62 – 63 in Transcript 10.

P11-LESBIAN: *Yoh, things I came across, in a school I was attending a boy wears a trouser and a girl wears a skirt like they did not understand that even if you are girls, there girls who don't feel comfortable wearing a skirt so but they were not understanding .* 22:14 ¶ 54 in Transcript 11.

Cisnormativity in school is reflected in infrastructure. For example, there are no gender-neutral bathrooms in schools, and, as a result, some feminine gay and transgender youth often experience discomfort sharing bathrooms with other learners of the same gender. Participants in the study related their experiences, for example:

P3-TRANSWOMAN: *Yes, girls' toilets, and they questioned that, and I couldn't answer that because I did not know whether am I a gay or transgender or what is going on. ".*

Also, the other participant reported:

P2-GAYMAN: *"They never allowed me. I remember a teacher found me in girls' toilets, and she said my birth certificate does not say I'm a girl. It says you are a male and said, I'm comfortable using girls' bathrooms"* 1:74 ¶ 111 in Transcript 2

Churches are reported as the most valuable structural resource related to the well-being of rural ecology. Still, LGBTQ+ youth find it hard to navigate to these resources owing to experiences of non-affirmation, which leads to participants feeling excluded in these structures. Prominent culture that marginalises LGBTQ+ youth in churches is reflected in dressing codes and the general attitude of church leaders and some congregants. For example, the following participants reported:

P11-LESBIAN*: Yeah, I went to church two and three times wearing trousers, and then you will see the way they looked at you (referring to church members). I didn't feel comfortable, and then they told my grandmother that they didn't like seeing me wearing trousers to church, then that was the time I left the church.* 22:7 ¶ 24 in Transcript 11.

P3-TRANSWOMAN: *"You can't tell me that I come to church wearing a trouser, suit and men's formal shoes? No, that is not me. I feel like you are demolishing me, you don't want me, you don't want me to be there*" *(4:29 ¶ 128 – 131 in Transcript 3).*

Also,

P1-LESBIAN: *I want to be comfortable when I'm at the church. I want to be me; I don't want to wear heals and skirts that means I'm not me; my soul won't be there…".* And "P8-TRANSMAN *at my parent's church, women would wear dresses and hats on the head; they would come to me telling me that on Sunday, I should come to church and prescribe what I need to wear. I will tell them I will not wear that.* 8:22 ¶ 159 in Transcript 8

P4-GAYMAN: *The other incident, I think, was in the church; we went to church with congregants. Dear friends, the service was okay until the pastor read the verse to the congregants. The pastor preached about a man who sleeps with another man. It was blasphemy in the eyes of God.* 5:16 ¶ 63 – 65 in Transcript 4.

As a result of non-affirmation, LGBTQ+ youth feel rejected by local churches, and they choose to distance themselves from these structures.

In local clinics, nurses often lack proper training to work with the LGBTQ+ population, including knowledge of health protocols for gender reassignment surgery. Also, there is a lack of MSM resources in some clinics. My participants related their experiences that caused them distress and discomfort resulting from navigating inadequate health facilities and social services in their communities; for example, participants who wanted to undergo gender transition reported:

P3-TRANSWOMAN: *When I arrive in town, take out my smart cart as it is; it's written male, but yet my presentation is female, so it brings up the issue that I stole someone else 's ID; I will then be told to go and bring the owner of this ID.*

And,

P7-TRANSWOMAN: *To make it easier, have you seen people who want to start transitioning? That transition process is the easiest; one should not wait to be financially stable to start transitioning or move elsewhere. It means you must save*

transport money like when you are poor; we don't know how many years you can save to transition.

Also, nurses lack knowledge of LGBTQ+ health care, including helping patients who want to start the transitioning process; for example, the following participants reported:

P3-TRANSWOMAN: *Hmm, last year, I realised that there is this HRT thing, hormonal treatment, and I decided to let me seek some information. I went to a clinic and spoke to the peer educator, who told me they would seek information until; now, shame…because I know the prescription; I even thought of buying those pills for myself, seems it's gonna take a long process.* 4:52 ¶ 234 in Transcript 3

Also,

P8-TRANSMAN: *They are not helping at all. Luckily, at Rainbow Seeds, a nurse took me to a local clinic. Upon arriving at the local clinic, DoH (Department of Health), people were unaware of the referral form they were supposed to give me.* 8:33 ¶ 369 – 371 in Transcript 8

Because of non-conformity, stereotypical gendered roles in the workplace, and LGBTQ+ identity, most LGBTQ+ youth face unemployment. Some unemployed participants had challenges finding employment in their communities, for example:

P 9-LESBIAN: *The most painful one is that my CV would be written Dimakatso, but when I appear there…. When they call, it's a girl's voice. Still, when I arrive there, they give you that look as if you'll be in a suit and tie instead of a skirt. Even the CV doesn't hold power anymore…. they judge you on appearance; you would say you are Thabo, but he'll be wearing weave and make-up; they are expecting him even if your CV was good.* 20:11 ¶ 67 – 71 in Transcript 9

A participant who is unemployed and an orphan reported:

P4-GAYMAN: Y*eah, I ended up failing two of my modules because of COVID-19. I was infected by Covid 19, and I couldn't manage to do my school work, and I ended up failing two modules… I returned, and they told me I owe the school and institution. I didn't have money then; I couldn't afford to pay the institution, so I had to drop out.* 5:64 ¶ 390 – 392 in Transcript 4

This participant further participant indicated a more systemic oppression in the macro systems:

> P4-GAYMAN: *"We are also affected, but there is nothing we can do as gay people because there is no one in the parliament who is a gay person. Something will be done by now"* (5:68 ¶ 450 – 452 in Transcript 4).

Also, certain employers and people in authority still hold beliefs that certain jobs are not supposed to be performed by women; for example, the following participant who was previously unemployed related her experience with the local council upon applying for a job:

> P10-LESBIAN: *"He said, "you are crazy. You are a woman. What if you break your back?" but it's still not fair that you are choosing work for us"* (21:26 ¶ 113 in Transcript 10 Mthandeki. edited).

Also,

> P3-TRANSWOMAN: *They said (referring to construction personnel at her local community) you cannot do a job meant for a woman if you are a man, and that is when we argued with the construction people until they said let's put him on a waiting list while he decides he will work as a man or a woman, so even now, he is not working.* 4:54 ¶ 240 – 242 in Transcript 3

Lack of resources in a rural community context, unemployment and poverty seem to intersect with prominent community ideologies that perpetuate the exclusion of LGBTQ+ youth in this community. There were other adversities, such as COVID-19 orphanhood, that also intersected with participants' LGBTQ+ identity to further position them at more risk. Thus, there are complex intersecting identities that often lead to more risks that are ultimately internalised, producing significant mental health challenges and atypical ways of coping.

Table 5.5: Theme 1 Sun-Theme 3

Theme 1_Subtheme 3: Psychological risk factor _Internalised homophobia and atypical coping mechanisms

The distal risk factors often lead to internalised homophobia typified by negative feelings and thoughts about one self's gender expression and sexual identity. Internalised homophobia often leads to low self-esteem, being in the closet, fear of rejection, negative internal talk, depression, and sometimes feeling alienated from God.

Inclusion criteria: Any reference to negative psychological experiences that are linked to external relational and structural hetero- and cisnormativity	**Exclusion criteria:** Any reference to negative psychological experiences that are not related to distal stressors related to LGBTQ+ identity

Participants in this study reported the negative effects of hiding their sexuality from family and the fear of being marginalised and ostracised; for example, the following participants reported:

> P1-LESBIAN: *Joo, my bother, that's "hell" You know I was not in hiding for long. Still, those two weeks or years were difficult because you had to go to church wearing a dress, to shops wearing girls' clothes that time, you are eying girls whom you would love to see you in gents clothing [its hell} it's like you are not recognised I don't wish it on anyone it's like living a double life.* 3:37 ¶ 346 in Transcript 1

Another participant feared coming out of the closet because of the humiliating treatment they saw being given to one of their friends:

> P3-TRANSWOMAN: *When they were passing the whole street from corner to corner, they used to say, hey bitch, how can you wear makeup wares? You are a man. You have to stand firm and be the man you came to earth being. These statements made me fear coming out of the closet, thinking that maybe I would be called such names; that was my journey.* 4:4 ¶ 30 in Transcript 3

Resulting from the fear of being ostracised, some of the participants had to adapt to heteronormativity and stand the negative psychological impact of adaptation. For example, this participant had to keep quiet and not confront homophobic bullying, fearing being beaten:

> P2-GAYMAN: *Others were beaten, others were called names, and I think it depends on how you respond to that particular incident that's happening at that time; I've always been a quiet individual. You will swear at me; I'll keep quiet. Teboho is the talkative one 1,2,3, so he gets beaten.* 1:51 ¶ 182 in Transcript_2

Participant 2 also feared being marginalised and feeling pressured to hide his sexuality from extended family members on his father's side of the family. He reported:

> P2-GAYMAN: *"Cos when they'd sit together with family members, they would say he has a gay child, so I never wanted that"* (1:62 ¶ 256 – 258 in Transcript_2)

Relating the awkward treatment he received from his peers in a boarding school hostel, which negatively affected her self-esteem and confidence, Participant 5 reported:

> P5-TRANSWOMAN: *At the farm., I think what I spoke about is all; that support also helped me. I had to accept myself more because I doubted myself because of my experience with the hostel guys, feeling like I can just be straight.* 6:47 ¶ 202 in Transcript 5

The participants also related:

> P5-TRANSWOMAN: *When I cried, I used to ask myself why God made me this way, asking myself that I couldn't just change and how I could change. By then, I wasn't sure, praying, asking God to change me, asking God if I could just be Authi(heterosexual man) and stop being insulted and bullied.* 6:9 ¶ 64 in Transcript 5

After being ill-treated by their father and paternal aunt, a participant lost their self-esteem, this participant reported that:

> P6-NONBINARY: *Im struggling with… I feel inadequate. I feel there's something wrong with me; I am always Im clumsy and untidy, and I blame it on that whole experience ……Even now, I've become self-conscious. I judge the way I dress and walk. I worry that I might not be appropriate because I fear being criticised. I'm struggling to be free.* 2:5 ¶ 39 – 45 in Transcript_6

Other participants often had instances of negative thoughts which entailed self-hate because of their sexuality owing to the prevalent heterosexist culture, for example: "*Yes, like I used to think, I don't know. I had several thoughts: what if I am a curse or something? Why am I like this?*" *(P8-TRANSMAN_8:23 ¶ 155 – 157 in Transcript 8).*

Also,

> P2- GAYMAN: *You know, it was very painful asking myself if it's being gay, a choice, or you were born with it; that has been a question… I ended up telling myself it's not a mistake; it could be that you have something heavy for them, and you just have to come clean to yourself. That's why they treat you this way; it was a painful thing.* 1:2 ¶ 28 in Transcript_2

The participants in the study who experienced significant macroaggressions such as rape (i.e., Participant 2) and assault, as well as severe instances of being marginalised by immediate family members such as a mother (i.e., Participant 11) reported themes of depression, suicidal ideation, and suicidal attempt. For example:

> P2-GAYMAN: *You know, I'd say, you know, I don't like talking about this, but it's fine; after I got raped, that's where I could see that the support was there cos I had suicidal thoughts; I started smoking while I knew I had one lung it was just I'm alone, and I'll get through this personally I couldn't deal with it.* 1:13 ¶ 54 in Transcript 2

He smoked to numb the intrapsychic pain that resulted from a painful experience of being raped. He further indicated that *"I tried even what I tried to do didn't; I took a pills container with ninety pills in it and took them all at once* (P2-GAYMAN, 1:15 ¶ 60 in Transcript_2.

> *P11-LESBIAN: Hai, it's like it's hard, sometimes I wake up feeling angry, there are things that happened, and I realise that I haven't healed, but I just told myself that its life after all, there was the time when I drank pills.* 22:33 ¶ 100 – 102 in Transcript 11.

As a result of micro- and macroaggressions, other LGBTQ+ youth often employ atypical coping mechanisms such as avoidance (P11), abusing substances (P-9) and using fantasy as a defence mechanism (P-6).

> P11-LESBIAN: *"Yeah, I don't become open. I feel like when I am open, I turn to bore a person about my problems; hence, I prefer being alone, but when the other person tells me what hurt them"* (22:12 ¶ 42 – 44 in Transcript 11).

> P 9-LESBIAN: *Yes … I could say that I think I got my comfort from dagga; it's the one that helped me cope cos I think I just started consuming alcohol lately always being smoking dagga I lust them as we speak.* 20:26 ¶ 141 in Transcript 9.

P6-NONBINARY: *Cos most of the time I played alone. I love storytelling and would take those old broomsticks and sticks to make people. Sometimes, I would take toiletries in the bedroom, make people with them, and just play alone. Mostly, I became alone. I would realise that the world treated me differently.* 2:3 ¶ 29 – 33 in Transcript_6

Risk factors intersect in complex ways to produce internalised hate in LGBTQ+ youth. The complex intersections of risk also pave unique ways of resisting, adapting to and transforming in adversity. Also, tapping into one's individualistic resilience creates meanings, helpful cognitions, and ways of coping with adversity.

5.4.2   Theme 2: Individualistic Qualities that Foster Resilience

This theme includes participating in sporting and other recreational activities such as expressive arts, indigenous games, and the performance of cultural rituals and religious experiences, including a connection with God or ancestors. Individualistic qualities also include showing resistance to heteronormativity, positive internal LGBTQ+ identity, having confidence, navigating to resources, including the internet, advocacy for inclusion in the community, and possessing a positive internal LGBTQ+ identity.

Table 5.6: Theme 2, Sub-Theme 1

Theme 2_Subtheme 1: A sense of spiritual connection
Performance of cultural rituals and religious experiences, including connection with a Christian God. This connection facilitates emotional well-being in distress.

Inclusion criterion: Any reference to cultural rituals and spiritual experiences	**Exclusion criterion**: Any reference to places such as churches or religious leaders and congregants

Participants in the study reported a sense of connection with God and the performance of religious rituals as resilience enabling. A sense of connection with God facilitates most participants' emotional well-being. Three participants mentioned praying to God, which often seems to help them to cope emotionally with the negative effects of social exclusion, discrimination and prejudices. Participants reported that after praying or having a spiritual experience, they feel better, and they gain the courage to question negative religious sentiments that often result in internalised homophobia. The participants commented as follows:

> P3-TRANSWOMAN: *I decided after going through what I have gone through, you know when you speak with people, they can disclose to others, so I decided to let me speak with this guy I don't know; I feel like he is helping me a lot.* 4:59 ¶ 261 in Transcript 3

> P4-GAYMAN: *When I deal with certain difficulties about my sexuality, I will go to church somewhere somehow and keep on praying to God and ask God for strength, to give me strength to overcome this situation at home, even at school, because somewhere, somehow, some of my teachers were so bullying when it comes to my sexuality.* 5:7 ¶ 33 in Transcript 4

> P 9-LESBIAN: *I pray for her as well and for us…prayer made it also possible to cope …when you communicate with God, you cast all your troubles to Him, and you feel relieved, and you just sigh afterwards, feeling a sense of relief… and that things will be better.* 20:30 ¶ 151 – 153 in Transcript 9

Religious messages such as "God is love" seemed to give participants confidence, and they used such messages to question and challenge negative, homophobic sentiments from the religious structures.

> P1-LESBIAN*: What I like in the bible is that it is said that" love thy neighbour as you love the self…. the only thing we do is love each other; we are not hating anyone; we are not messing with anyone's life … The only thing we do is love; that is what God wants…that we love one another, that's it.* 3:29 ¶ 184 – 186 in Transcript 1

> She further added that *"P1-LESBIAN: Hence we say God is not only at church but everywhere, but when you are at church, and people are rejoicing there's life but if you, not yourself there's no life" (3:30 ¶ 190 in Transcript 1).*

The participants reported spirituality and navigating to spiritual places. The relationship with a Christian God seems to enable resilience for my participants; only one participant mentioned ancestors. Also, navigation to religious structures, such as participants reporting churches, enabled resilience despite some participants experiencing negative religious sentiments in these places. Thus, the Christian religion and a sense of connection with God are important, complex resources that facilitate their resilience.

Table 5.7: Theme 2, Sub-Theme 2

Theme 2_Subtheme 2: Engaging in sporting and recreational activities.

They are taking part in sporting and other recreational activities such as expressive arts and indigenous games such as "khathi", "diketo", and "Morabaraba". Expressive arts include singing, writing, dancing, leadership, and debating.

Inclusion criteria: Any reference to sporting and recreational activities and expressive arts	**Exclusion criteria:** Any reference to activities that are spiritual outside participation in sports and expressive arts

Despite Christian spirituality, some participants reported different forms of expressive arts and playing indigenous games. Participation in sports allowed participants to build their confidence and develop self-esteem. Also, sporting codes such as netball afforded transgender participants to express themselves, which contributed to good feelings. Participants in the study (i.e., P4, P6, P12, P5) who engaged in sporting codes at school gained a platform to express themselves while being appreciated by others for doing so. They realised their unique talents, gifts or special abilities, which contributed to feelings of self-worth, for example:

> P4-GAYMAN: *Yes, I was a member of indigenous games. They helped me to "outgrow myself" as a gay person because when we speak of indigenous games, we talk about "khathi", "diketo", and "Morabaraba" to grow up to be strong to be proud of the person who I am because, at some point, I will play in front of many people, then I will have to be myself, and I feel more comfortable playing it in front of other people.* 5:17 ¶ 67 – 69 in Transcript 4

> P6-NONBINARY: *"Made me feel good…I used to write stories to distract myself. Sometimes, I wrote, and sometimes, I sang and danced. Even though it has been a while, I don't have the energy anymore" (2:21 ¶ 91 – 93 in Transcript 6).*

> P 12- GAYMAN: *I got so many leadership positions at school because of my academics. That's where I found healing when I started shining academically. That's when I said, Oh, Free State debating team. It's when I felt like I was also a human at the end of the day.* 23:13 ¶ 30 in Transcript 12.

P5-TRANSWOMAN: *With many things, like at school, I used to play netball while playing netball. I was a centre, when they brought netball they didn't say you would wear shorts, but I was counted as a team of twelve, each of us would arrive. I will get my Sqebazana (Short skirt).* 6:39 ¶ 178 – 184 in Transcript 5

Involvement in sports and indigenous games was not only good for the health of my participants, but their narratives show how such involvement positively impacted their psychological well-being; it offered them a space to express themselves and gain confidence. Self-expression for Participant 6 enabled them to relieve stress through dancing and singing. For Participant 4, it was an opportunity to be celebrated by others. At the same time, P12 participated in netball and P5 in debate. They felt that their gender expression and sexuality were affirmed and they actually had something to do in their school community.

Participant 6, who experienced significant non-affirmative sentiments from their family as well as from school, reported that:

P6-NONBINARY*: I always sang to make myself feel better. RESEARCHER: Singing? ... what kind of songs? P6-NONBINARY: Back then, it used to be a lot of Pop, RNB your Beyoncé, Christina, I'll just sing sometimes, write and would just create a new world.* 2:11 ¶ 77 – 80 in Transcript 6

They also reported:

P6-NONBINARY: *"I used to write stories to distract myself. Sometimes I wrote and sometimes sang and danced." (2:21 ¶ 91 – 93 in Transcript 6).*

Participant 12 mentioned leadership positions and participating in the debate as resilience-enabling activities. He realised his special abilities, which facilitated the process of feeling like fitting in social spaces, especially at school. This participant also faced feelings of exclusion and microaggressions from their primary schooling days. When he started to excel in both leadership, academics and sports, he gained a sense of belonging.

P 12- GAYMAN*: I got so many leadership positions at school because of my academics. That's where I found healing when I started shining academically. That's when I said, Oh, Free State debating team. It's when I felt like I was also a human at the end of the day.* 23:13 ¶ 30 in Transcript 12

Active participation in sporting codes, indigenous games, leadership and debate facilitates resilience at the individual level. Also, it intersects with resilience at a social level as it allows LGBTQ+ youth to interact with others and with their environment. Moreover, it strongly enhances psychological qualities such as confidence and positive self-esteem, allowing individuals to thrive amid their adversities.

Table 5.8: Theme 2, Sub-Theme 3

Theme 2_Subtheme 3: Possessing positive psychological qualities that enable thriving in adversity.	
Showing resistance to hetero and cis-normativity, positive internal LGBTQ+ identity, and confidence. Confidence entails a demonstration of being sure of oneself, which includes being sure of LGBTQ+ identity and freely expressing such an identity with a minimal fear of exclusion and using typical/normative mechanisms to cope with the negative psychological impact of internalised homonegativity as well as hetero- and cis-normative culture in families, schools, and the community at large.	
Inclusion criteria: Any reference to psychological qualities an individual possesses that enables them to cope	**Exclusion criterion:** Any reference to social support structures such as family, friends, and the community at large

The participants in the study demonstrated resistance to heteronormativity and cisnormativity by actively asserting their LGBTQ+ identities, despite the potential risks associated with familial, educational, and societal contexts. The participants critically examined and scrutinised the prevailing heteronormative ideologies within religious institutions and educational systems, with a specific focus on the uniform policy. They demonstrated self-confidence when discussing LGBTQ+ subjects, engaging with literature about LGBTQ+ matters, and conducting online research to acquire information. Advocacy efforts encompassed various strategies, including disseminating knowledge on sexuality within families, engaging the community, and challenging the local primary health system. When confronted with external challenges, participants in the study reported experiencing positive internal dialogue, displaying optimism, and adopting a self-reliant attitude.

In challenging hate and exclusion in local church structures, some participants reported:

P4-GAYMAN: *As for me, if the person doesn't have love, I don't see why they should pray; what are you praying for because you don't have God in yourself ... How can you hate a person and claim to have God? How is that even possible ... And also about acceptance, the very same way they preach to people to accept God, it's the very same way they can teach people to accept others according to who they are and what they are.* 5:66 ¶ 428 – 436 in Transcript 4

P11-LESBIAN*: like why God loves all of us, and God knew up from our mother 's wombs why do they make things hard for us that we are not feeling comfortable of going to churches, sometimes a person feels like going to church and knowing that I have to wear a skit at that time I don't have Yahhhh it doesn't make sense.* 22:27 ¶ 130 – 132 in Transcript 11

P8-TRANSMAN: *haa [Laughs] So it's not a while ago, my paternal aunt's time my granny passed away; when I got into the bedroom, my aunt asked, "Are you gay? I asked her what is gay, and she said she didn't know; I relied on saying do you see, you are talking about something you also don't know.* 8:17 ¶ 263 in Transcript 8

Some participants (i.e., P3, P4, P5) reported reading books about LGBTQ+ people, which facilitated their emotional well-being through reflecting on narratives of different LGBTQ+ people across the world and gave them tips for managing social risks, for example:

At a funeral of the gay who was killed, some motivational speaker encouraged us, telling us that people don't like us; they are quarrelling with you out of something they don't know. He even gave us some novels like that book. When you read it inside, it has different stories of people who are gay. So reading gives you a clear picture that this is how things are like, in the world, this is how gay people live, so it means the way I am, I have to live like a character in that book. 6:24 ¶ 122 in Transcript 5

Other participants (i.e., P3, P7, P8) actively searched for information on the internet, particularly about the transitioning process, since local health facilities could not provide such information; for example, the following participants reported that:

P3-TRANSWOMAN*: Ohh, I went to Google and searched how can I get breasts, yet I am a male; hormonal therapy just appeared, and I just tapped to hormonal therapy, then I saw the pills for your buts to grow, for your breasts.* 4:53 ¶ 235 – 236 in Transcript 3

The other participant indicated that:

P8-TRANSMAN: *So from there, in that three months, I was looking on YouTube on social networks trying to search for a person who acts like that what they are, so while I was still searching, I got a video of this other guy they refer as Buck Angel … while he was explaining his story, I was like, hai man, you know I am this person, and then I found out that the term for this person that I am is Transgender.* 8:36 ¶ 135 – 137 in Transcript 8

Confident participants involved in presenting LGBTQ+ topics during the life orientation period demonstrated advocacy for inclusion and optimism. For example, in her advocacy for other LGBTQ+ people in her community, P3 commented:

P3-TRANSWOMAN*: I was like, okay, I have been working with Retshitse; I am one of the key populators for Restsitse, so the information I take from Retshitse 's WhatsApp group, I pass it to the peer educator, so telling them you can't treat such a person like this of a person gets to the clinic they are not supposed to look for lubricants they must be displayed, and the person can pick up for themselves.* 4:51 ¶ 228 in Transcript 3

Also, in showing optimism,

P3-TRANSWOMAN: I *always tell myself that I won't be defeated by something that cannot talk if I say a pen you are going to write, it will be writing because it doesn't have a mouth … I tell myself to do something you see you are going to do I cannot build a mansion now because I am not working What I am saying is do a thing they way you want to do it don't follow what others are doing, do it your way do it as you want don't consider what you will lose those will be addressed after that, do what you want*. 4:68 ¶ 301 in Transcript 3

Other participants (i.e., P7 and P12) reported self-relying attitudes in instances where opportunities for affirmation were few, for example:

P7-TRANSWOMAN: *I think…..building a strong character out of this. As I said, I build myself in such a way that I don't want people's opinions. If you wait for my opinion, it means everyone's opinion will always drag you down, so every time you will want people's opinions, there will never be a time when you will know yourself.* 7:28 ¶ 243 in Transcript 7

Also,

> P 12- GAYMAN: *So I grew up with no sense of belonging anywhere. The only thing is it tuned me into an attention-seeking human being because you don't have self-expression. It made me like someone who said, "I'm gonna show them." from primary school, I was like Let me take myself out there; let me perform academically, cos there's nothing for you if you do make yourself go up, so I knew that from primary school.* 23:10 ¶ 22 in Transcript 12.

Some participants (I.e., P4, P5, P8 and P11) in my research questioned and challenged hetero- and cis-normative sentiments by church leaders and school community members. For example, questioning homophobic sentiments from the conservative Christian community:

> P4-GAYMAN: *As for me, if the person doesn't have love, I don't see the reason what they should pray; what are you praying for because you don't have God in yourself... How can you hate a person and claim to have God? How is that even possible?*

Also, when a pastor referred to homosexuality being a democratic phenomenon which was non-existent during the apartheid era in South Africa, P8, feeling offended and challenging a pastor who claimed that LGBTQ+ people existed after the democratic regime, commented:

> P8-TRANSMAN: *I was like, hai Ntate (Sir), you are speaking something I don't know ... I was like, sir, you speak of something you don't know; you want to say is old as you are, you have never seen a person who was similar to me before 1994 ... he said, eh has; after 1994, they said everyone should do what they want, so I told him you are making up a story. Stay with my mother in the house. We will talk, but I don't know when. For now, I don't want to talk with you about your 1994 story.* 8:9 ¶ 171 – 175 in Transcript 8

> P11-LESBIAN: *God loves all of us, and God knew from our mothers' wombs why they make things hard for us, and we are not feeling comfortable going to churches. Sometimes a person feels like going to church and knowing that I have to wear a skit at that time or don't have Yahhhh it doesn't make.* 22:27 ¶ 130 – 132 in Transcript 11

Participant 11, like others (P4, P5, P8) in their statements, questioned the hetero- and cis-normative culture in churches, which often results in feelings of exclusion and marginalisation. Questioning exclusion practices in churches enabled participants to assert their viewpoints or perspectives surrounding gender and sexual diversity. Furthermore, questioning exclusion

could reflect a sense of a well-formed identity, which also entails embracing one's identity. It also relates to other sets of psychological qualities, such as confidence and positive self-esteem.

Looking at my findings thus far, individualistic resilience qualities intersect with risk factors in such a manner that the greater the individualistic qualities, the less the effects of internalised homophobia. Participants who showed more individual qualities related to resilience, such as confidence, questioning heteronormative ideologies, and having a sense of connection with God, had a robust defence against internalising negative statements and sentiments from their community.

5.4.3 Theme 3: Relational and Structural Supports Within the Rural Ecology

Relational support that facilitates LGBTQ+ youth resilience ranges from family peers to friends, teachers, and community members who show affirmation and provide material and emotional support. The role players also advocate for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ youth, and such affirmation positively impacts the psychological well-being of LGBTQ+ youth.

Table 5.9: Theme 3, Sub-Theme 1

Theme 3_Subtheme 1: Experiences of Immediate and Extended Family Affirmation	
Family expresses acceptance of LGBTQ+ identity through pro-affirmative gestures, spoken language, and advocating for inclusion in school and the community—emotional and material support from immediate and extended family members.	
Inclusion criterion: Any reference to family support, including nuclear and extended family members such as relatives	**Exclusion criteria:** Any reference to affirmation by individuals outside the nuclear and extended family

Despite the prevailing norms, some families actively demonstrate affirmation to their LGBTQ+ child. Often, some families start not affirming but end up showing love and support to sexually and gender-diverse children. In most instances, in the beginning, non-affirmation is owing to a lack of knowledge, cultural prescripts, and the influence of religion. However, some families manage to resist these influences. Most participants, except Participants 6 and 11, reported that their family now accept their sexuality. Acceptance of sexuality seems to be linked to their confidence, self-acceptance, and overall emotional well-being. Participants 6 and 11 seem to be experiencing symptoms related to depression, which strongly suggests that non-affirmation leads to compromised mental well-being.

Acceptance was mostly demonstrated through pro-affirmative language, including gestures and using the correct pronouns, which fostered a sense of belonging in LGBTQ+ youth in a nuclear family. Furthermore, not only did parents, mostly mothers, demonstrate affirmation, but they also advocated for inclusion in the school system.

My participants mostly experienced pro-affirmative gestures, which included the use of language, for example:

> P2-GAYMAN*: He can even call me now and say "mfazi unjani"? (Woman, how are you?) he is Xhosa. He calls me a woman now. I think he made peace with the fact that my son is gay. Somehow, I would feel like for him it's like that cos when I'm visiting him in the Eastern Cape; I will act straight.* 1:60 ¶ 254 in Transcript 2.

> P3-TRANSWOMAN*: Things are good currently. To show that things are good, she used to call me a boy, but now, she calls me Ausi; I will say yes, girls, I am a girl now. " She used to say you are a boy, but now she adapts.* 4:57 ¶ 265 in Transcript 3

> P5-TRANSWOMAN: *My mother supported me when I was old by buying me clothes, saying that I saw some heels at some place on special, why don't you go buy them. Even on my birthday, she would buy me girlish gifts. She even started to call me Ausi Neo; even my uncle is no longer calling me Tau…..even the facial expression when he (referring to the uncle) says "ngwana rona", my sibling. I can sense his love, acceptance and everything.* 6:30 ¶ 138 – 142 in Transcript 5

Affirmation goes beyond language, and it goes to pro-affirmative actions, including material and financial support. Most of the participants in the study also reported accounts of supportive families which contributed to their overall well-being. Material support consisted of families buying clothes that matched the gender identity of their child. Material support was also reported regarding different expenses related to LGBTQ+ identity.

> P8-TRANSMAN: *I remember when starting my transitioning, they would assist with transport money, like from Mma Napo Hospital to u Universitas Hospital or my appointments in Bloemfontein; we depart from here at 4 am, and they would give me transport money to Mma Napo (Local hospital) and then money for food on the way. I mean, sometimes, when I was not working, they would do that and say go, you can't miss your appointments because you don't have money or for other reasons.* 8:16 ¶ 251 in Transcript 8

> P3-TRANSWOMAN: *I got inside and told my Mother that Mom Fola (pseudom) had just told me that that was such an event in Bloemfontein. He is saying it's pride. I don't know what it is like; I can't just elaborate on what it is, but I have to be there, okay no problem, everything that you need, I will give you.* 4:17 ¶ 84 – 88 in Transcript 3.

LGBTQ+ youth in the study also received emotional support from their families; for example, P2, after he was raped, regarding his family, reported:

> P2-GAYMAN: *"You know my mom and my brother are there every day. He'd call me before I slept to make sure I was OK. He's not in South Africa. He works overseas; we talk almost daily and check if I'm OK mentally"* *(1:17 ¶ 76 in Transcript 2).*

Participant 4 reported that while his father and brothers were not treating him well, his mother intervened; he reported: *"At some point, my Mom actually was a pillar of strength because she is the one who stood up for me by that moment when my father used to discriminate against me, even my brothers" (P4-GAYMAN).*

Participant 8, who was going through an emotionally straining gender reassignment medical procedure, reported that:

> P8-TRANSMAN: *Emotional support, because I remember at first, going travelling to Bloemfontein, I came back drained; I was tired of saying I was leaving this thing; they would lift me, saying don't quit if it worth having to do it for yourself. If you leave this thing, you will regret it in the long run. Do it even if it doesn't go at your pace, and have patience; eventually, it may come right.* 8:29 ¶ 387 in Transcript 8

Beyond emotional support, families advocated for the inclusion of their LGBTQ+ child both at school and in the community, for example:

> P10-LESBIAN: *"My mom called the principal as she was a domestic worker around Gauteng it was distant for her to come in person she asked him "Sir what you are looking for is education or whether a child wears what type of trouser" (21:15 ¶ 67 in Transcript 10).*

The support of parents who affirm their child's sexuality can also involve advice on relationship challenges, for example:

> P3-TRANSWOMAN: *There was this time when I argued with my boyfriend; I was cheating though I was wrong; my Mother just came to me to tell me that no, Kabo, in a relationship, you have to be loyal; you cannot just go and sleeping around if you know you have a boyfriend. She took my boyfriend; she sat us both down and said yes, mph made a mistake; forgive her and move on. She further said, Kabo, please take care of your partner, and you, Tumelo, be like this.* 4:41 ¶ 186 in Transcript 3

While participants mostly valued family affirmation, I noted that some families had to undergo the "mourning process" owing to cultural and religious ideals before accepting their LGBTQ+ child. Families of my participants got involved in a reparation process following the rapture caused by the previous non-affirmation of LGBTQ+ youth gender and sexual diversity. For example, Participants 1, 3, 4, 5 and 9 reported themes of reparations in their families following a period where families were trying to navigate their acceptance. Thus, it was clear that family affirmation often intersects with religion and culture and can have a positive or negative influence.

Table 5.10: Theme 3, Sub-Theme 2

Theme 3_Subtheme 2 Supportive relationships from teachers, peers and friends	
Different from support, including advocacy, curiosity by peers to learn about LGBTQ+, emotional support, and the whole school community addressing homophobic bullying. Friends, peers, and allies support structures and networks for emotional and material support, a sense of community with both hetero and homosexual peers and friends.	
Inclusion criteria: Any reference to social support from people outside the nuclear and extended family	**Exclusion criteria:** Any reference to family support and individualistic self-reliant psychological attributes

Relational support structures that are resilience-enabling were reported in the school ecology, which entailed support from school managers, teachers, and fellow learners. LGBTQ+ youth in the study navigated their way to form supportive networks with other LGBTQ+ youth, and some attended gay pride events arranged outside their communities. They also formed relationships with heterosexual peers who offered them protection from bullying. Romantic partners were also reported to provide financial and emotional support. Supportive relationships entailed emotional and financial support and advice; peers were curious to learn

about the LGBTQ+ identity, and teachers and school managers addressed homophobic bullying. Life orientation teachers prepared lessons on gender and sexual diversity and encouraged participation.

Some participants in the study reported general acceptance of their LGBTQ+ identity at school, including affirmation and support from teachers, which facilitated feelings of protection, belonging, and love. The participants reported:

> P1-LESBIAN: *Yeah, the school accepted me after I accepted myself. I had the best grades from 10 until 12 in my high school life; I was free, bro. I was not hiding if they said boys on this side. My teachers would say it's okay if you want to go that side and are comfortable going there. It's fine. Do you understand?* 3:13 ¶ 84 in Transcript 1

> "P7-TRANSWOMAN: *You know I was not that child……hence, I told you I don't know what bullying I don't know what it is, and every school I went to is like the school has a lot of LGBTQ. In every class, I think there are about five of them.* 7:20 ¶ 177 in Transcript 7 Mthandeki. edited

The principal addressed homophobic bullying and feeling uncomfortable owing to using gender-binary toilets:

> P4-GAYMAN: *So if ever boys are going to discriminate against you when you go to their toilets as much as girls are going to discriminate against you when you go to their toilets, I, as the principal, am gonna give you toilets specifically for gays if there are gays here at school that you know that we don't know as principal or say teachers its for you to collect them then I am gonna give you a key for a toilet that is only gonna be used by you guys, then it will be only to your responsibility to make sure that it's always clean and hygienic.* 5:11 ¶ 37 in Transcript 4

Participant 5 reported that she was offered the opportunity to teach dance skills to girls at her school; she reported:

> P5-TRANSWOMAN: *Teachers were not judgemental. They supported me this way: I am a dance choreographer and a dancer, so I used to teach children to dance at school. After school, I taught them Setswana dance, "sepotjwa" dance and all that so that we went to shows; they gave me a room at school; I was dealing with girls saying that they said you would work with girls… … I then realised that these people consider me because if they were ignorant, they would say I should teach guys, but*

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no, they said take girls. That was so when they could go to the female hostel on recreation day. I will go there. 6:35 ¶ 162 – 169 in Transcript 5

Some participants reported close relationships with certain teachers who offered them emotional support and advice; for example, P4 received spiritual advice from his teacher while experiencing emotional challenges due to bullying.

P4-GAYMAN*: Moral support in a way when I feel bad about something; I will go to my life science teacher; even at night, I will call her and tell her this that that that, and she will say if you feel like crying, cry, then we will talk tomorrow. ......At a certain time when I am short of something, she will give me money or something which she does have.* 5:36 ¶ 204 – 212 in Transcript 4

He also reported:

P4-GAYMAN*: She will comfort me in a way, and she will tell me that it's okay, just give God space, keep praying, and never give up on praying. God is alive. God is great; he is magnificent. Keep on praying everything will be right; never lose hope, just be strong.* 5:37 ¶ 212 in Transcript 4

P7 reported a very close relationship with her teacher before and following the death of her mother:

P7-TRANSWOMAN: *This teacher wanted to spend time with us; in her free time, she would call; I think she wanted to fill that space that she is a mother, and her children and grandchildren are far away from her, the only children who were close to her it was us. Because even when I am at home, she will ask permission to spend time with me. Even when my mother was hospitalised, she visited her.* 7:23 ¶ 201 – 205 in Transcript 7

P8 felt affirmed by his teachers. He reported that:

P8-TRANSMAN: *So when he arrives in class, there is a thing that he will call the males to stand up; when he says males, I will go to the males and when he says girls, the girls will go and stand the other side. So those who did not understand would say you are a girl; go and stand with girls, so he used to shut down that argument by saying leave him alone. You see?* 8:48 ¶ 81 in Transcript 8

P4 reported that his teachers took an active role in addressing bullying, which made the participant feel protected:

> P4-GAYMAN: *I remember the day I wanted to go to the boys' toilet, then there was this gang; I don't remember what they were smoking, then they tried to insult me and asked me, what do you want here, you gay? Then I ran to Mr Bee and told him the whole story. We arrived there and found these boys smoking, and he called them to the office and asked them what the problem was. He dealt with them very decisively. He even suspended them because he spoke to them at once, and they repeated it.* 5:15 ¶ 51 – 59 in Transcript 4

Peers reported being curious to learn about the LGBTQ+ gender and sexual identity; the participants reported:

> P2-GAYMAN: *"Exactly, it was exciting for me. Even boys in my class were about it."*
>
> RESEARCHER: *"So people were excited to learn about it?"*
>
> P2-GAYMAN: *Yes, about LGBTQI, I sometimes got a text from someone saying we could meet after school. I enjoyed the class, and I wanted to learn more about LGBTQ. I never thought it would come from someone "straight " heterosexual, as I never got support from them, but my classmates made it possible, and that's when I told myself that I should be free.* 1:38 ¶ 123 – 125 in Transcript_2

Emotional support from heterosexual peers was reported by participants, for example:

> P7-TRANSWOMAN: *"When we got to grade 12, we knew each other, and my classmates loved sexual topics. It's an everyday topic with every chance we get, and everyone participates"* (*7:39 ¶ 441 in Transcript 7*).

P12 related a story about a heterosexual friend he had since primary school who provided him with emotional support and affirmation. He reported:

> P 12- GAYMAN: *Swanky, yes; he called me. He said, "Friend, you know I am not gay neh there is this gay person, I'll send you my Netflix details" because I don't watch TV often. I didn't know the show then, and I saw this guy. He (referring to this friend) said, "Bro, this guy is you; this is your personality. You are owning the space;*

you are so big." I've never seen in any space, you know, where a gay person in Africa.
23:40 ¶ 130 in Transcript 12

P7 and P8 related their experiences with heterosexual classmates:

P7-TRANSWOMAN*: We are at the point where we are more than classmates. We are family as if we had known each other long before we met in 10th Grade ... my classmates loved sexual topics. It's an everyday topic with every chance we get, and everyone participates"* 7:39 ¶ 441 in Transcript 7

P8-TRANSMAN *But a funny thing is that I had guy friends, but I feel more like them. My friends from high school said, but because you are one of us, we will also change your name. No boy goes by the name of Thembi.* 8:2 ¶ 37 in Transcript 8.

Other forms of support came from sexual partners, which entailed advice and emotional and financial support, as reported by some of the study participants:

P5-TRANSWOMAN: *When I was in Thabanchu, I got a boyfriend upon my arrival; he is still my boyfriend. He stayed with me and supported me with money when my heart was broken; he would sit me down….he would say, no man, baby, these things happen. This is on earth; there will always be judgment. Some people don't like gays so that I will accept you, and some won't.* 6:22 ¶ 116 – 118 in Transcript 5

P 11, who faced symptoms related to depression and had suicidal thoughts owing to non-affirmation from her mother and unsupportive school environment, had a sexual partner who supported her emotionally; she reported that:

P11-LESBIAN: *She is my ex-girlfriend; my best friend is my ex, so maybe whenever something hurts me, I will tell her, but as a joke, let's say something hurts me today. I won't tell her. Let's say I will take a week without. I will tell her the time I have healed. I will only tell her as a joke like, yeah, you know this, and this happened.*

Not only did participants report positive and affirming relationships with heterosexual peers and support from their sexual partners, but they also navigated into forming relationships with individuals with the same gender and sexual identity (i.e., P3, P4, P5, p6, P10 and P12) and reported support from these relationships. For example, P5 reported a relationship with a transsexual friend who mentored and gave her financial and emotional support; she said:

P3-TRANSWOMAN: *There was an LGBTQ+ awareness campaign in Welkom(a town about 80 kilometres from Ventersburg), so this friend of mine was named Fola. She is so such a darling to me; this is a person who helped me to be the person that I am ... Fola was doing Grade 12 that year, and I Was doing Grade 8; he knew that Micka was gay(referring to herself), and he hadn't come out of the closet, and I think he would be happy to come out of the closet to experience how happy this world is like, he approached me and told me that there is an awareness in Welkom, the transportation is free and so is everything you need to avail yourself.* 4:12 ¶ 60 – 62 in Transcript 3

P4, who is an orphan, reported that he received financial and emotional support from his friends:

P4-GAYMAN*: Friends that I have in my circle, people that I befriend, are there for me; sometimes, when I need something, I will call them, and they will send me money. Even though they don't send me money and I need some soap, they will say Chommie (Friend), come. I got more soap in my house, and I will go, and they will give me.* 5:69 ¶ 406 in Transcript 4

He added:

P4-GAYMAN*: "They are transgender, right? They went through more than what I went through, so somewhere, they will somehow confide, share experiences with me, we will console each other and be okay"* *(5:49 ¶ 272 – 275 in Transcript 4).*

P5, who used to stay in a school residence (hostel) in her high school years, reported that:

P5-TRANSWOMAN: *My gay friends, there was something that used to be called a hostel festival; other hostels from another school would come to play with us, so they used to come and sleep in my room; that is when they told me that Mmataka (my friend) when you are gay you date other men and like men, but they were three of them, the other one used to tell me that I do both Men and Women so I was like what is this thing.* 6:15 ¶ 81 – 82 in Transcript 5

Social relationships are a protective factor for participants, especially in a rural community with little structural support. Participants related emotional and financial support and advice; peers were curious to learn about the LGBTQ+ identity, and teachers and school managers addressed homophobic bullying. All this support

seemed to be positively impacting participants' psychological well-being. Thus, resilience enabling support from superordinate systems such as socio-ecology intersects with a psychological system to support resilience.

Table 5.11: Theme 3, Sub-Theme 3

Theme 3_Subtheme 3: Wider community members, professional and structural supports
Affirming intervention provided by health care, social services, local police, community members support, and community-based structural supports aimed at cultivating the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth. Support from the community involves acceptance of LGBTQ+ identity, typified by expressions of care and love. Community support entails the absence of aggression and using different affiliations, such as advocacy for inclusion and emotional and material support. Community-based support is an accepting atmosphere in the community, including support from non-profit organisations and the local municipality.

Inclusion criterion: Any reference to support structures within the rural community context in the Free State province, including local community or other surrounding rural communities	**Exclusion criterion:** Any reference to support structures derived outside the Free State rural community context

Service providers, including health care practitioners, NGO workers, and managers, have been reported by participants as resilience-enabling. Participants in this study reported that support from service providers and community members consists of material and emotional support, advocacy for inclusion, and advice, which is resilience-enabling. The supportive structures my participants reported reinforce a sense of belonging, connection and participation in the community.

A few participants (i.e., P2, P4, and P7) in the study reported professional intervention such as helpful nurses, medical support from doctors and psychologists, protection from the police, and social worker intervention. Compared to other participants in the study who view nurses in local clinics as non-affirmative, P4 reported:

> P4-GAYMAN: *The nurses are so good; they are so good they even like us. Whenever we go to the clinic, we come out; they will queue us in front of other patients and call*

us aside; if the clinic is not full of people, they will call us into the office and help us before others and leave. 5:57 ¶ 338 in Transcript 4

P7 reported that:

P7-TRANSWOMAN: *About my transition journey, I could still remember it was 2021. I told them I wanted to start with hormonal injections to get girls' hormones. They said to go to the doctor. As they thought I was joking, I did go alone to Dr Brit...He checked me.* 7:41 ¶ 445 – 447 in Transcript 7

Other participants reported community members' support in the spirit of Ubuntu from neighbours and community members in the streets and religious spaces. Participants also reported support from community-based LGBTQ+ organisations.

The data gathered from this study suggests that some community members in different rural spaces demonstrate acceptance of LGBTQ+ youth. Acceptance of LGBTQ+ identity was reported by P1, P2, P4 and P7, who felt that their communities generally accept their sexuality and gender expression despite some micro and macroaggressions they heard of or experienced in their communities. For example, in a school context, P2 reported:

P2-GAYMAN: *"Besides that, now I'm myself around the school. I can be free. Everyone knows Ayabonwe, who is gay in Nkgopoleng. Everyone accepted me, even those I didn't expect they'd be in my life"* (1:42 ¶ 144 in Transcript 2).

P 1 added:

P1-LESBIAN: *"It's my neighbours. They have accepted and loved me and never made me feel otherwise. I've never experienced homophobic action or comments from my teachers, neighbours and people from my township people. It's just support"* 3:42 ¶ 287 in Transcript 1

P4 related experiences of affirmation from grandmothers in a local nursing home he was volunteering at, he said:

P4-GAYMAN: *'The old age places where there is full of older people, I will go there somewhere somehow help them, wash them, speak to them. The Grannies will tell stories of their past, that this thing of being gay existed a long way back for years in those days.* 5:38 ¶ 218 in Transcript 4

The lady shared an indigenous perspective of gender and sexual diversity in her community in a supportive and affirmative way. Also, Participant 7 reported:

> *P7-TRANSWOMAN: "They never treated me less as a girl because I always wanted to be treated as a girl; if the boys go, Kamo will always remain; there has never been a time where they will say Kamo go to other boys."* 7:15 ¶ 124 – 127 in Transcript 7

Other participants had experiences of receiving material support from allies and community members. For example, P4 related a story of receiving accommodation from a community member residing in Bloemfontein when they needed to attend a gay pride event; he said:

> P3-TRANSWOMAN: *So, the first week during the week, Fola told me that from here to Bloemfontein, we couldn't just go there because of sleeping arrangements; this means we need to go to Welkom to connect, and there is free transport from Welkom to Bloemfontein, so I asked where are we going to sleep friend he then told me that there is this other one lady who stays in Welkom and she is staying in Bloemfontein she has offered us accommodation from Thursday until Saturday, I said okay Chommie no problem.* 4:18 ¶ 90 – 92 in Transcript 3

P3 reported material support from a community member who realised that she is transitioning; she reported:

> *On my way, not even approaching halfway to where I was going, I heard someone saying, oh, are you gay? I wasn't aware that you are gay; I wasn't aware that you wear dresses. Please come collect some of my dresses that I think will fit you…she was a community member, and I said I would come sweaty to pick dresses' then my self-esteem went up to say attest someone is noticing me that Kabo is wearing dresses.* 4:25 ¶ 118 – 121 in Transcript 3

My participants reported that community-based non-profit organisations and those outside the community offered seasonal intervention as resilience-enabling. Non-profit organisations seem to be a valuable asset to my participants as they advocate for inclusion through raising awareness, educating families, including the community and challenging the prevailing hetero- and cis-normative practices in different community spaces such as clinics and schools. Three participants reported support from community NGOs, they said:

> P3-TRANSWOMAN: *Then the following month, Retshitse (an NGO outside the community) came asking us how the clinic treatment is; I told them about my*

situation, and they went to the clinic after, then I went, I think, two months later. I was just going to assess the situation and collect some lubricants. 4:49 ¶ 224 in Transcript 3

P5 also reported::

P5-TRANSWOMAN: *While in Thabanchu, I went to Tholoana e Molemo, an organisation like Rainbow Seeds; I explained that they go from town to town. If they are not in Thabanchu, they are at Lady Brand. So, when my Mom (grandmother) came with my uncle, I took them to Tholoana e Molemo (an NGO in the local community). They sat them down and told them that you can't do this to a child. They further explained that they are not the only child going through this and are not bewitched, but they are like that he is God's work; they then became right towards me after.* 6:32 ¶ 144 in Transcript 5

P8, on the onset of his gender transition process, reposted obtaining help from an NGO that came into her community to offer intervention; they ensured that he obtained necessary referral forms, which the local clinic was not aware of:

P8-TRANSMAN*: You see, they are not helping at all. Luckily, at Rainbow Seeds, a nurse took me to a local clinic. Upon arriving at the local clinic, DoH (Department of Health), people were unaware of the referral form they were supposed to give me.* 8:33 ¶ 369 – 371 in Transcript 8

Participants reported other forms of support from community members. For example, P3 reported that a community member encouraged her to start a makeup salon, and she further marketed this business innovation. She reported:

P3-TRANSWOMAN: *She marketed my makeup salon; if you want to make up you can also go it's only R50, the problem is that she has already decided a price for me. Haha (The participant and I laughed). It's like she is doing natural at R50 and Drag Queen's makeup is too expensive. That one is R200; I was okay.* 4:45 ¶ 206 in Transcript 3

P4 reported having received advice and financial support from the neighbour and emotional support from a nursing home:

P4-GAYMAN: *So Mme Mmamorena will tell me that whatever you did is totally wrong and you don't need to do that, so advice and love and respect made me be what I am RESEARCHER: So she gave you advice? P4-GAYMAN: advice, love and respect, never humiliated me.* 5:32 ¶ 171 – 176 in Transcript 4

P4 further reported good experiences from a nursing home:

P4-GAYMAN: *it helped me a lot because sometimes they will make jokes and will laugh to the fullest until I forget what I came out from; let's say I came out at home after being insulted by my father, then I will go there, and they will know how to cheer me up in that way …this grandmother, but I didn't know her name, but when I entered at the door she could read me, when I was in a bad space she could see me and say, you are not okay with what happened; I will try to hide it, she knows how to cheer me up.* 5:41 ¶ 225 – 228 in Transcript 4

P7 reported growing up in a collectivist community that took care of her after her mother passed away at the age of 10; she reported:

P7-TRANSWOMAN: *The way I grew up, everyone is your parent, most importantly, people who are near you when you grow up … the reason is that we all are reprimanded collectively; everything is being collectively done to us. It doesn't mean a parent will focus on one child only. Even where we were fletched at school, one parent would collect all of us.* 7:17 ¶ 144 – 149 in Transcript 7

Other participants (P9 and P4) related experiences of affirmation with people they meet in religious spaces and local taverns in their communities. Other participants (i.e., P1, P4 and P9) related experiences of affirmation with people they met in religious spaces and local taverns in their communities. For example, P9 related that a local church recruited them and encouraged them to attend church; she said: *P 9-LESBIAN: To tell us that we shouldn't be children united at taverns, we should go to church. They will even marry us. You come as we are. They don't mind us"* 20:6 ¶ 38 – 39 in Transcript 9.

After experiencing exclusion in a charismatic church, P4 decided to join "kereke ya sephiri" related to his experience in this religious structure; he said:

P4-GAYMAN: *Hahaha (participant is laughing). It gives me power even when I come from it. Ever what the word that was read there and the hymns, I will be signing them. The word will be in me, and I will try to talk more and more and preach to*

others who are not attending "Kereke ya sephiri", the secret night vigil church….. I will be like, you know what? Last, I went to a church at this certain person's place, and this was the word that was preached the ... it gave me that that I should attend church, and it's not the church; it's a prayer, a secret congregation; we meet with a lot of people, we chat and share ideas, it's so nice. 5:47 ¶ 254 – 264 in Transcript 4 .5:47 ¶ 254 – 264 in Transcript 4

Participants reported affirmation in a rural community despite instances of marginalisation and victimisation in this community. Community risks to LGBTQ+ youth exist concurrently with affirmative practices driven by community values such as ubuntu and the concept of love in a Christian community. Intersection community risks with support produces unique coping methods and paves pathways to resilience. For example, amid different risks, certain service providers, NGOs and churches display affirmative practices that positively impact their resilience's psychological domain. Thus, the social domain of participants can either have a positive or negative influence on their psychological resilience domain.

5.3.4. Theme 4: A Sense of Safety and Connection With the Environment

This theme includes community space, infrastructure and natural resources supporting the well-being of LGBTQ+ youth. Infrastructure such as the home environment fosters a sense of safety and feeling safe around community space, including places such as taverns, which contribute positively to the psychological well-being of sexually and gender-diverse youth.

Most participants (I.e., P2, P3, P4, P5, P8, P11, P12 - refer to the pictures in Figures 5.1 to 5.12 in the study) seem to rely on their home environment, including safe and secure infrastructure; they drew pictures of their uncles', grandparents', friends' and parents' houses. They (i.e., P3, P4, P9, P10, P12- refer to pictures in Figures 5.1 to 5.12 in the study) also drew pictures of local churches. Some participants drew pictures of local taverns (i.e., P3, P9, P10- refer to pictures in Figures 5.1 to 5.12 in the study). Participants 6 and 12 drew a picture of a mountain found in their community. Participant 3 drew a picture of a library, and P12 drew a picture of the local park.

The home environment seems to be resilience-enabling as participants prefer this environment to rest and have a sense of protection from the outside world. Other participants reported a sense of safety in their community spaces, which the absence of significant micro- and macroaggressions could have facilitated. The participants reported:

P1-LESBIAN: *Ey bro, you know that is very tricky cos you see my township is LGBTI safe cos I never heard that a gay is murdered or lesbian is raped, we are very safe here. There is a tavern on the outskirts where I can come back alone. Nothing would happen to others.* 3:34 ¶ 214 in Transcript 1

P4-GAYMAN: *Not in this community. No gay has been humiliated in this community because there are gays I know here, but they never had a problem before, but besides in the community, some of my friends go through a lot wanting to be accepted at home.* 5:54 ¶ 302 in Transcript 4

P7-TRANSWOMAN: *I think for me, everything has been nearby. The school was down the road, and I stayed at the third house from the corner; I have never experienced discrimination. Hence, I say when they say you are in danger in the community, I have never experienced that.* 7:14 ¶ 118 – 119 in Transcript 7

P8 related his experience at a community space where poets present their work; he said: *"P8-TRANSMAN then, in poetry sessions, you just come there irrespective of whether you are a girl or boy or unicorn or whatever; they don't mind. Everybody is welcome."* 8:61 ¶ 317 in Transcript 8 .

The participants who drew mountains reported:

P6-NONBINARY: *There used to be this mountain behind my street, and I used to go there with my friends. They are the ones that made me feel okay. One of them was also gay, and there was another one….we would go to this mountain there was a fore then a mountain then field on the other side of block seven we would pass the bridge to go there to watch hot guys and just chill it was fun, so every time I think of Kutlwanong I think about block seven and that mountain I feel like going again.* 2:8 ¶ 130 – 131 in Transcript 6)

P8-TRANSMAN: *"Usually, where I hike, there is a spot in Mabolela with a well with a waterfall. usually go there from time to time as atTsheseng, somewhere where we can ascend like this."* 8:60 ¶ 319 in Transcript 8)

A participant who drew a local library commented as follows to the researcher:

RESEARCHER: *I can see that you also drew the library.*[SEP]*P3-TRANSWOMAN: ohh, the library. I love it because it helps me gather information; when I do awareness, I*

know the L stands for this: this is how he or she feels. I am aware that now there are transmen and transwomen in this family of us; there are grannies, grandfathers, and aunts so so that we can bind and do one thing. Hence, the library is the source of information. 4:65 ¶ 288 – 289 in Transcript 3)

P2 reported a sense of connection with the local park; he reported:

P2-GAYMAN: *I think the park helped a lot because as much as I played in the park, I felt like I did belong there. I got there to play, be happy, swing around, and sometimes just listen to myself; I respect and value my space.* 1:47 ¶ 166 in Transcript 2

Most participants in the study reported local taverns as resilience-enabling; generally, taverns are places where they felt welcomed as opposed to local churches. A. participant reported:

P2-GAYMAN: *I was aware at the place called "Kwa Nzima chisa nyama (not real name)" they hosted three appreciation parties in one month to appreciate LGBTQ people, so I feel like as lesbian, gay and Trans, you are welcome at Kwa Nzima; the treatment is going to be good.* (1:54 ¶ 214 – 216 in Transcript 2)

P1 related her affirmation experiences at the local tavern where she felt respected by heterosexual males:

RESEARCHER*: "What sort of things do they do that show you that they respect you?*
P1-LESBIAN: *They never make me feel small. They don't attar those sexual comments."*

RESEARCHER: *"Yeah."*

P1-LESBIAN: *"We will change you; when I arrive at the groove, everyone says, "My man, take five." Where are the girls? And I say no, guys, I don't have them."* (3:36 ¶ 217 – 220 in Transcript 1) d

Participant 4 reported:

P4-GAYMAN: *Somewhere, somehow, I will go out to vibe; there is a nearby tavern that I normally go to; I have never been discriminated against. RESEARCHER: At the Tavern? P4-GAYMAN: not at all RESEARCHER: Tell me more? P4-GAYMAN: Hahaha(laughing), it's so nice and very enjoyable; I enjoy myself whenever I am there because people we meet there show love to each other even if I don't know you. I just*

get there with my drinks and put them on the table. We talk, hug, and get to know each other that way. It's so nice. That lifted my self-esteem. 5:50 ¶ 278 – 282 in Transcript 4

Participant 5 added

P5-TRANSWOMAN: *Yeah, so it happened that we went to Tweespruit in a local Tarven. Upon our arrival at Tarven, I was a bit uncomfortable. I was also not used to alcohol, so I saw heterosexual guys coming in and out with gays. The other Mjita (heterosexual man) was looking at me, but I was not there; I was very cold towards him. He even went to my friends and asked them why my friend was ignoring me, so my friends told me there was a man.*

RESEARCHER: *"Hhhh".*

P5-TRANSWOMAN: *"They said this is a man for you, so we went outside, and the guy proposed, telling me he had been looking at the. He then kissed me, but I was cold at first, but I got used to it"* (*6:16 ¶ 84 – 86 in Transcript 5).*

Participant 9 also reported affirmation from one of her local taverns; she added:

.P 9-LESBIAN: *The place is nice. We hosted our pride events there, and it's nice because we don't judge each other there. We live our thing. It's just nice, man… It's nice in the sense that we are free. Even the person who is in hiding is free. You just get surprised when you see them there; they are one of us.* 20:22 ¶ 117 – 121 in Transcript 9

Participant 10 reported that the tavern was a space where she could feel free to engage with heterosexual peers about her sexuality, including educating them about sexuality and how they can treat their girlfriends. She reported":

P10-LESBIAN: *"A woman takes longer to be turned off unlike man for you to please her play with her first, don't rush to intimacy so I favour tavern for such conversations and spreading of the word about us (referring to the LGBTQ+ community)"* (*21:23 ¶ 101 in Transcript 10)*

The physical environment in rural spaces, including infrastructure such as houses and taverns, seems to have positively impacted the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth. A sense of safety in a rural environment positively impacts the psychological domain of resilience. Also, spaces such as

taverns foster social resilience as they house conversations about gender and sexuality, and such conversations have a positive effect on the psychological well-being of LGBTQ+ youth. The natural and man-made environment intersects with social and psychological resilience. Also, throughout this research, participants mentioned other things, such as playing sports such as netball and indigenous games, which positively impacted the physical and psychological domain of their resilience.

5.4. Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, I reported four themes arising from the data sets' thematic analysis. The themes of this chapter show that even though LGBTQ+ youth face intersecting psychological, relational, and structural risk factors, they possess personal resilience qualities. Furthermore, their ecology, including families, schools and community environment, enable their resilience uniquely and contextually relevantly. They reported resilience enabling relationships with family members, peers, friends, teachers and community members. Some view their community environment as safe despite the macro- and microaggressions some participants experienced in their communities. In the next chapter, I link the themes in this chapter with the literature and my conceptual framework.

CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

As highlighted I conducted a phenomenological study to explore the multisystemic accounts of resilience to the risk factors of LGBTQ+ youth in a Free State rural community context. The study's results indicated that various psychological and spiritual attributes and factors related to relationships, social structures, and the environment played a role in promoting the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth. In this chapter, I discuss my research findings, linking them to existing literature and conceptual framework.

6.1 Themes Denoting Risk Factors

The findings discussed in the previous chapter strongly suggest that rural communities are indeed generative, dynamic, and complex (Moletsane, 2012). Rural ecology has social, historical, political, gender and sexuality ideologies that sustain it. These ideologies relate to the principle of structural determinism in systems theory (Becvar & Becvar, 2014). As highlighted by Francis (2021), Matsúmunyane and Hlalele (2019), and Mayeza (2021), heteronormativity, conservative cultural and religious values and norms, masculinity, and femininity typify rural spaces. The current heteronormative ideologies on the Free State rural community's similarity to other community contexts in an African continent are primarily rooted in the continent's history of colonialism (Khuzwayo-Magwaza, 2021; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019; Moreno et al., 2020).

In this section, I discuss risk factors at relational and structural levels and how the risks are internalised; such risks are consistent with the minority stress model theorisation.

6.1.1 Distal Stressors in Families, Schools and Communities and Proximal Stressors

In congruence with prior research conducted by Gyamerah et al. (2019), Luvuno et al. (2019), and Matsúmunyane and Hlalele (2019), the individuals who participated in the present study conveyed instances of familial denial, inconsistent affirmation, and non-affirmation, which were attributed to religious and cultural factors. Previous research has documented risk factors within the educational setting (Daniels et al., 2019; Francis, 2017). In the present study, participants conveyed instances of microaggressions involving verbal insults and negative sentiments directed towards them by nurses, religious leaders, and teachers. The relational risks appear to intersect with the community's prevailing heteronormative and cisnormative frameworks, contributing to the ongoing exclusion and marginalisation of LGBTQ+ youth across various aspects of their social environment.

In light of the substantial body of scholarly work (e.g., Eppretcht, 2014; Jones & Ferguson, 2020; Khuzwayo-Magwaza, 2021; Montle, 2021; Murray & Roscoe, 1998), it is evident that there is a wealth of literature documenting the presence of gender and sexual diversity within a pre-colonial African community. A solitary participant indicated that an older individual acknowledged the presence of individuals with diverse sexual orientations. In contrast, another participant shared their grandmother's belief that their child is bewitched. The understanding of indigenous perspectives on gender and sexual diversity appears to have diminished due to the prolonged influence of colonialism over several decades. Lopang (2014) posits that the decline in knowledge may have been attributed to the reluctance of African scholars to document these phenomena due to their perception of them as wicked. At the community level, the observed phenomenon could be attributed to indoctrination influenced by adherence to the Christian faith (Jones & Ferguson, 2020; Luvuno et al., 2019; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019).

The individuals in question faced challenges regarding their sexual orientation and gender identity due to cultural and religious norms within their communities. These norms included expectations for individuals to conform to traditional gender roles, such as marrying, having children, and engaging in gender-specific chores and activities. Additionally, religious beliefs held by their communities regarded non-conforming gender expressions as being associated with possession by demons and evil spirits. The results of this investigation align with the scholarly works of Bhana and Mayeza (2016), Govender et al. (2019), Luvuno et al. (2019), and Thobejane et al. (2018).

6.1.2 Structural Inequalities in Schools, Health System, Non-Affirmation in Church Structures and Unemployment

The study participants provided accounts of various structural risk factors, including unemployment, limited availability of LGBTQ+ healthcare information and resources in nearby clinics, absence of affirmation within local church institutions, and compulsory heteronormativity in schools, as evidenced by uniform policies. The findings from the study align with the current body of literature in South Africa, as evidenced by previous research conducted by Daniels et al. (2019) and Francis (2017, 2019, 2020, 2021). According to the studies conducted by Francis and Reygan in 2016, Luvuno et al. in 2019, and Mkhize and Maharaj in 2021, it was found that lack of resources and poorly trained practitioners is a prevalent issue that often results in inadequate services provided to LGBTQ+ people including youth. Furthermore, structural risk factors frequently undermine the ability of families, service providers, and community members to advocate for the effective inclusion of LGBTQ+ youth

(Bhana, 2014; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019; Nichols, 2021). Structural hetero- and cis-normativity pose a significant challenge to the principles of social justice, human rights, and the inclusivity of LGBTQ+ youth residing in rural communities (Francis, 2017; Parmenter et al., 2021).

Furthermore, my research participants also reported encountering challenges in securing employment within their communities, which can be attributed to societal biases related to their gender expression and sexual orientation. According to statistical data from South Africa, in the second quarter of 2023, a significant proportion of young individuals encountered the challenge of unemployment. Specifically, 60.7 per cent of individuals aged 15-24 years and 39.8 per cent of those aged 25-34 were found unemployed (Stats SA, 2023). Individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ may encounter a heightened vulnerability to unemployment, as evidenced by the experiences of the participants in the study who were unemployed.

Mkhize and Maharaj (2021) and da Luz Scherf et al. (2021) highlight systemic elements, such as inadequate resources and insufficiently trained nursing personnel, as significant barriers to addressing health concerns within the LGBTQ+ community. Similarly, the participants in the study conveyed many instances of microaggressions and expressed dissatisfaction with the limited availability of resources in the nearby clinics. Within educational institutions, it has been observed that uniform policies and the lack of gender nonbinary cloakroom facilities perpetuate a culture that adheres to heteronormative and cisnormative norms. The scholarly works authored by Bhana (2014), Francis and Reygan (2016), and Francis (2017) collectively highlight instances of discriminatory behaviours exhibited by educational administrators, managers, teachers, and peers within the school environment. The microaggressions documented by the participants in the study within educational institutions and the healthcare industry align with the existing body of scholarly literature. Consequently, LGBTQ+ youth cannot derive advantages and engage meaningfully within essential institutions, such as educational establishments, which foster the resilience of young individuals, particularly those experiencing poverty (Ebersöhn, 2017; Theron et al., 2022a).

6.1.3 Psychological Risks: Internalised Homophobia and Atypical Coping Mechanisms

The research participants in the study reported experiencing relational and structural distal stressors, aligning with the minority stress model in the conceptual framework I employed. The participants in the study expressed feelings of apprehension regarding potential rejection from their family members, as well as experiencing low levels of self-esteem. Additionally, they

reported engaging in negative internal self-talk, experiencing a depressed mood, contemplating social isolation, and even suicide attempts. The psychological risk factors related to internalised homophobia were reported in the literature by APA (2021), Gyamerah et al. (2019), and Moagi et al. (2021).

Daniels et al. (2019) assert that individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ and reside in rural communities encounter significant physical and mental health risks within distinct societal contexts. Adversities faced by LGBTQ+ youth are attributed to their heightened exposure to risk factors and limited availability of relational and structural support systems. Haffejee and Wiebesiek (2021) acknowledge the significance of structural resources and the capacity of the ecological context to offer resources that promote resilience. However, it is important to note that certain LGBTQ+ individuals residing in rural ecologies may not always have access to such resources. The presence of intersecting identities contributes to the perpetuation of risk factors. A significant portion of the individuals participating in the study originate from Christian households and are either speakers of or affiliated with the Basotho ethnic group. The existing body of literature (e.g., Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019; Mayeza, 2021) highlights the observation that the convergence of multiple identities, such as being of black racial background, experiencing poverty, and facing material deprivation, frequently intensifies the impact of minority stress.

In a post-colonial African society, LGBTQ+ youth find themselves in a position where they must navigate the complexities of their socio-ecological environment to secure inclusion and accountability. Within this context, they frequently seek validation, support, and affirmation of their gender and sexuality. However, they face numerous risk factors that have detrimental effects on their health and overall well-being, as documented by Daniels et al. (2019), Haffejee and Wiebesiek (2021), Harper et al. (2021), and Logie et al. (2018). Additionally, resilience among LGBTQ+ youth may involve safeguarding oneself against the perceived risk of revealing one's sexual orientation to family and friends. The existing body of research indicates that certain LGBTQ+ youth members choose to withhold information about their sexual orientation from their families due to concerns about potential mistreatment and exclusion, particularly in environments characterised by heightened risks, such as rural areas (Epprecht & Mngoma, 2022; McCormick, 2015; Semang et al., 2020; Mayeza, 2021). Individuals who express a desire to disclose their sexual orientation, commonly referred to as "coming out of the closet," do so to embrace their true selves in the presence of their family and peers in the hopes of attaining acceptance and recognition for their authentic identity (Sandler, 2022).

6.2 Resilience Themes

Positive psychological attributes, spirituality, engaging in sporting and recreational activities, family affirmation, peer relationships, teacher support, LGBTQ+ NGO support, and environmental aspects, among others, intersected to enable LGBTQ+ resilience in this context. From the effects of minority stress discussed above, which were perpetuated by both relational and structural risks resilience, enabling support was shown to hold a value in mitigating risk factors and promoting the well-being of LGBTQ+ youth in this context. Ungar (2021) stipulates that resilience is a process informed by compromises between systems. Such systems are typified by being open, dynamic and complex. Such systems promote connectivity. The findings from this research strongly demonstrated the compromises between different systems. However, as highlighted by Ungar (2011), socio-ecology played a critical role in facilitating resilience in most participants' subsystems, which are biological and psychological systems.

6.3 Individualistic Qualities that Foster Resilience

In this section, I discuss literature related to the theme of individualistic qualities that foster resilience under the three subthemes: A sense of spiritual connection, engaging in sporting and recreational activities and positive psychological qualities to thrive.

6.3.1 A Sense of Spiritual Connection

Participants in the study reported a sense of connection with the Christian God, which cultivated hope and facilitated their emotional well-being; some even distanced themselves from non-affirmative religious spaces. While holding on to their faith in God, they navigated to spaces of affirmation while others chose to engage in private religious rituals such as prayer. Some participants reported a sense of affirmation from their ancestors. According to Harper et al. (2021), in Kenya, gay and bisexual youth reported spiritual affirmation and a belief that God created them as sexually diverse.

Religion and spirituality among Basotho youth have been reported in previous studies about resilient youth, such as Van Rensburg et al. (2019). Previous youth resilience studies such as Theron (2016), Jefferis and Theron (2017), Theron et al. (2013), Theron (2016), and Van Rensburg et al. (2015) reported Afrocentric explanations of resilience, which are tied to spiritual connections and rituals to such as prayer to God and performing ancestral ceremonies. This study suggests that religion and spirituality, as also reported in studies of LGBTQ+ like Luvuno et al. (2019) and White et al. (2020), such a resilience-enabling mechanism also applies to LGBTQ+ youth in rural ecology in the Free State province. Moreover, like in hetero- and

cis-normative youth literature reviews conducted by Theron (2020) and Van Breda & Theron (2018), spirituality is an assertion to these participants.

6.3.2 Engaging in Sporting and Recreational Activities

Participants in the study also reported participation in sports and recreational activities such as indigenous games, including "khathi", "diketo", and "Morabaraba", netball and dance. Participation in recreational activities, especially for transgender youth, facilitated free expression and created a platform where they could gain confidence. Daniels et al. (2019) Ha. Similarly, international literature by Lo et al. (2022) also reported participation in sporting and recreational activities.

Some participants mentioned that writing, debating, and public speaking positively influenced their confidence. Writing offered them an opportunity to reflect on their experience and, in turn, offered them insight into them. Reid (2022) discovered in a study that ballroom facilitated resilience by boosting confidence and instilling agency to work toward healing. The participants in the study valued engaging in sports and recreational activities, which traded off resilience in their psychological system (Ungar, 2021).

In a review involving 29 studies, Eather et al. (2023) found that participation in sports is related to improved psychological well-being and reduced levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. Furthermore, it facilitates pro-social behaviour and interpersonal communication and fosters a sense of belonging. Also, sports and physical activity are related to physical health; WHO (2022) stated that physical activity, including sports, can prevent and manage cardiovascular diseases, cancer and diabetes. Thus, participation in sports and other activities offered resilience to my participants' psychological, physical, and social systems. Furthermore, it offered them the opportunity to recover and provided them resistance to some of the effects of minority stress, such as lack of confidence and psychological stress.

6.3.3 Positive Psychological Qualities to Thrive

My findings showed that LGBTQ+ youth mastered resilience through advocacy for inclusion in schools and the community. Participants' sense of agency involved possessing confidence and teaching others about the LGBTQ+ identity during life orientation lessons and possessing self-relying attitudes, optimism, and positive internal talk. Haffejee and Wiebesiek (2021) also reported that transgender youth in their study possessed agency; they taught older people in their community about their gender identity. The study also reported self-relying attitudes, and some participants also questioned and challenged the hetero- and cis-normative discourse,

especially homophobia in the Christian structures. Similarly, Williams et al. (2022) and Scheadler et al. (2023) reported resistance against prevailing heteronormative and cis-normative norms through activism. Vázquez et al. (2023) reported that in the context of social distancing amid the COVID-19 pandemic, LGBTQ+ youth in their study mastered resilience through the possession of self-relying attitudes. Lo et al. (2022) also reported on metacognitive thinking, which questions hetero- and cis-normativity and fosters gender acceptance and self-acceptance.

Similar to studies such as Barsigian et al. (2023), Luvuno et al. (2019), and Mkhize and Maharaj (2021), the use of the internet to serve health-related information relating to gender and sexual identity, especially about the gender transition process, was reported. Moreover, participants in the study reported reading books about other LGBTQ+ persons, which helped them cope with their daily challenges. My participants did not only report individualistic resilience qualities, but they also reported relational and structural resilience enabling supports.

6.4 Relational and Structural Supports Within the Rural Ecology Cultivating Self-Acceptance and Coping With Minority Stress

In this section, I discuss the literature related to relational and structural supports within rural ecology, cultivating self-acceptance and coping with minority Stress under the three subthemes: experiences of immediate and extended family affirmation, supportive relationships from teachers, peers and friends and wider community members, and professional and structural supports.

6.4.1 Experiences of Immediate and Extended Family Affirmation

The study participants conveyed pro-affirmative language, such as employing appropriate gestures and correct pronouns, which contributed to cultivating a sense of inclusion among LGBTQ+ youth within a nuclear family structure. In a study conducted by Gyamerah et al. (2019) in Tshwane, South Africa, the researchers found that participants reported having supportive relationships with female figures, including mothers, aunts, and sisters. Furthermore, the present study encompassed a sample of male siblings, fathers, uncles, and grandfathers who offered emotional guidance and financial assistance to LGBTQ+ youth. Nevertheless, the support received from female figures appears to surpass that of male support. There is a tendency for male individuals to create a sense of separation from LGBTQ+ youth, potentially influenced by the concept of hegemonic masculinity, as discussed by Bhana and Mayeza (2016). Therefore, the findings of the study did not indicate a higher level of support from male individuals.

Furthermore, a participant in the study conveyed that his sexual orientation was validated by his father and male siblings, a response that was facilitated by his mother's efforts to promote inclusivity. The existing body of literature (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Ellapen, 2007; Mfecane, 2016) demonstrates the presence of stereotypical behaviours and cultural norms exhibited by individuals of different genders, which can be attributed to societal scripts. The manifestation of societal scripts among LGBTQ+ youth may not invariably align with expected behaviours, potentially resulting in disapproval and exclusion.

 The study participants who identified as LGBTQ+ also reported receiving emotional support from their families. The existing body of literature, as evidenced by studies conducted by Matsuno et al. (2022), Mintz et al. (2021), and Pflugeisen et al. (2023), indicates that parental and family support plays a crucial role in mitigating the adverse effects of minority stress. In a study conducted by Nichols (2021), participants conveyed that their parents provided both emotional and financial assistance and actively advocated for the inclusion of their children in educational institutions and the broader community. According to Nichols (2021), an affirming family has the potential to enhance resilience within a heteronormative school system. In addition, it was observed that parental support played a significant role in aiding the recuperation process of LGBTQ+ youth who experienced adverse consequences resulting from minority stress. Furthermore, the act of reparations undertaken by families after becoming aware of their child's sexual orientation demonstrated the capacity of a familial structure to evolve, adapt, and embrace inclusivity (Ungar, 2018a). Furthermore, it has been observed that the provision of reparations by families has played a significant role in facilitating the recuperation of LGBTQ+ youth from the adverse consequences of minority stress (Asakura, 2019; Ungar, 2018b, 2021).

According to my research findings, it is evident that prevailing cultural and religious expectations, which adhere to heteronormative and cisnormative standards, along with structural risk factors, frequently contribute to the disempowerment of families. Therefore, it is imperative to offer psychoeducational interventions on gender and sexuality to families to enhance the resilience of families who may be facing challenges in accepting or affirming their child's identity (Daniels et al., 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). Families often collaborate with additional support systems, including Non-Profit Organisations, educators, school administrators, and local establishments promoting family unit resilience.

6.4.2   Supportive Relationships From Teachers, Peers and Friends

My participants related experiences of support from school managers, teachers, and fellow learners, as well as forming supportive networks with other LGBTQ+ youth. Okanlawon (2021), in a literature review performed in Nigeria, revealed affirming relations between heterosexual and LGBTQ+ youth in the context of family rejection and aggression from the community. Such relations stayed strong as peers were curious to learn about sexual diversity, and they offered protection against homophobic bullying and emotional support. Similarly, in the study, peer relations were reported, and my participants obtained emotional support and protection from bullying from heterosexual peers who became their allies. Furthermore, participants also formed relationships with other LGBTQ+ youth; they obtained advice, emotional support, and financial support from these relationships, which facilitated their confidence. The positive effects of friendships in combatting minority stress were also reported by Parmenter et al. (2021) and Bighash (2021). Also, several studies (e.g., Matsuno et al., 2022; McDermott et al., 2023; Peel et al., 2022; Wike., 2022) reported the positive impact of peer and friend relations on the overall well-being of LGBTQ+ youth; thus, as reported per the accounts of my participants, peer and friend relations provide trade-off resilience in instances where family affirmation is not possible.

Some school managers and teachers were reported as championing the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth. According to my participants, some teachers addressed homophobic bullying, provided emotional support, and disseminated information in books about LGBTQ+ identity. In a few instances, school managers provided bathrooms that LGBTQ+ learners could use. My data suggests that some schools relaxed their uniform policy to create an inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ youth. According to Johns et al. (2019a), addressing homophobic bullying and harassment can be successful through implementing policies that combat bullying and harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity. However, the literature points out that South African schools do not include LGBTQ+ youth owing to the prevalent hetero- and cis-normative culture in schools (Francis, 2017). Besides, my research indicates that an affirmative school atmosphere can enable LGBTQ+ youth by cultivating an atmosphere that promotes a sense of belonging, empowerment, recognition, and safety (McDermott et al., 2023). To this end, an affirmative school atmosphere can provide resilience to families and the community (McDermott et al., 2023).

6.4.3 Wider Community Members, Professional and Structural Supports

The literature points out that youth resilience can be enabled by community religious leaders, community members, and local adults (Ebersöhn, 2017; Hope et al., 2017). However, such may not be true for LGBTQ+ youth in rural ecologies owing to prevailing heterosexist community norms and values (Bhana, 2014; Francis, 2017; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021). My research reported on various community macro aggressions such as rape, murder, and other forms of victimisation as well as microaggressions such as verbal and emotional bullying. Amid the overwhelming risk factors, my participants also reported resilience, enabling support from family members, professionals and structures such as schools and churches.

Participants in this study reported that support from service providers and community members consists of material and emotional support, advocacy for inclusion and advice from community members' religious spaces. Furthermore, participants reported receiving material support from allies and community members. Participants also reported advocacy for inclusion and linking LGBTQ+ youth to resources that non-profit organisations have carried out.

Community-based LGBTQ+ youth support was reported by various studies such as Haffejee and Wiebesiek (2021), Logie et al. (2018), Parmenter et al. (2021) and Schmitz and Tyler (2019). The studies reporting on LGBTQ+ youth resilience indicate youth advocating for and negotiating for resources and support through challenging established norms. My research pointed to instances where youth and community organisations advocated for inclusion. Like youth studies conducted in this context (i.e., Jefferis & Theron, 2017; Theron et al., 2013; Theron, 2016; Van Rensburg et al., 2015), LGBTQ+ youth reported support which is consistent with the philosophy of Ubuntu/Botho. Participants reported material support regarding food and clothes from community members and neighbours. One participant reported being parented by the collective community through older females in the community (Nwoye, 2017, 2022; Viljoen, 2003).

The African philosophy of Ubuntu emphasises a collective identity and interdependence between a person and their physical and social ecology. (Klaasen, 2017; Mkhize, 2022; Nwonye, 2017). The philosophy of Ubuntu offers hope for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in an African context (Njoko, 2019). However, looking at my participants' risk factors, it seems as if communities often disregard Ubuntu when attending to issues surrounding gender and diversity and how they relate to LGBTQ+ youth. Furthermore, despite exclusion in communities, the constitutional rights of LGBTQ+ people, particularly in South Africa, are

among the most powerful protective laws against discrimination (Alkadry, 2015; Lease & Gevisser, 2017; Nasser-Eddin et al., 2018). It is necessary to advocate for inclusion and make available other meaningful resilience-enabling resources to support sexually diverse people better in different ecologies (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021). Regardless, the study participants from the community confirm that resilience is a context-specific phenomenon (Ungar, 2011, 2015, 2021).

Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) are a resource enabling LGBTQ+ youth resilience. NPOs enable resilience through educating families and communities about gender and sexual diversity. NPOs advocate for inclusion and challenge heterosexist schools and health systems. Furthermore, NPOs link LGBTQ+ youth to critical health resources inside and outside rural communities and provide psychosocial and health services. Research indicates that LGBTQ+ youth benefit from services such as mental health services (individual therapy, support groups), gender reassignment services for transgender youth, MSM services, and antiretroviral treatment (Álvarez et al., 2022; Luvuno et al., 2019; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021; da Luz Scherf et al., 2021). To this end, experiences of affirmation in family, relationships with peers, friends, teachers, and others, as well as wider community support, promote a sense of belonging to a community and facilitate navigating to both natural and built environments in LGBTQ+ youth.

6.5   Sense of Connection with the Environment

Resilience is made possible through a network of interacting and intersecting resources from multiple systems, such as cultural, environmental, relational, and structural resources (Höltge et al., 2021). In support of this view, my research participants also reported environmental support, such as their home environment, including safe and secure infrastructure. Participants also reported community spaces such as taverns, while a few also mentioned churches, parks, mountains, and local libraries, while others mentioned a sense of safety in their community environment.

Equitable access to environmental resources has been linked to the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth by studies such as Asakura (2019), Littman (2022) and Saewyc et al. (2020). With this understanding, however, the literature points out that rural spaces generally lack resilience, enabling natural and built resources for all its inhabitants (Balfour, 2016). Lack of resources or disempowerment to navigating resilience resources has been a challenge for LGBTQ+ youth owing to the heterosexist rural community norms (Wike et al., 2022). Also, the effective implementation of LGBTQ+ affirmative policies and the promotion of inclusivity has been

noted as a challenge in rural spaces (Daniels et al., 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019).

Moreover, extensive LGBTQ+ research literature in an African societal context, including rural spaces (for example, Govender et al., 2019; Gyamerah et al., 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Harper et al., 2021; Logie et al., 2018; Luvuno et al., 2019; Okanlawon, 2021) focuses on individualistic and relational resilience enabling resources they possess. However, the existing research seems to fail to report on the role of the natural and built environment in co-facilitating resilience (Ungar, 2021).

This critical limitation from the literature was addressed by this study, indicating an interaction between other systems (i.e., biological, psychological, and relational) with the natural and built environment. The present study indicates that the home environment (build environment) is a resource where LGBTQ+ youth can feel safe and rest. Feeling safe and able to rest can be associated with reduced anxiety, and resting is also related to mental well-being. Taverns are built environments where, according to most participants, they feel appreciated, and this boosts their self-esteem, thus positively influencing the psychological system. Participants reported that in taverns, they could have conversations about LGBTQ+ identity with community members, thus strengthening relational support. Taverns contributed to raising awareness by hosting LGBTQ+ events. Participants also reported affirming church buildings as spaces where they could connect with God and derive support from the Christian community.

To this end, my research indicates how the environment influences other systems (Ungar, 2021). For example, participants experienced psychological distress in male toilets, indicating that the environment can perpetuate risk exposure or promote resilience.

6.6   Summary Of The Chapter and Conclusion

This chapter contextualises the findings of the study on the multisystemic resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in a rural community in the Free State province within the broader scholarship on LGBTQ+ resilience. The present study elucidated the intricate interplay between various multisystemic factors, including biological and psychological attributes, relational and structural support, and environmental influences, about the resilience exhibited by LGBTQ+ youth within the specified context. Most of the findings from this study align with the existing body of international and local literature on LGBTQ+ youth, as well as the literature on Basotho resilience. Complex intersections play a significant role in the literature on resilience, particularly in the natural and built environment. Furthermore, it is worth noting that there is a

lack of research conducted in South Africa that comprehensively examines the various factors within the multisystemic framework that contribute to the development and availability of LGBTQ+ youth literature. Consequently, this study has the potential to offer intervention recommendations to various stakeholders involved in supporting LGBTQ+ youth, as well as guidelines for future research, as elaborated in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER 7
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the findings of the study after the analysis of the data. I analysed the findings from the perspective of the existing literature as well as concepts and theories in my conceptual framework. The literature and conceptual framework were used as a lens to understand the multisystemic resilience of gender and sexually diverse youth in a rural community context in the Free State province of South Africa.

This chapter offers an overview of the study and presents answers to the research questions. Thereafter, the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 3 is revisited. I discuss the potential contributions and limitations of the study. I also present recommendations to stakeholders working with LGBTQ+ youth in rural communities. Furthermore, I critically reflect on the study's methodological strengths and limitations. I recommend future research in multisystemic LGBTQ+ youth resilience, with the aim that the research findings will inspire others to continue the investigation.

7.2 Overview of the Research Questions

The section begins by providing an overview of the research questions that guided the study.

7.2.1 Primary Research Question

The primary research question is: How do multisystemic factors in a rural community in the Free State Province (FS) influence LGBTQ+ youth resilience?

7.2.2 Secondary Research Questions

The secondary research questions are:

a. What multisystemic factors intersect to threaten the well-being of LGBTQ+ in a rural Free State context?
b. How do the multisystemic factors intersect to enable resilience in LGBTQ+ youth in a rural community context?
c. How can knowledge gained from LGBTQ+ resilience research be used to develop a framework that healthcare professionals, psychotherapists, and community service providers can use to promote the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in rural communities?

7.2.3 Overview of Research Sub-Questions Explored in the Literature Review

The literature research sub-questions are:

A. What is the pre-colonial historical, colonial, and current political and social context of gender and sexuality in African communities?

B. How do colonial political ideologies, religious beliefs and myths on gender and sexual diversity in Africa and South African gender and sexuality perpetuate risk factors faced by LGBTQ+ youth in a rural community?

C. what personal, relational, and structural resilience-enabling resources do LGBTQ+ youth in different international, African, and South African communities rely on for their resilience?

7.3   Overview of the Study

The study aimed to explore how multisystemic factors in a rural community in the Free State Province (FS) influence LGBTQ+ youth resilience. In doing so, the study explored participants' views on multisystemic factors that intersect to threaten the well-being of LGBTQ+ youth in a rural FS context. Also, this study looked at multisystemic factors intersecting to enable resilience in LGBTQ+ youth in this context. In doing so, I conducted a literature review looking at personal, relational, and structural resilience-enabling resources that LGBTQ+ youth in different international, African, and South African communities rely on for their resilience. I realised there is some literature on systemic resilience, mainly in the USA and Canada, but few studies on South Africa. However, most of these studies were not conducted in rural areas, and none seemed to be framed using the multisystemic (i.e., biological, psychological, relational, natural and manmade environment) resilience framework. The scarcity of literature on the topic prompted a need to conduct this study.

The literature review used in this study focused mainly on primary sources such as scholarly journals and books, newspaper articles, and government policy documents. The literature focused on the colonial theorisation of gender and sexuality, prevalent risks found in various communities, and the systemic resilience of LGBTQ+ youth.

The conceptual framework that guided the study was developed from the research questions and objectives stated in Chapter One. The conceptual direction included the Ungar (2021) multisystemic resilience framework, which I also supplemented using the Minority Stress Model (Frost & Meyer, 2023) and the Feminist Theory of Intersectionality (APA, 2021; Chan & Howard, 2020), and African theorisation into health, resilience and psychopathology (Nwoye 2017, 2022; Theron & Theron, 2013). In my framework, socio-ecology (Ungar, 2011) is a focal point for resilience. Moreover, this revised framework integrated theories, literature,

and the results of this study to provide a resilience-enabling biopsychosocial ecological intervention model for rural community LGBTQ + youth.

My framework was boosted by an empirical study that consisted of semi-structured individual interviews to explore participants' understanding of the phenomenon of resilience (Creswell, 2018). I took field notes and kept a reflective journal during the study, ensuring I produced an audit trail for an authentic study (Johnson et al., 2020). Furthermore, I presented the findings of my data after I concluded a detailed data analysis process. Four themes were developed from the data analysis process. These were: Firstly, distal and proximal stressors and resources LGBTQ+ youth need; secondly, individualistic qualities that foster resilience; thirdly, relational and structural supports within the rural ecology cultivating self-acceptance and coping with minority stress; and lastly, a sense of safety and connection with the environment. I revisited the participants for member-checking (McKim, 2023). Member-checking helped me to produce a credible study as the participants were allowed to access the transcribed data to clarify, approve, or disapprove the captured information.

This study shows that amid intersecting relational and structural risk and internalised homophobia, family affirmation is the leading factor that contributes to the psychological well-being of LGBTQ+ youth. However, resilience is enabled by compromises between different socio-ecological role players such as family, friends and peers, teachers, community members, and local Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs). It also facilitates the natural infrastructure, such as home environment, housing, and local tavern establishments. This study aimed to contribute to the multisystemic framework by addressing deficiencies in LGBTQ+ youth resilience literature in rural communities.

7.4   Findings According to the Research Questions

What propelled me to do this study was to explore risk factors and the multisystemic resilience process of LGBTQ+ youth in a rural community context. Furthermore, the study looked at how different disk factors intersect to threaten LGBTQ+ youth's well-being and intersecting multisystemic resilience enabling support. I included my research questions and objectives in the chapter on this research. In this section, I addressed the study's secondary research questions and objectives by integrating my research findings so that my primary question is addressed.

7.4.1 Secondary Research Questions

In this section, I address three secondary research questions.

7.4.1.1 Secondary Research Question 1

The first secondary research question is: What are participants' views on multisystemic factors that intersect to threaten the well-being of LGBTQ+ in a rural FS context?

Objective: To explore how multisystemic factors intersect to threaten the well-being of LGBTQ+ in the rural Free State.

Ungar (2011) stipulates that risk exposure is a prerequisite for resilience. Indeed, the study confirmed that LGBTQ+ youth in rural community contexts face intersecting risk factors, which are better theorised as distal stressors (Relational and Structural risks), which account for proximal stressors (i.e., internalised homophobia) in sexual and gender minorities (Haas & Lannutti, 2019; McConnell et al., 2018; Toomey, 2021). Figure 7.1 shows the intersection between relational and structural risk and how they both contribute to internalised homophobia, as reported by participants in the study.
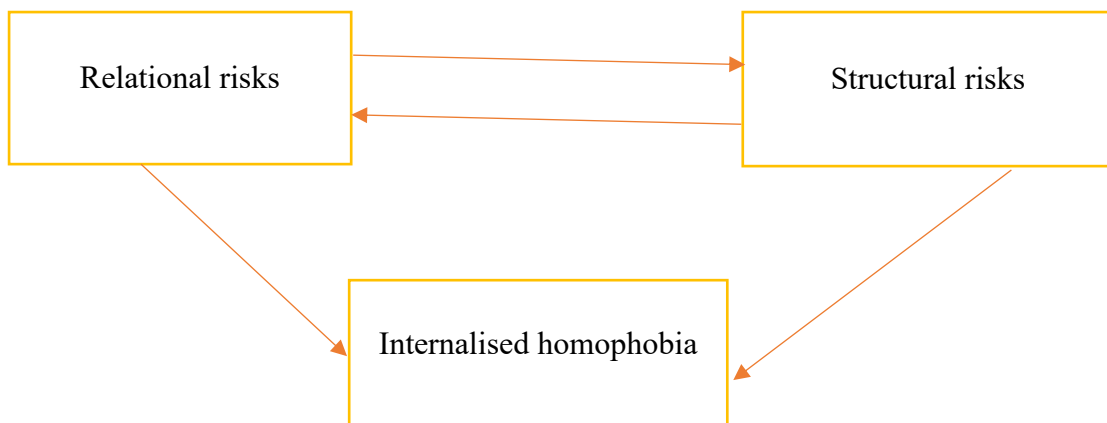
Figure 7.1: Intersecting Risk Factors Of LGBTQ+ Youth in a Rural Context In the Free State Province

As illustrated in Figure 7.1, there is an intersection between structural and relational risk factors. My research noted that community norms and ideals often favour hetero- and cisnormativity, such as family denial, inconsistent affirmation and rejection owing to religion and culture, macroaggressions (such as rape, murder, and assault by community members), and microaggressions (such as verbal insults and negative sentiments from nurses, religious leaders, and teachers). Relational risks intersect with structural risk factors such as unemployment and poverty, lack of knowledge by clinic nurses about LGBTQ+ health care, including gender reassignment protocols, absence of gender-neutral bathrooms in schools,

hetero- & cisnormative uniform policies, and non-affirmation in local churches identified in this research.

The intersectional relationship is such that systemic oppression, discrimination, and marginalisation are reflected in a lack of resources, existing school policies, curricula and non-affirming health systems. The structural risk factors influence, perpetuate, and promote hetero- and cisnormativity, which result in relational risks. On the other hand, relational risks are rooted in colonial conservative Christian ideologies, values, and norms, as well as post-colonial amnesia that gender and sexual diversity are evil and un-African. There are socio-ecological role players such as family members, professionals such as nurses and teachers, policymakers, and politicians who hold non-affirming views, which negatively impact the distribution of resilience-enabling resources to LGBTQ+ youth. The interplay between relational and structural risks then contributes to internalised homophobia noted in my research. Internalised homophobia reported by my participants was typified by fear of rejection from family, feeling alienated from God, low self-esteem, negative internal dialogue, depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts.

This research has identified relational risk factors such as attitudes, beliefs, biases, and values that discourage gender and sexual diversity. Furthermore, the relational risks in the study, akin to the works of Bhana (2014), Francis and Kuhl (2020), and Matsúmunyane and Hlalele (2019), linked to LGBTQ+ identity, originate from cultural and religious norms prevalent in the rural community. The prevailing culture and values in the Free State rural community are influenced by and contribute to the existing hetero-cisnormative structures within the community. Like previous LGBTQ+ youth research conducted by Daniels et al. (2019) and Haffejee and Wiebesiek (2021) in rural areas, the study found that participants experienced the impact of structural risks, such as lack of acceptance in churches and the absence of structural resources, such as healthcare facilities. These factors contributed to the development of internalised homophobia among the participants. Non-affirmation within families, for instance, was shaped by the imposition of compulsory heterosexuality and cisnormativity originating from societal institutions like churches. To support LGBTQ+ youth, families, peers, and community-based professionals and service providers must overcome structural barriers. Structural risks can hinder families who wish to support their child's LGBTQ+ identity or service providers who aim to offer services for the well-being of LGBTQ+ youth (Bhana, 2014; Gyamerah et al., 2019; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021; Rothmann, 2018).

The community structures in this context, which adhere to hetero-cis-normativity, appear to disregard and undermine the presence of gender and sexual diversity. Moreover, the dominant community culture was evident in the physical structures (such as the absence of bathrooms for individuals who identify as gender non-binary in schools), allocation of resources (such as the absence of healthcare services for LGBTQ+ young people in nearby clinics), and customary behaviours within the community (such as the enforcement of uniform policies in schools). Some participants in the study internalised and assimilated various forms of non-acceptance within the community. Non-acceptance led to the development of unconventional coping mechanisms and mental health difficulties associated with internalised homophobia. In addition, this research revealed various factors that contribute to risk exposure, including racial identity (being black), geographic location (living in a rural area), religious affiliation (belonging to the Christian faith), social status (being an orphan, living in poverty), and employment status (being unemployed). Different aspects of positionality intersect with various systems supporting the resilience of the LGBTQ+ community (Chan & Howard, 2020).

According to Matsúmunyane and Hlalele's (2019) literature, being Black and identifying as Basotho has been found to perpetuate structural and relational risks that contribute to the development of internalised homophobia. In addition, being part of the Black race is associated with cultural norms that may not fully accept or support gender and sexual diversity (Bhana, 2014; Burchardt, 2020; Kiguwa, 2006; Shefer et al., 2015). The cultural norms commonly observed among individuals of black ethnic background include men marrying, having children, providing for their families, and participating in initiation schools, while women are expected to marry and care for their husbands and children (Mkhize, 2006; Mfecane, 2016, 2018). The study found that the idealised portrayal of cultural norms in Black communities, as discussed by Matsúmunyane and Hlalele's (2019), had a significant impact on the participants' experiences of marginalisation.

Another salient factor identified in this study is residing in a rural locality. Daniels (2019), Haffejee and Wiebesiek (2021), and Rand and Paceley (2022) have documented that rural areas are recognised for their prevalent adherence to heteronormative values and norms, as well as their limited availability of structural resources. The individuals in the study also encountered mandatory adherence to heterosexual and cisgender norms, which manifested in the form of subtle and overt acts of discrimination that they reported experiencing within their families and the broader community. The participants and their counterparts faced inadequate health assistance from clinic nurses due to the presence of compulsory hetero- and cisnormativity as

well as a lack of resources. This ill-treatment was also observed in families and communities, as well as in schools where cisnormative uniform policies and infrastructure were in place. The experiences of marginalisation frequently harm individuals' ability to participate and advocate for resilience and access to resources in different community settings, including health facilities, schools, and local Christian faith institutions like churches.

The Christian faith significantly influences precolonial African culture, as evidenced by literature demonstrating its detrimental impact on the LGBTQ+ identity (Francis & Kjaran, 2020; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019; Schmitz et al., 2020). According to my research, participants indicated that Christianity contributed to a lack of acceptance within their family. Additionally, their community holds the belief that homosexuality is a sinful behaviour and that demons possess individuals who identify as such. Furthermore, participants reported that poverty, unemployment, and orphanhood are factors that exist alongside their sexuality or gender diversity.

The presence of factors such as being black, practising the Christian faith, experiencing poverty, and facing unemployment can not only be seen as risk factors. Still, it can also have distinct impacts on the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth. Additionally, this study observed the extent to which my participants possessed agency and how socio-ecology contributes to the availability of resources that promote resilience, including environmental resources that enhance resilience.

7.4.1.2   Secondary Research Question 2

The second secondary research question was: How do the multisystemic factors intersect to enable resilience in LQBTQ+ youth?

Objective: To explore how multisystemic factors intersect to enable resilience in LGBTQ+ youth.

There is youth resilience literature (i.e., Ebersöhn, 2017; Jefferis & Theron, 2017; Theron et al., 2013; Theron, 2016; Van Rensburg et al., 2015, 2019) on research conducted in the Free State and similar community contexts among the Basotho-speaking population in the context of poverty and structural disadvantage. Also, systemic resilience studies documented in reviews such as Theron (2020) and Van Breda and Theron (2018) did not account for the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth and were conducted using hetero- and cis-normative resilience frameworks (Colpitts & Gahagan, 2016; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021). Rural communities

have been known for the overwhelming risks and exclusion of LGBTQ+ people (Daniels et al., 2019; Francis, 2017; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021).

Figure 7.2 shows how multisystemic factors intersect to enable resilience, as reported by my participants in the Free State rural community context:
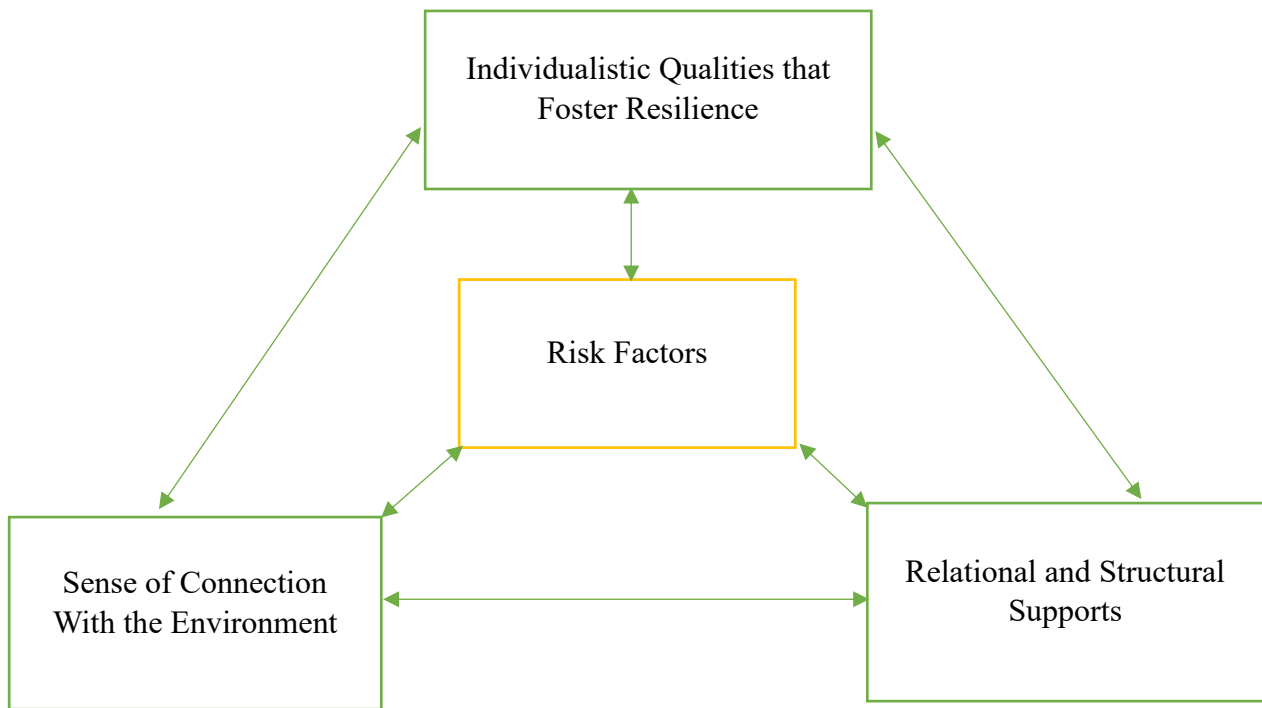
Figure 7.2: Intersecting Resilience Factors of LGBTQ+ Youth in a Rural Context in the Free State Province

The figure illustrates the intersection between the subordinate biological and psychological system and the superordinate social and environmental system, which collectively impact the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in my research. The subordinate system was discussed with individualistic qualities that promote resilience. The social system is addressed in the context of relational and structural support, while the environmental system discusses the theme of the environment. Figure 7.2 also illustrates the ongoing interaction between resilience-enhancing multisystemic supports and participants' risk factors in their environment. For example, on the psychological level, this study has identified that participation in sports, indigenous games, leadership, and expressive arts facilitated confidence in some participants, thus counteracting the effects of internalised homophobia. Also, NGOs advocating for inclusion in families,

clinics, and in the community helped to mitigate some of the structural and relational risks found in this community context. Furthermore, psychological qualities my participants possessed, such as self-relying attitudes, a sense of agency, optimism, and positive internal talk, helped them to cope with some of the structural and relational risks in this context. For example, they could question negative religious sentiments and non-affirmation in their local churches.

My research demonstrated the interconnected influence of multiple factors on the resilience process of LGBTQ+ youth. Like Ungar (2021), I observed the compromises and complex intersections involved in balancing subordinate and superordinate systems in promoting LGBTQ+ youth resilience in this particular setting. For example, affirmation and support from teachers through addressing homophobic bullying and giving emotional support to LGBTQ+ learners traded resilience in the psychological system. Also, teachers working towards inclusive practices such as relaxing school uniform policy facilitated a sense of belonging to participants.

There was also noted intersectionality between the African values of Ubuntu, where some participants reported receiving assistance from community members and neighbours. Also, some participants reported performing spiritual rituals such as prayer and going to church, including African-initiated churches such as "Kereke ea Sephiri". This present research 'findings, to some extent, adhered to African indigenous communal pathways to well-being and resilience reported by non-LGBTQ+ studies previously done in this community context and similar contexts (such as Jefferies et al., 2019; Theron, 2013; Theron et al., 2013; Theron & Liebenberg, 2015; Van Rensburg et al., 2018).

Family affirmation played a prominent role in mitigating the impact of minority stress on relational and structural support. The participants whose families affirmed their gender expression and sexuality confirmed they had higher levels of psychological resilience and assertiveness than participants who received affirmation from other individuals or groups within their social and ecological environment. Additional socio-ecological actors, such as educators, promoted inclusivity among families and within the school environment. They achieved this by engaging in discussions with parents about sexuality, addressing instances of bullying, ensuring the provision of gender-neutral bathrooms for LGBTQ+ students, and implementing more inclusive uniform policies. The primary sources of support for LGBTQ+ youth and their families were predominantly NPOs. These organisations for participants who could access them played a crucial role in enhancing the psychological well-being of LGBTQ+

individuals by advocating for inclusion within families, offering support, and providing education on gender and sexual diversity.

Additionally, the NPOs contributed to the biological resilience of LGBTQ+ youth by ensuring accessibility to necessary healthcare services, such as antiretroviral medications and other health-related support. Furthermore, the NPOs also played a significant role in fostering social resilience among LGBTQ+ youth. The participants' psychological well-being was positively influenced by their residential environment, including their homes, local taverns, parks, and mountains. Participants' home environment promoted biological well-being by offering safety and security. Connecting with certain places in the community, such as parks and mountains, as well as a sense of safety in the home environment, mitigated psychological risk factors such as anxiety. Also, in particular, local Taverns as environmental resources played an important role in some participants' resilience as they felt appreciated, welcomed, and loved in these establishments.

The participants in the study reported a range of life-threatening risk factors in their communities. Furthermore, they also documented accounts of resilience. The resilience accounts encompassed a range of psychological attributes that individuals possess to confront risk factors effectively. Additionally, relational resilience was identified as a crucial factor involving support from families, teachers, school managers, NGOs, peers, and friends. Participants additionally disclosed protective environmental factors, including the physical infrastructure of their homes, their perception of safety and validation at local taverns, and their engagement with different spaces within their community. The identified protective factors demonstrate that rural communities can foster resilience, as Rand Paceley's research (2022) indicates.

Moreover, it indicates that rural environments are characterised by constant change, intricate interconnections, and the ability to create new things; they can effectively promote the ability of LGBTQ+ young individuals to adapt and thrive in ways that are relevant to their specific circumstances and cultural backgrounds (Balfour, 2016; Masinire, 2020; Ungar, 2021). Although there are resources and support that promote resilience, the dominant discourse that favours heterosexual and cisgender norms still poses a threat to LGBTQ+ youth and the various systems that surround them. The relationship between risks and resilience implies that structural inequalities significantly limit the environment's ability to provide substantial assistance (Bhana, 2014; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021; Rothmann, 2018; Rothmann & Simmonds,

2015). Therefore, LGBTQ+ youth can achieve resilience by having the necessary capabilities and utilising the systems they are part of to access resources that promote resilience (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021).

7.4.1.3   Secondary Research Question 3

Secondary Research Question 3 is: How can knowledge gained from LGBTQ+ resilience research be used to develop a framework that healthcare professionals, psychotherapists and community service providers can use to promote the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in rural communities?

Objective: To use resilience research to develop a framework that healthcare professionals, psychotherapists, and community service providers can use to promote the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in rural communities.

The study participants are faced with a blend of relational and structural risks, which have a detrimental effect on their psychological well-being. Furthermore, the participants recognised various elements that bolstered their resilience, such as family affirmation, interventions by LGBTQ+ NPOs, support from educators and school administrators, and assistance from local establishments such as taverns. The diverse types of assistance were acknowledged as valuable resources in enhancing their capacity to surmount obstacles and sustain their welfare. When implementing an intervention, it is crucial to consider the level of risk and the accessibility of resources that impact resilience (Ungar, 2018b).

The findings of this study favour prioritising human rights and LGBTQ+ legislation, considering the historical aspects of gender and sexuality in an African context, and incorporating the Ubuntu philosophy when interacting with the macro, meso, and microsystems, which is essential. In addition, LGBTQ+ youth need to be able to possess agency, and their environments should support this by promoting acceptance and inclusivity (Asakusa, 2016; Francis, 2021; Ungar, 2011).

To this end, resilience researchers, such as Haffejee and Wiebesiek (2021) and Ungar (2011), contend that this phenomenon is enabled by the capability of young individuals to navigate their circumstances effectively and the capacity of their accessible resources to provide culturally and contextually suitable assistance. Moreover, it is asserted that strategies, processes, and resources that promote resilience depend on how recipients perceive them, which is influenced by specific contextual factors (Gonzalez et al., 2021; Hillier et al., 2020; Ungar, 2011). Furthermore, the goal of intervention is to expedite the process of recovery,

adaptation, or transformation. Moreover, interventions improve connectivity, promote active engagement, and acknowledge the inherent compromises required within systems (Ungar, 2018b). Thus, in this research, participants' socio-ecology facilitated recovery and adaptation processes, with different support from family, peers, friends, teachers, and local LGBTQ+ NGOs. For example, NGOs could trade resilience in a family system the same way parents traded resilience in a school system. The support helped participants overcome the negative psychological impact of minority stress.

Therefore, utilising current youth resilience frameworks that adhere to traditional heterosexual and cisgender norms, such as the one proposed by van Breda and Theron (2018), may have negative consequences for gender and sexually diverse youth, as highlighted by Colpitts and Gahagan (2016). Therefore, it is crucial to promptly establish LGBTQ+ inclusive measures, which can be achieved by enacting appropriate laws and implementing relevant policies (APA, 2021; Asakura, 2019; Nylund & Temple, 2017). According to Ungar (2018a), resilience research focuses on developing interventions that help individuals recover, adapt, or transform. These interventions enhance connectivity, promote participation, and recognise the compromises between systems. The effectiveness of strategies, processes, and resources that promote resilience depends on what individuals consider important, influenced by their specific circumstances (Gonzalez et al., 2021; Hillier et al., 2020; Ungar, 2011). Knowledge from this research contributed to proposing a culturally sensitive intervention framework discussed in detail in section 7.6.

7.5   Findings According to Literature Review Questions

In this section, I address the literature review questions.

7.5.1   Literature Review Question 1

The first literature review question is: What is the pre-colonial historical, colonial, and current political and social context of gender and sexuality in African communities?

The literature (e.g., Epprecht, 2014; Montle, 2021; Murray & Roscoe, 1998) shows that gender and sexual diversity existed in a precolonial society throughout Africa. Studies show that the meaning and the function of gender and sexual diversity differ from one community to the next. The theorisation of gender and sexual diversity changed during colonialism, and presently, how this phenomenon is viewed lacks an indigenous perspective. (Kaoma, 2018; Khuzwayo-Magwaza, 2021; Lopang, 2014). Furthermore, colonialisation brought new ideologies that viewed this phenomenon as evil, ungodly, and pathological. Such views led to practices that

aimed to eradicate, heal, or correct this phenomenon forcefully (Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019). Conservative Christian values and norms propelled most practices for eradicating gender and sexual diversity. As a result, these norms had an impact on politics surrounding gender and sexual diversity. To this end, the new theorisation brought different forms of macro and microaggressions in various community contexts against the LGBTQ+ community.

Despite the literature recording the presence of gender and sexual diversity in precolonial society, my research findings didn't reveal any significant indigenous knowledge about gender and sexual diversity, which could mean that the acculturation effect took place. My participants also referred to themselves using Western descriptions such as gay, lesbian, and transgender. They also viewed words such as Istabane as decorative. They relied more on the biblical phases of love to comfort themselves and to challenge exclusion in church structures. They also relied on the Christian God instead of their ancestors for resilience.

7.5.2 Literature Review Question 2

The second review Question is: How do colonial political ideologies, religious beliefs and myths on gender and sexual diversity in Africa and South African gender and sexuality perpetuate risk factors faced by LGBTQ+ youth in a rural community?

The literature shows that colonialisation enforced compulsory heterosexual and cisgender norms and values. As a result, gender and sexual diversity was punished under the Roman-Dutch laws throughout different countries in Africa. Particularly in South Africa, the Sexual Immorality Act of 1952 was one of the anti-homosexual laws against the LGBTQ+ community. Resulting from these laws and the Christian norms, LGBTQ+ people in different communities faced intersecting structural, and relational risks. Similarly, research participants in Chapter 5 reported overwhelming structural and relational risks that led to internalised homophobia in some of them. This gives the impression that non-affirmative beliefs and myths are prevalent in rural communities. The prevalence of non-affirmation strongly suggests that rural communities in South Africa still have a long way to go in terms of availing resilience-enabling resources to LGBTQ+ youth.

7.5.3 Literature Review Question 3

The third literature review question was: What personal, relational, and structural resilience-enabling resources that LGBTQ+ youth in different international, African, and South African communities rely on for their resilience?

The literature, for example, Álvarez et al. (2022), Luvuno et al. (2019), Mkhize & Maharaj (2021), and da Luz Scherf et al. (2021) report biological resilience enabling resources such as sports and recreational activities, hormonal and gender reassignment services for transgender youth, MSM services, and antiretroviral treatment. The literature (for example, Daniels et al., 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Hillier et al., 2020) also reports psychological resilience enabling resources such as agency, positive LGBTQ+ identity, and self-relying tendencies. The literature further demonstrates the role that social relationships from family, friends, peers and schools play in supporting the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth. My research also indicated that spirituality, psychological qualities, and social support are linked to resilience. I am convinced that the interplay of different resources is possible to promote resilience. Thus, resilience is a concept that needs a more rather holistic view. Also, the process is facilitated by complex interactions between individuals with their context over time. To this end, Asakura (2016) emphasises collaborative work at macro-, meso- and microsystems when facilitating the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth.

7.6   Revisiting the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in Chapter 3 highlights the multisystemic resilience of gender and sexually diverse youth, influenced by various theories such as the Socio-Ecological Theory of Resilience (SERT) by Ungar (2011), the Minority Stress Model by Meyer (2003), the Feminist Theory of Intersectionality by Chan and Howard (2020), and African indigenous perspectives on personhood and sexuality.

My research emphasised that the resilience of LGBTQ+ individuals is influenced by multiple factors across various systems, including biological, psychological, social, and environmental influences (Ungar, 2021). The level of exposure to risks influences the resilience process. In my research, I found that the minority stress model provided a more comprehensive understanding of these risks. In addition, I observed that the level of risk exposure and access to resources that promote resilience is influenced by factors related to one's position in society, such as race, gender, religion, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. My research focused on the intersection of minority stress and positionality and how they jointly influence the resilience process of LGBTQ+ youth. I established a connection between the findings and the theoretical framework by utilising data to support the concepts from the literature review. Figure 7.3 provides a visual presentation of the altered study conceptual framework following the findings of the current empirical study I conducted:

Macro-system ecological trade-off:

Challenging hetero and cisnormativity through constitution, policy drafting, policy review, availing funding, and other resources for messo and microsystem interventions (Bhana, 2014; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021; Rothmann, 2018; Rothmann &

Macro-system intervention:

- Reform the national DoE policy to be more affirming.
- Funding for rural LGBTQ+ NPOs

Meso-system ecological intervention:

- Psychoeducation to families, school communities and communities at large (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Thobejane et al., 2018).
- Policy implementation, building facilities and availing LGBTQ+ youth health and social services. (Luvuno et al., 2019; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021)
- Advocacy and training on inclusion in schools and in the community at large (Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019)

Meso-system intervention:

- Raising awareness in communities
- Teachers addressing bullying.
- Schools altering uniform policies and providing gender non-binary bathrooms.
- Inclusion of LO topic in the curriculum
- Family intervention
- Affirmation in local taverns

Micro-system biopsychosocial Intervention:

Biological: sports and recreational activities, hormonal and gender reassignment services for transgender youth, MSM services, Antiretroviral treatment (Luvuno et al., 2019; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021; Scherf & Zanatta, 2021)

Psychological: mental health services (individual therapy, support groups) and psychoeducation to cultivate self-acceptance/positive identity, coping strategies, Self-relying attitudes, sense of mastery, hope and agency (Álvarez et al, 2022; Harper et al., 2021; Lo et al., 2022)

Social: LGBTQ+ support groups, Allies, enhancing social support from service providers, peers and families (Epprecht & Mngoma, 2022; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Mayeza, 2021)

Environmental: LGBTQ+ centres, Gender non-binary bathrooms in schools, sporting, and recreational centres (Daniels et al., 2019)

Microsystem Intervention

- Participation in sports, arts and recreational activities
- Health care resources, including gender-affirming services.
- NGO support groups and family

Figure 7.3: Multisystemic Resilience Enabling Biopsychosocial Ecological Intervention Model for Rural LGBTQ+ Youth.

The left-hand side of the altered conceptual framework contains ideas from the literature review that are in line with the theories and concepts used in this study. On the right-hand side, I have included a brief explanation of the results of this study.

To this end, gender and sexual minorities in a rural community within a Free State context not only encounter discrimination and marginalisation within the societal framework of rural communities, but they also experience structural and systemic oppression. Therefore, exploring beyond the rural environment is necessary to implement an effective and adaptable intervention.

7.6.1 Macrosystem Intervention

My research revealed that external macro systems influence the intervention in a rural ecology. For instance, the scarcity of resources in rural clinics can be attributed to the distribution of funds within the healthcare system at the provincial and national levels. I agree with the findings of Bhana (2014), Francis (2017), Luvuno et al. (2019), Mkhize and Maharaj (2021), and Moreno et al. (2020) that to support LGBTQ+ youth, the South African national government should actively address and counteract the prevailing norms that assume heterosexuality and cisgender identity. This review can be achieved by formulating and enforcing policies related to health and education that are inclusive and affirming of diverse gender and sexual identities. Therefore, it is evident that the requirements of higher-level systems determine whether an individual will adapt positively, regardless of their genotype or phenotype (Ungar, 2016, 2018b). The South African constitution has the potential to support efforts to promote inclusivity and reform structural systems to develop affirmative policies and ensure their effective implementation (Moreno et al., 2020). Furthermore, the execution of policies can be achieved by providing training and allocating resources at the intermediate levels, which can have a beneficial effect on rural schools as well as social and health facilities (Brown & Njoko, 2019; Francis, 2021; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021).

7.6.2 Mesosystem Intervention

My research highlighted the significant contributions of NGOs, teachers, and other community members in rural areas. These individuals advocated for inclusion and provided valuable resources that helped my participants develop resilience. Therefore, at the community level, it is crucial to advocate for inclusion, provide access to resources, and offer psychoeducation on gender and sexuality. This is supported by the APA (2021), Daniels et al. (2019), Haffejee and

Wiebesiek (2021), and Matsúmunyane and Hlalele (2019). Additionally, the level of risk exposure and the recipients' perception of relevance, which is determined by a specific context, are the key factors that influence resilience (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 202; Ungar, 2016, 2018b; Van Breda & Theron, 2018). Additionally, there are religious practices that affirm LGBTQ+ individuals, such as accepting and marrying same-sex couples. There are also cultural practices, like pre-colonial theorisation and lobola for same-sex couples, that communities can adopt to promote and embrace gender and sexual diversity. These practices have been discussed and documented by scholars such as Epprecht (1998), Jones and Ferguson (2020), and Murray and Roscoe (1998). Religious and culturally appropriate practices allow for advocacy without risk to African culture, norms, and indigenous heritage (Khuzwayo-Magwaza, 2021; Lopang, 2014; Montle, 2021).

As per the APA (APA, 2021), LGBTQ+ resilience at the community level is linked to advocacy, community activism, and social justice efforts to challenge oppressive systems and ensure social support, including access to community resources. These factors were apparent in my research, as evidenced by the participants' appreciation for the support they received from their social network. Nevertheless, society frequently bestows recognition upon displays of masculinity and femininity, considering them as "ego ideals", which can pose a hindrance when advocating for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ youth (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Thobejane et al., 2018). Likewise, the individuals I studied expressed significant concerns about the quality of their relationships and the overall framework of society, which frequently led to the development of internalised homophobia. Participants' narratives demonstrate that the intersection of risks and resources that promote resilience creates distinct routes to the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in this particular situation. Sexual and gender-diverse youth frequently deviate from societal heteronormative norms, leading to their victimisation and marginalisation from society (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016). My participants were subjected to brutality from both their family and community members, including instances of rape, assault, and microaggressions such as being verbally abused with derogatory language. Consequently, it would be feasible to intervene by advocating for psycho-educational initiatives aimed at enlightening communities about the underlying causes of prejudice and discrimination against sexual and gender-diverse communities, as well as the benefits of embracing inclusive cultural and religious customs (Kaoma, 2018; Khuzwayo-Magwaza, 2021; Lopang, 2014).

Participants encountered obstacles in their academic pursuits due to the presence of a uniform policy in schools, instances of microaggressions from specific teachers, and difficulties

associated with using gender-segregated restrooms. Therefore, schools require a comprehensive and cooperative intervention encompassing policies on uniforms, gender non-binary bathrooms, support groups for LGBTQ+ individuals, and active promotion of inclusivity. School intervention should also strive to enhance LGBTQ+ visibility and foster a sense of inclusion in the school environment while promoting acceptance of diverse gender and sexual orientations (McDermott et al., 2023).

7.7 Microsystem Intervention

I consolidated the results of this research and considered affirmative intervention at the micro-levels. Thus, for micro-level intervention, psychologists, therapists, social workers, community workers, and other professionals who work with LGBTQ+ youth in rural areas should be mindful of the issues set out below.

Firstly, the ecological theorisation of resilience also considers individualistic resilience processes, such as agency, which can be cultivated in resilience-enabling educational and therapeutic interventions (Álvarez et al., 2022). Moreover, LGBTQ+ resilience is a product of broader macrosystems that influence ecosystem interactions, such as sexual and gender-affirming school environments and peer and family support (Gyamerah et al., 2019). However, heteronormative societal culture and lack of social support impact how the internalisation of homophobia can lead to the non-normative functioning of LGBTQ+ youth (Daniels et al., 2019). Thus, the goal of the intervention, including resilience-enabling therapeutic intervention for LGBTQ+ people, is to restore psychic harmony, peace of mind, and total efficiency (Freud, 1935). The therapeutic process can entail reflection on sexuality and positionality and the internalised homophobia from significant people.

Moreover, the client may present with omnipotence, splitting, and idealisation at this point (Clarke, 2019). At this point, therapists can help clients to reflect so that they realise how an external heteronormative discourse, including macro and microaggressions, violence, and prejudices, can be internalised (Álvarez et al., 2022). Thus, mental well-being in LGBTQ+ youth could be maintained by working with distal stressors and developing a sense of belonging in a community (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Parmenter et al., 2021; Schmitz & Tyler, 2019). Moreover, individualistic LGBTQ+ youth resilience enabling intervention goes beyond mental health/psychological intervention, and they also include access to affirming physical health services.

As highlighted by Luvuno et al. (2019), Mkhize and Maharaj (2021), and da Luz Scherf et al. (2021), LGBTQ+ youth benefit from physical health services, which include gender-affirming treatment, MSM condoms, and Prep and post-exposure ARV treatment. My research also reported the need for these services in rural communities. Also, physical health in LGBTQ+ youth can be optimised through netball and other games, positively impacting mental well-being by creating a sense of belonging to a community (Daniels et al., 2019).

LGBTQ+ youth do not always have a sense of belonging in their communities owing to distal stressors, which bring feelings of marginalisation in families and the community (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019; Mayeza, 2021). Likewise, in my research, I noted that when distal stressors are internalised, propagating resilience can mean using atypical coping methods, such as abusing alcohol, to ease the intra-psychic pain that comes with marginalisation (Scannapieco et al., 2018). At this point, therefore, it is valuable to help LGBTQ+ youth understand the function of these substances through psychoeducation. Depending on the constitution or legislative laws to advocate for LGBTQ+ youth inclusion is insufficient owing to a prevalent hetero and cis-normative societal structure (Moreno et al., 2020).

Secondly, as Ungar (2011) highlighted, socio-ecology is both the drive and the focal point in examining and understanding the resilience process. The research highlighted family, friends, peers and allies, schools, social clubs (i.e., taverns), and local NGOs as social systems that enable LGBTQ+ youth resilience. Each system possessed multisystemic resilience principles stipulated by Ungar (2021). For example, the family system was a key social system that traded resilience in the psychological system by promoting self-acceptance and confidence. A family system that is resilient and enabling to LGBTQ+ youth is open and dynamic (Ungar, 2021). Such a system can adapt and transform (Ungar, 2018b) to affirm an LGBTQ+ child. Given the post-colonial amnesia that gender and sexual diversity are un-African (Khuzwayo-Magwaza, 2021; Matsúmunyane & Hlalele, 2019; Montle, 2021), most families, such as those of my research participants, do not have complete knowledge about the existence of such in an African community. However, a family system that can trade off resilience to the psychological system of an LGBTQ+ child can withstand the negative impact of hetero-cisnormative community norms and ideologies.

Thirdly, self-disclosure of one's sexual orientation is a complex issue that depends on the intersectionality of personal, family dynamics and sociocultural aspects, such as the realities of

coming out (Epprecht & Mngoma, 2022; Mayeza, 2021; Semang et al., 2020). So far, research has strongly suggested that community interventions encouraging LGBTQ+ youth to disclose their gender and sexual diversity could be doing more harm than good (Epprecht & Mngoma, 2022; Semang et al., 2020; Mayeza, 2021). Thus, an intervention deemed contextually relevant should be implemented, given the resources and possibilities for inclusion that a rural socio-ecology can provide (Rand & Paceley, 2022). Given this research, as a result, any form of community or personal intervention should not encourage coming out of the closet but psycho-educate communities and individuals about the advantages and disadvantages of coming out to family, friends, and others. Therefore, psychologists must be aware that disclosing one's sexuality has a negative connotation because it advances a heteronormative discourse (Mayeza, 2021).

However, disclosure of LGBTQ+ identity can have a personal meaning for an individual. Moreover, when practitioners work with families, it is necessary to understand that accepting an LGBTQ+ youth's parents may go through "the mourning process"; parents often have gendered expectations of their children (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Moosa & Bhana, 2020a, 2020b). Therefore, discovering and accepting a child's sexuality can be difficult (McCormick, 2015; Sandler, 2022). Thus, parents are often unprepared to hear about a child's sexuality and are often disempowered by a hetero- and cisnormative discourse (Mayeza, 2021).

Fourthly, negotiating sexual and gender identity depends on different intersecting aspects of positionality, such as, for instance, in the study, being Black, speaking Sotho or belonging to a Basotho ethnic group, unemployment, poverty, and orphanhood. Unfortunately, LGBTQ+ youth negotiate their gender and sexual identity surrounded by heterosexual power and privilege, which limits access to certain desired affirming relationships and places (Francis, 2017). It is, therefore, important for LGBTQ+ youth to identify some relationships and places in the community that have the potential to support their resilience (Daniels et al., 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Rothmann, 2018). Therefore, a psychologist may join with clients in exploring the identified relationships and social structures available and need to appreciate that there is a lack of health resources for transgender people and other LGBTQ+ youth (Koch et al., 2019; Mkhize & Maharaj, 2021).

7.7.1 Potential Contributions to Understanding Multisystemic LGBTQ+ Youth Resilience

There is an urgent need for affirmative practices and reform in policies toward the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people, including youth. This study examined systemic resilience and proposed

approaches. By adopting a multisystemic perspective on resilience, this approach considers the interconnectedness of various systems. It considers how biological, psychological, and social factors contribute to vulnerability and resilience. Only a limited number of studies (e.g., Govender et al., 2019; Gyamerah et al., 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Logie et al., 2018; Luvuno et al., 2019) have specifically examined LGBTQ+ resilience, but these studies either did not utilise a systems approach or were not conducted in rural areas. Furthermore, the resilience research conducted among Free State youth in mainstream studies did not specifically prioritise examining LGBTQ+ youth resilience.

There are several studies that have been carried out in the United States and Canada to examine the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth. These studies include Asakura (2019), Rand and Paceley (2022), and Johnston et al. (2021). However, given the importance of culture, context, positionality, and other ecological factors in influencing resilience, it is not appropriate to generalise findings from studies conducted in the United States and other Western countries to the South African context (Ungar, 2018b). Hence, this research contributed substantially to comprehending the multifaceted ability of LGBTQ+ youth to adapt and thrive in a rural South African setting that upholds freedom. Furthermore, the study highlights the pressing need for policy implementation and affirmative practices in the rural community of the Free State due to the overlapping personal, relational, and structural risk factors identified. Furthermore, this study unveiled noteworthy observations regarding the interplay of psychological, social, and environmental factors that contribute to the development of LGBTQ+ resilience.

First and foremost, this research uncovered psychological and familial resilience traits linked to resilience in LGBTQ+ youth. My research indicated that lack of support within the family is a significant contributor to the development of internalised homophobia, which in turn leads to symptoms of depression. Furthermore, non-affirmation is bolstered by religious beliefs, cultural norms, and a lack of understanding regarding LGBTQ+ identity. Moreover, the intervention proved beneficial in tackling risk factors in families. The insights acquired from this facet of the research could prove valuable to psychologists operating within this domain, enabling them to customise therapeutic interventions aimed at enhancing resilience in LGBTQ+ youth and their families.

Furthermore, this study demonstrated how educators and school administrators fostered LGBTQ+ resilience. Schools fostered resilience by tackling homophobic bullying, modifying current uniform policies to accommodate LGBTQ+ youth, and designating bathrooms as

"gender neutral" for LGBTQ+ youth. The Department of Education can utilise the findings of this research to revamp policies and strive towards implementing affirmative policies in rural schools.

Moreover, this study demonstrated the significant contribution of NGOs in educating families and communities about gender and sexual diversity. Non-profit organisations (NPOs) promote inclusivity and actively oppose schools and health systems that discriminate against non-heterosexual individuals. Additionally, they offer healthcare services specifically tailored to the needs of LGBTQ+ individuals. This information is vital for comprehending and enhancing the community's strengths and resources. Also, participants who did not have NGOs in their communities believed that such organisations could help raise awareness in the community and distribute resources that would help them. Hence, the acquired knowledge from this research is valuable to the Department of Social Development to distribute resources efficiently to LGBTQ+ NGOs to bolster their efforts.

Additionally, this study demonstrates how communities bolstered the ability of LGBTQ+ youth to bounce back from adversity, aligning with the African philosophy of Ubuntu. However, only a small number of religious institutions acknowledged and validated LGBTQ+ identity. Additionally, this research suggests that local taverns serve as environments that validate certain behaviours associated with small-scale and large-scale acts of hostility and increased levels of communal assistance. Practitioners and community leaders can utilise the research findings to strengthen their advocacy for inclusion based on Ubuntu values. They can also collaborate with taverns to raise awareness within the community.

7.8   Researcher Reflexivity

In this section, I have included my reflections on the study. I reflected on the assumptions I brought to this study and how my participants' unique multisystemic resilience accounts aligned with or deviated from my initial assumptions.

I was astounded by certain participants who shared profound and intimate narratives about their lives. I did not expect participants to reveal too sensitive experiences of their lives, such as being raped before, owing to the shame such carries. They seemed eager to recount their experiences, and a phenomenological study provided the most effective means. Incorporating the [2]Sesotho language in most interviews proved advantageous, facilitating effective

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[2] Sesotho is a language spoken by people belonging to Basotho ethnic population and other ethnic groups around Free State province.

participant engagement. Nevertheless, due to my affiliation with the University, I initially perceived the existence of a power imbalance. I endeavoured to build a connection by elucidating the objective of the research in their native tongue, and the illustrations they created facilitated their relaxation.

A subset of the participants identified me as a heterosexual male affiliated with the University, and none of them inquired about my sexual orientation. Furthermore, I refrained from disclosing any information to them. However, certain individuals among the participants were able to discern my sexual orientation as a gay man from their community due to my exceptional proficiency in speaking Sesotho despite having an isiXhosa name.

My personal experience growing up in a rural community was not great during primary school years. I remember that I would change streets or walk back whenever I observed a group of boys walking down, fearing to be bullied. I developed anxiety. I had challenges relating my experiences to anyone, including my family. I had heterosexual friends who were loving, accepting, and supportive. At some point, I joined soccer, trying to fit in, but I could not. I was bullied at school. I remember the secondary school I went to used to be labelled as a school that accepts gays. Despite the cis-normative uniform policies in my previous secondary school, gay learners were allowed to play netball with girls. Also, the school principal and teachers protected gay learners against homophobic bullying. I spent about five years in Pretoria and Johannesburg doing my master's degree and working as a psychologist. Returning to Free State province to do this research was indeed fulfilling.

7.8.1 Reflecting on the Methodological Limitations of This Study

My research yielded significant data regarding the ability of gender and sexually diverse youth in a rural Free State community to adapt and thrive across multiple systems. Nevertheless, the study was susceptible to potential biases. As a researcher, I identify as a Christian. I was raised in Vredefort and Parys, which are located in the Free State province. In Chapter 1, I shared my personal experiences regarding the rural community context in the Free State, along with the assumptions I made. To mitigate bias, I consciously tried to analyse my understanding of this community and the distinct data that has arisen from the study critically. I observed resemblances and disparities between my presumptions and deliberated upon them with my supervisor.

An additional methodological constraint in the study is the exclusive utilisation of drawings as a supplementary approach for data collection. A few participants expressed dissatisfaction with

their drawings, and I had to reassure them that I was not evaluating their artistic abilities. Subsequently, I became aware of alternative approaches for gathering data, including utilising photographs, timelines, or focus groups.

Additional constraints of my research include its exclusive focus on LGBTQ+ youth. It would have been valuable to conduct interviews with their families, service providers, and professionals involved in their care, such as educators, clinic nurses, and local non-profit organisations (NPOs), to enhance the research's utility.

7.9   Reflecting on the Assumptions Brought to This Study

In Chapter 1, I assumed that the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in rural areas of South Africa is influenced by individualistic intrapsychic processes and limited relational, structural, and environmental resources. Through this study, I discovered that validation and encouragement from family, friends, teachers, and community members primarily enhanced personal qualities such as assertiveness and self-assurance. Therefore, individualistic or psychological qualities do not exist in isolation. In addition, individuals who expressed experiences of lacking validation from their families experienced notable adverse consequences of minority stress, including symptoms associated with depression.

The second assumption in Chapter 1 posits that LGBTQ+ youth living in rural areas of South Africa, like their peers in other African societies as well as American and Western communities, typically hide their gender and sexual orientation until they consider it suitable or safe to reveal. The participants in the study held divergent perspectives; the act of hiding one's sexual orientation is associated with diminished self-assurance and other consequences stemming from minority stress.

The third assumption was that in rural communities, LGBTQ+ youth who openly disclose their sexual orientations and gender identities tend to form friendships with peers who have similar identities, as well as with heterosexual peers who have open-minded attitudes, to create a feeling of safety.

7.10   Recommendations

In this section, I make recommendations for policy, practice and future LGBTQ+ youth resilience studies.

7.10.1 Recommendations for Policy

- The national Department of Basic Education (DBE) must urgently draft a policy on affirmation practices for LGBTQ+ learners, focusing on admission policies, uniforms, gender non-binary bathrooms, antibullying, and sports participation in schools.

- The Department of Health and Social Development should draft healthcare-inclusive policies and practice considerations that healthcare workers and social workers can use to provide a sensitive intervention to LGBTQ+ youth and their families.

7.10.2 Recommendations for Practice

- The education department must provide teacher workshops on gender and sexual diversity.

- The Department of Health must train nurses to provide affirming health care to gender and sexual minorities.

- The Department of Social Development needs to train social workers on working with LGBTQ+ individuals and their families.

- Community intervention is needed, and existing LGBTQ+ youth NPOs are well-positioned to provide it. Therefore, the Department of Social Development needs to allocate more funds for training and resources for existing organisations.

7.10.3 Recommendations For Future Research

Engaging in introspection regarding the contributions and constraints of my research has prompted me to contemplate forthcoming investigations on the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth.

- Further research is required to investigate the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth, as this area has not been adequately studied. Future studies on LGBTQ+ youth should include the integration of focus groups.

- Conducting interviews with parents and family members of LGBTQ+ youth would be beneficial in examining the risk factors and resilience within a family dynamic when raising an LGBTQ+ youth. Family intervention is necessary for addressing the majority of issues faced by LGBTQ+ youth. They possess knowledge regarding how families in rural areas manage risk factors and provide support to their gender and sexually diverse children.

- It is necessary to conduct interviews with teachers, school nurses, and NGOs that work with LGBTQ+ youth to gain a deeper understanding of the difficulties they face and

the resources they utilise in supporting the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in this particular setting.

7.11   Summary Of The Chapter and Conclusion

This study, which was rooted in social justice, not only focused on individualistic/bio-psychological resilience qualities but also looked at the facilitating role of social, cultural, structural, institutional and environmental factors. LGBTQ+ youth are faced with various risk factors that are detrimental to their physical and psychological well-being. Thus, both looking at how individual LGBTQ+ youths resile and the role that their physical and social environment play in enabling resilience is crucial. The responsibility for resilience is placed on the individual agencies to navigate the resources the ecology should provide (Ungar, 2011). Affirmation practices are long overdue to ensure that the human rights of LGBTQ+ people are protected. Institutions such as local schools and clinics should play a role in ensuring that awareness and psychoeducation are given to communities on various matters surrounding sexual and gender minorities. It is essential to cherish existing affirmations, such as existing LGBTQ+ youth NPOs in some communities, as well as create opportunities for new affirmation in rural communities.

The Free State rural community context is a risk-saturated community context like other rural contexts. However, this research proved that this context supports LGBTQ+ resilience in unique, cultural, and contextually meaningful ways. As a result, it is possible to affirm LGBTQ+ in rural spaces. Still, such affirmation needs a collaborative effort from different local community stakeholders, including but not limited to families, teachers, local clinic nurses, social workers, community leaders and psychologists. Moreover, affirmation and inclusivity can be brought by transforming hetero-cis-normative macrosystems (for example, national and provincial health and education systems), resulting in the provision of resilience enabling resources to mesosystems (for example, community and family level), thus having a positive influence in the microsystem (i.e., LGBTQ+ youth). I hope that in the spirit of Ubuntu and demonstrating God's love for LGBTQ+ youth, this research assists in bringing insights into promoting their resilience in a rural community context.

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APPENDICES

8.1 APPENDIX A: ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER

UNISA | university of south africa

UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2023/07/05

Ref: **2023/07/05/55075924/28/AM**
Name: Mr MS Zhange
Student No.:55075924

Dear Mr MS Zhange

Decision: Ethics Approval from
2023/07/05 to 2028/07/05

Researcher(s): Name: Mr MS Zhange
E-mail address: 555075924@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 0737860994

Supervisor(s): Name: Prof K Mohangi
E-mail address: mohank@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 012 337 6169

Title of research:
The multisystemic resilience of gender and sexually diverse youth in a rural community context in the Free State Province

Qualification: PhD in Psychology

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2023/07/05 to 2028/07/05.

*The **medium risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2023/07/05 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:
1. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached.
2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.

3. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.

4. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.

5. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.

6. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.

7. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.

8. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2028/07/05**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number **2023/07/05/55075924/28/AM** *should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Kind regards,

Prof AT Motlhabane
CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC
motlhat@unisa.ac.za

Prof Mpine Makoe
EXECUTIVE DEAN
qakisme@unisa.ac.za

Approved - decision template – updated 16 Feb 2017

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8.2   APPENDIX B: TURNITIN REPORT

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8.3 APPENDIX C: LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Member South African Translators' Institute
www.language-services.online

16 March 2024.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

The thesis "The multi-systemic resilience of gender and sexually diverse youth in a rural community context in the Free State Province" by Mthandeki Simon Zhange has been proofread and edited for language by me.

I verify that the document is ready for publication or public viewing in terms of language and has been formatted per the prescribed style.

Please note that no view is expressed regarding the document's technical contents or changes made after the date of this letter.

Kind regards

Anna M de Wet

SATI MEMBER 1003422

BA (English, Afrikaans, Latin) (Cum Laude), University of Pretoria.
BA Hons ((Latin) (Cum Laude), University of Pretoria.
BA Hons (Psychology), University of Pretoria.

8.4 APPENDIX D: EVIDENCE OF DATA ANALYSIS- ATLAS TI CODE REPORT EXCERPT

Project: Multisystemic Resilience of Gender and Sexually Diverse Youth in FS Rural Community Context

Report created by Mthandeki Zhange on 2023/12/12

Code Report

All (103) codes

● **a need for affirmation and visibility in churches, school and community**

Created by Mthandeki Zhange on 2023/08/28, modified by Mthandeki Zhange on 2023/09/04

1 Groups:

Resources needed

0 Codes

● **a need for diversity in schools curriculum & practices**

Created by Mthandeki Zhange on 2023/08/28, modified by Mthandeki Zhange on 2023/09/13

1 Groups:

Resources needed

0 Codes

● **a need for support groups and LGBTQ+ organisations**

Created by Mthandeki Zhange on 2023/08/28, modified by Mthandeki Zhange on 2023/08/31

1 Groups:

Resources needed

0 Codes

● **acceptance from ancestors**

Created by Mthandeki Zhange on 2023/08/27, modified by Mthandeki Zhange on 2023/08/31

1 Groups:

Religion and spirituality

0 Codes

● **acceptance of LGBTQ+ identity from community**

Created by Mthandeki Zhange on 2023/08/27, modified by Mthandeki Zhange on 2023/08/31

1 Groups:

Community members support

0 Codes

● **acceptance of LGBTQ+ identity at school**

Created by Mthandeki Zhange on 2023/08/27, modified by Mthandeki Zhange on 2023/08/31

1 Groups:

School based supports

0 Codes

● **accepting atmosphere at local tarven**

Created by Mthandeki Zhange on 2023/08/27, modified by Mthandeki Zhange on 2023/08/31

2 Groups:

Community based supports / Environment Natural and Insractructure

0 Codes

● **adapting to heteronomativity**

Created by Mthandeki Zhange on 2023/08/27, modified by Mthandeki Zhange on 2023/08/31

1 Groups:

Internalised homophobia

0 Codes

8.5 APPENDIX E: SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT

Biographical information	
Age	21
Race and ethnic group	Black, Sesotho
Community Name	Ventersburg
Gender and sexual identity	Transexual female
Pronouns	Her/hers
Are you at a secondary school, tertiary institution, employed or unemployed	Unemployed

Transcript

RESEARCHER: Take me through your journey of discovering your sexual identity and gender expression

P3-TRANSWOMAN: I grew up as a boy, a straight boy wearing clothes all the time; it was five years when I discovered that I was gay; In my primary days, I was always with girls, spending most of the time with girls. So what I could tell is that I, really, really enjoyed being around them even now. So what used to happen is that during those times, everyone was unaware of, or they were ignoring, gay people out there. So, it was hard for me to say I was gay. I then decided that let myself live in a closet and keep it as a problem having this kind of problem My early grade 3, I became brave enough and said, let me come out of the closet

RESEARCHER: You were around what age in Grade 3?

P3-TRANSWOMAN: I was nine years

RESEARCHER: what were your fears? You mentioned something about people.

P3-TRANSWOMAN: according to my knowledge, there is a lot of discrimination in our location because the knowledge is so low; they don't know how to treat a gay person, how to speak to her, how to pronounce her, how to treat her in a war. So ….

RESEARCHER: They don't know how to use the right pronouns… so what kind of things you saw in your community that indicate that your community doesn't know

P3-TRANSWOMAN: There is this other old gay, I can say; he is someone I know from, so this person, when I grew up, was already out of the closet, already wearing makeup, and was dating both genders. I am not sure if they were bisexual or not. The person often, when they are on the streets, used to be called names such as "Trasie", you are a bitch, and you can't just put on makeup like you are a woman.

RESEARCHER: So it was those homophobic comments; if you could remember more, what did they say? How did they treat them?

P3-TRANSWOMAN: When they were passing the whole street from corner to corner, they used to say, hey bitch, how can you wear makeup wares? You are a man. You have to stand firm and be the man you came to earth being. These statements made me fear coming out of the closet, thinking that maybe I would be called such names; that was my journey…

RESEARCHER: Hmmm

P3-TRANSWOMAN: so early in grade 5 that when I started dating this other guy from Bloemfontein, he goes by the name of Shawn. Well, it was a relationship. I think it was my mistake not telling him I am actually gay and still in the closet. As time passed, my friends asked me who this was; I then had to tell them that no, he was my boyfriend. They asked how you could have a boyfriend if you were a boy.

RESEARCHER: Those friends are girls?

P3-TRANSWOMAN: Yes, my female friends; I was so shattered because I couldn't tell them that, guys, this is how I am, this is how I feel, this is me in the coming days

RESEARCHER: What were you fearing when you said you couldn't tell them who you were?

P3-TRANSWOMAN: They are full of discrimination. They are so, so, so homophobic those people I could tell one of the stories they used to say, having conversations about other gays from social media, they would say, how can a male wear J string? Where are the balls(*testicles*)? You know such things …so that made my self-esteem.

RESEARCHER: So, those comments affected your self-esteem?

P3-TRANSWOMAN: so much, so I ended up telling myself that maybe I am still trying to find out whether I am gay or what; I am not sure. I am not firm about my sexuality for now; they said if you are gay, you have to cut yourself from us .. it was a really, really heavy situation.

RESEARCHER: Hmmm

P3-TRANSWOMAN: So coming out of the closed in Grade 6 was difficult, but I had to do it.

RESEARCHER: You are saying you had to do it, and I am wondering what it is that let you make that decision to say I want to do it

P3-TRANSWOMAN: Things that used to eat me inside (*troubled me emotionally*); I used to smile, but by then, I was always moody, so the whole situation was changing my personality

RESEARCHER: Okay

P3-TRANSWOMAN: so I thought if I can come out of the closet, I can be the Mpho that I know from my birth

RESEARCHER: So you thought coming out of the closet would positively affect your emotional well-being?

P3-TRANSWOMAN: Yes, so Grade 6 was when I realised that, okay, let me do this. It was around June, and I was still dating the same guy from Bloemfontein. I had a call from him telling me that he wanted to meet my family; I wanted to tell him that you couldn't just do that because my Mom didn't know

8.6   APPENDIX F: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

UNISA | college of education

A Blank Copy of Informed Consent Form and Return Form
Informed Consent for Participation in interviews, an audio recording of interviews, and use of

direct quotations in the write-up.

DEAR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT

My name is Mthandeki Simon Zhange. I am doing research under the supervision of Professor K Mohangi, a Professor in the Department of Psychology of Education, towards a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Psychology at the University of South Africa. We invite you to participate in a study entitled: The multisystemic resilience of gender and sexually diverse youth in a rural community context in the Free State Province.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This study is expected to collect important information that could help explore how the LGBTQ+ youth 's environment in a rural community in the Free State province influences their resilience. To understand resilience, this study looks at risk factors that threaten well-being and what factors influence the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in the rural Free State context. This study will explore how multisystemic factors (I.e., biological, psychological, social, and environmental) influence resilience in LQBTQ+ youth. This study seeks to use resilience research to influence policy implementation and make practice recommendations to stakeholders such as queer-informed narrative therapists, teachers, school managers, psychologists, and social workers working with LGBTQ+ youth in rural communities.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are invited because:

- You are a young person who identifies as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or questioning.
- Either stay, attend or have attended school in a rural area in the Free State province.
- Be between 16 -30 years of age.
- You are doing Grade 11 or 12 or unemployed (completed your matric) or at institutions of higher learning or working.

I obtained your contact details from a friend or community organisation who referred me to you. This study will consist of approximately fourteen participants. Ten of my participants will be cisgender individuals. Five should identify as male, and five should identify as female. Four of my research participants should identify as transgender.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves *audio taping in a semi-structured interview. The type of questions I may ask in an interview are:*

- Take me on your journey towards discovering, dealing with/working through, or accepting your gender and sexual identity.

- Draw a picture (s) of what coping with stress or being strong looks like for you as an LGBTQ+ person; you can include people, places, and things that support your well-being in the presence of stress.

- What hardships do you or any other LGBTQ+ youth endure as a gender and sexually-diverse youth growing up in your community?
- Who and where did you get support, and how were you supported?
- What good experiences did you have as an LGBTQ+ young person at school and in your community?
- How can your community, including different places, community members, schools, churches, local clinics, and others, contribute to the resilience or well-being of LGBTQ+ young people?

Please note that the Interviews will last longer than 1 hour 30 minutes

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary, and you are not obligated to consent to participation. If you decide to participate, you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a written consent (adult)/ assent (participant younger than 18 years old) form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This resilience research may help to promote human rights, inclusion, and social justice for LGBTQ+ youth who are often experiencing the negative effects of marginalisation in communities. This research could come up with practice considerations and recommendations for different rural community stakeholders who are working with LGBTQ+ youth. This research may be useful in understanding how LGBTQ+ youth in a Free State rural community context tap into their psychological strengths and social and environmental supports amid different adversities/risks related to being an

LGBTQ+ young person. This research may help policymakers, psychologists, social workers, and health and education practitioners (i.e., school managers and teachers) to implement strength-based approaches to increase LGBTQ+ youth well-being and resilience at individual and community levels.

ARE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

Please note that by participating in this research, you have experience emotional distress as you will be speaking about your experiences as a gender and or sexually diverse young person. LGBTQ+ youth participating in this research are encouraged to reach out to me and I will assit you to book free debriefing sessions with the social workers at your local clinic, which I will assist participants in navigating to these resources. Should this not be possible, please liaise with me; I will take responsibility for organising alternative counselling services.

WILL THE INFORMATION I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Please note that during the interviews, a tape recorder will be used; this will help me to transcribe the data. The identity of all participants in this research will be protected by excluding any identifying information on the research report. Transcripts will be saved on a password-protected computer, and only my supervisor and I can access the transcripts.

Your name will not be recorded anywhere, and no one can connect you to the answers you give. Your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym, and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods, such as conference proceedings.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

The researcher will store hard copies of your answers for five years in a locked a cupboard at his home for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password-protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. *Hard copies will be shredded, and electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the computer's hard drive through a relevant software program*.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

No payment will be awarded to participants in this study.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the college of education Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you want to be informed of the final research findings, please get in touch with Mthandeki Zhange at 0737860994 or email 55075924@mylife.unisa.ac.za. The findings are accessible for five years. You should also contact Mthandeki Zhange should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study.

Should you have concerns about how the research has been conducted, you may contact:

Prof K Mohangi

Email:mohank@unisa.ac.za

Tell: 012 337 6169

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.

_____

Mthandeki Zhange

CONSENT/ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY (Return slip)

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation. I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have been able to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw without penalty (if applicable). I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and conference proceedings but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified. I agree to the recording of the interview. I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname (please print)   _____

_____   _____
Participant Signature   Date

Researcher's Name & Surname (please print)   _____

_____   _____
Researcher's signature   Date

EXAMPLE OF A LETTER REQUESTING PARENTAL CONSENT FOR MINORS TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

Dear Parent

Your Child is invited to participate in a study entitled: The multisystemic resilience of gender and sexually diverse youth in a rural community context in the Free State Province.

I am undertaking this study as part of my doctoral research at the University of South Africa. The purpose of the study is This study is expected to collect important information that could help in exploring how the LGBTQ+ youth 's environment in a rural community in the Free State province influences their resilience. To understand resilience, this study looks at risk factors that threaten well-being and what factors influence the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in the rural Free State context. This study will explore how multisystemic factors (I.e., biological, psychological, social, and environmental) influence resilience in LQBTQ+ youth. The possible benefits of the study are to influence policy implementation and make practice recommendations to different stakeholders such as queer-informed narrative therapists, teachers, school managers, psychologists, and social workers working with LGBTQ+ youth in rural communities.

WHY IS YOUR CHILD INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?
- They are a young person who identifies as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or questioning.
- Either stay, attend or have attended school in a rural area in the Free State province.
- They are between 16 -30 years of age.
- They are doing Grade 11 or 12 or unemployed (completed your matric) or at institutions of higher learning or working.

If you allow your child to participate, I shall request them to:

- Take part in an interview for one hour to one and a half hours at their home or any place they feel comfortable. Please note that the interviews will be recorded.

The questions I will ask in an interview are:

- Take me on your journey towards discovering, dealing with/working through, or accepting your gender and sexual identity.
- Draw a picture (s) of what coping with stress or being strong looks like for you as an LGBTQ+ person; you can include people, places, and things that support your well-being in the presence of stress.
- What hardships do you or any other LGBTQ+ youth endure as a gender and sexually-diverse youth growing up in your community?
- Who and where did you get support, and how were you supported?
- What good experiences did you have as an LGBTQ+ young person at school and in your community?
- How can your community, including different places, community members, schools, churches, local clinics, and others, contribute to the resilience or well-being of LGBTQ+ young people?

Any information obtained in connection with this study and can be identified with your child will remain confidential and only be disclosed with your permission. Their responses will not be linked to their name, your name or the school's name in any written or verbal report based on this study. Such a report will be used for research purposes only.

The only foreseeable risk to your child by participating in the study is emotional distress owing to relating their experiences as LGBTQ+ youth. Your child will receive no direct benefit from participating in the study; however, the possible benefits to the wide LGBTQ+ youth are:

This resilience research aims to promote human rights, inclusion, and social justice for LGBTQ+ youth who are often experiencing the negative effects of marginalisation in communities. This research may come up with practice considerations and recommendations for different rural community stakeholders who are working with LGBTQ+ youth. This research may be useful in understanding how LGBTQ+ youth in a Free State rural community context tap into their psychological strengths and social and environmental supports amid different adversities/risks related to being an LGBTQ+ young person. This research may help policymakers, psychologists, social workers, and health and education practitioners (i.e., school managers and teachers) to implement strength-based approaches to increase LGBTQ+ youth well-being and resilience at individual and community levels.

Neither your child nor you will receive any payment for participating in this study.

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may decline to participate or withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal or refusal to participate will not affect them in any way. Similarly, you can agree to allow your child to be in the study and change your mind later without penalty.

In addition to your permission, your child must agree to participate in the study, and you and your child will also be asked to sign the assent form accompanying this letter. If your child does not wish to participate in the study, they will not be included, and there will be no penalty. The information gathered from the study and your child's participation will be stored securely on a password-locked computer in my locked office for five years after the study. After that, records will be erased.

There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research.

If you have questions about this study, please ask me or my study supervisor, Prof K Mohangi, Department of Psychology of Education, College of Education, University of South Africa. My contact number is 0737860994, and my e-mail is 55075924@mylife.unisa.ac.za. The e-mail of my supervisor is mohank@unisa.ac.za; her telephone number is: 012 337 6169

Permission for the study has already been given to the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA.

You are deciding to allow your child to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information above and decided to allow them to participate in the study. You may keep a copy of this letter.

Name of child:

Sincerely

_____   _____   _____

Parent/guardian's name (print)   Parent/guardian's signature: Date:

_____   _____   _____

Researcher's name (print)   Researcher's Signature   Date:

8.8 APPENDIX H: A BLANK COPY OF ASSENT FORM

UNISA | college of education

EXAMPLE OF A LETTER REQUESTING ASSENT FROM Minors TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

Title of your research: The multisystemic resilience of gender and sexually diverse youth in a rural community context in the Free State Province.

Dear _____   Date _____

I am studying LGBTQ+ youth multisystemic resilience as part of my studies at the University of South Africa. I would like to invite you to be a very special part of my study. I am doing this study to find out how resilience (being strong) looks like amid risk factors that threaten well-being and what factors influence the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in the rural Free State context. This study will explore how multisystemic factors (I.e., biological, psychological, social, and environmental) influence resilience in LQBTQ+ youth.

This letter is to explain to you what I would like you to do. There may be some words you do not know in this letter. You may ask me or any other adult to explain any of these words that you do not know or understand. You may take a copy of this letter home to consider my invitation and talk to your parents about this before deciding if you want to be in this study.

I would like to interview you because:

- You are a young person who identifies as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or questioning.
- Either stay, attend or have attended school in a rural area in the Free State province.
- Be between 16 -30 years of age.
- You are doing Grade 11 or 12 or unemployed (completed your matric) or at institutions of higher learning or working.

I obtained your contact details from a friend or community organisation who referred me to you. This study will consist of approximately fourteen participants. Ten of my participants will be cisgender

individuals. Five should identify as male, and five should identify as female. Four of my research participants should identify as transgender.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves *audio taping in a semi-structured interview. The questions I will ask in an interview are:*

- Take me on your journey towards discovering, dealing with/working through, or accepting your gender and sexual identity.
- Draw a picture (s) of what coping with stress or being strong looks like for you as an LGBTQ+ person; you can include people, places, and things that support your well-being in the presence of stress.
- What hardships do you or any other LGBTQ+ youth endure as a gender and sexually-diverse youth growing up in your community?
- Who and where did you get support, and how were you supported?
- What good experiences did you have as an LGBTQ+ young person at school and in your community?
- How can your community, including different places, community members, schools, churches, local clinics, and others, contribute to the resilience or well-being of LGBTQ+ young people?

Please note that the Interviews will last between 1 hour – 1:30 minutes.

I will write a report on the study but not use your name in the report or say anything that will let other people know who you are. Participation is voluntary, and you do not have to be part of this study if you don't want to take part. If you choose to be in the study, you may stop participating at any time without penalty. You may tell me if you do not want to answer my questions. No one will blame or criticise you. When I finish my study, I shall return to your school to talk briefly about some of the helpful and interesting things I learned. I shall invite you to come and listen to my talk.

The benefits of this study are:

This study seeks to use resilience research to influence policy implementation and make practice recommendations to stakeholders, such as queer-informed narrative therapists, teachers, school managers, psychologists, and social workers working with LGBTQ+ youth in rural communities.

Potential risks are:

Please note that by participating in this research, you have experience distress as you will be speaking about your experiences as a gender and or sexually diverse young person. LGBTQ+ youth participating in this research are encouraged to reach out to the local clinic to book free debriefing sessions with

the social workers, which I will assist participants in navigating to these resources. Should this not be possible, please liaise with me; I will take responsibility for organising alternative counselling services.

You will not be reimbursed or receive any incentives for participating in the research.

If you decide to be part of my study, you will be asked to sign the form on the next page. If you have any other questions about this study, you can talk to me or have your parent or another adult call me at 0737860994. Do not sign the form until you have all your questions answered and understand what I would like you to do.

Researcher: _____ Phone number: _____

Do not sign the written assent form if you have any questions. Ask your questions first and ensure that someone answers those questions.

WRITTEN ASSENT

I have read this letter which asks me to be part of a study at my school. I have understood my study's information and know what I will be asked to do. I am willing to be in the study.

_____ _____ _____
Learner's name (print): Learner's signature: Date:

_____ _____ _____
Witness's name (print) Witness's Signature Date:

(The witness is over 18 years old and present when signed.)

_____ _____ _____
Parent/guardian's name (print) Parent/guardian's signature: Date:

_____ _____ _____
Researcher's name (print) Researcher's signature: Date:

8.9   APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Section A

Biographic Information (for LGBTQ+ youth)

1. Preferred Name
2. Age
3. Race and Ethnic Group
4. Name of your community
5. Your pronouns (i.e., He, she or they)
6. Identify either as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Queer
7. Are you at a secondary school, tertiary institution, employed or unemployed

Section B

Research Focused Questions (for LGBTQ+ youth in my study)

- Draw me a picture (s) of what coping with stress or being strong looks like; you can include people, places and things that support your well-being in the presence of stress.

- Take me on your journey towards discovering, dealing with, or accepting your gender and sexual identity.

- What hardships do you or any other LGBTQ+ youth endure as a gender and sexually-diverse youth growing up in your community?

- Who did you get support from, and how?

- What good experiences did you have as an LGBTQ+ young person at school and in your community?

- How can your community, including different places, community members, schools, churches, local clinics, and others, contribute to the resilience or well-being of LGBTQ+ young people?

The researcher and nature of the study

My name is Mthandeki Zhange; I am a PhD in Psychology (Psychology of Education) student at the University of South Africa (UNISA). I am inviting fourteen participants to participate in a study titled: The multisystemic resilience of gender and sexually diverse youth in a rural community context in the Free State Province.

Invitation to Participate in an LGBTQ+ Youth Research Study

I am looking for participants who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or queer/questioning (LGBTQ+); they should:

- Either staying, attending, or attending school in a rural area in the Free State province.
- Be between 16 -30 years of age
- Either doing Grade 11 or 12 at institutions of higher learning, unemployed or working
- Unemployed and working participants must have completed their Grade12
- For participants under 18 years, parents will need to consent for participation and should therefore be aware of the youth's LGBTQ+ identity

The study will comprise an interview at a place where participants feel safe. Should you be interested in participating in this study, please don't hesitate to send a WhatsApp message to this number: 081 481 4858

Date	Notes
15 October 2022	**Activity: Presentation at Psychology conference:** Prior the conference I submitted the abstract which was accepted. **Abstract has been accepted as an oral presentation** 24 July 2022 Dear Mthandeki Zhange We are pleased to inform you that your submission titled: Gender and sexual diverse youth in a rural community: A resilience perspective , has been accepted for inclusion as an **Oral Presentation** in the Scientific Programme of the 26th Annual South Africa Psychology Congress held at Emperors' Palace, in Johannesburg, South Africa, from the 12th - 14th October 2022. Please note that to ensure that your presentation will be included in the congress programme, you are required to pay your registration fee, in full, by **31 July 2022**. Information related to the scheduling of your presentation will follow in due course. If you have any queries, please contact the Congress Organiser, Ms Fatima Seedat (by replying to this email), and quote Abstract ID: 97. Kind Regards Ms Fatima Seedat *Congress Organiser* *26th Annual South Africa Psychology Congress* *Acceptance letter from Psysaa* **Notes:** I consulted with my supervisor who assisted me to revise my presentation. At the conference I received comments from different psychology practitioners and scholars. One leading resilience scholar recommended that I look at the multisystemic resilience, by then my topic only focused on the socio-ecological resilience. I think I will have a look at this new approach perhaps I will revise my title and research focus.
13 November 2022	**Activity: Editing research proposal** **Notes:** Its towards the end of the year, I have to submit my proposal for marking, I am so overwhelmed by revisions I have to make in my work. Most revisions are language based and as a PhD student I understand that its important to write concussively. However, I have a number of shortcomings I need to address ranging from using verbs in sentences, the flow from one sentence to the next as well as paragraphs. Perhaps I need to look for writing tips on YouTube or do a academic /English writing course.
18 July 2023	**Activity:** Meeting with Prof Mohangi to discuss Chapter 2 and the data collection process. **Notes:**

Prof Mohangi advised that I use transition words for my chapters. She asked that I edit the research flyer before sending it to FS Rainbow Seeds. She also advised that I prepare consent forms and interview transcript templates and send my interviews throughout data collection. We discussed that the first interviews would be used for piloting interview questions. She reminded me to keep field notes and constantly update my research journal.

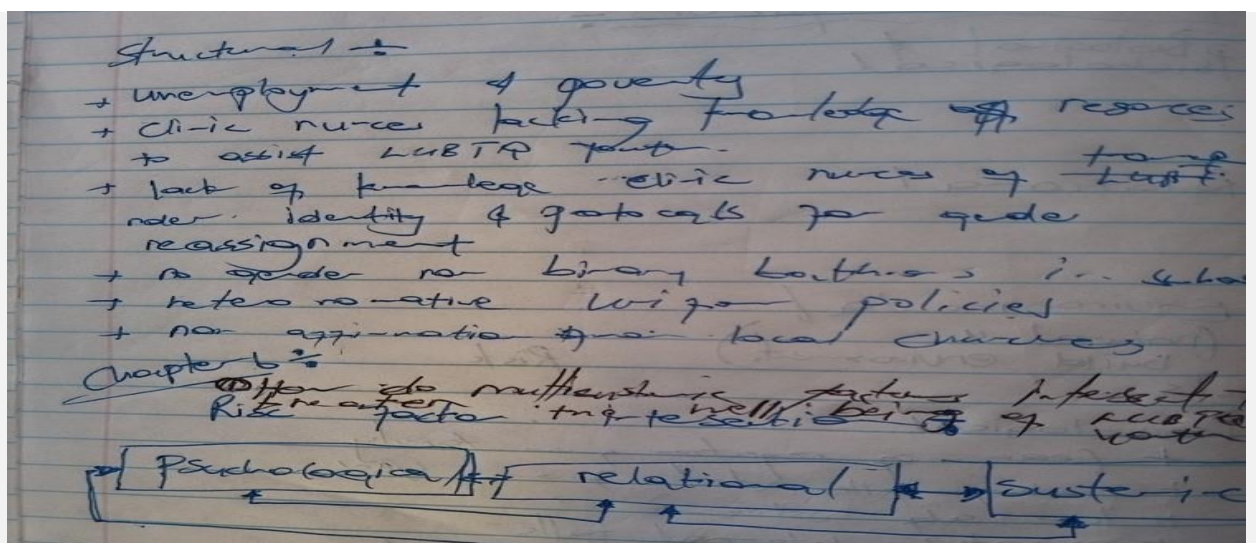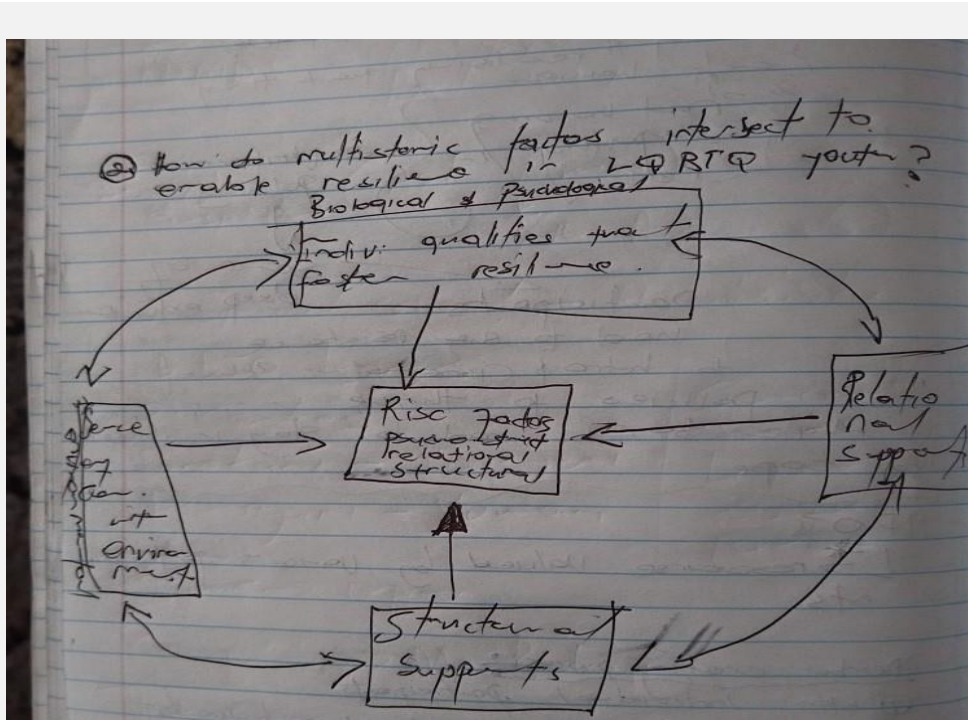|	
07 August 2023	**Transcription and translation of data**: Whatsapp conversation with Prof Mohangi, Prof advised me to translate Sesotho into English when producing my transcript; she further advised that I indicate at the beginning of chapter 5 that Sesotho was translated to English.
18 August 2023	**Activity: Data analysis Reading though each transcript** **Notes:** After transcribing the data for this study, I was overwhelmed by the length of some transcripts that went beyond 15 pages. I had to read and re read each transcript, make notes, and observe how themes emerged from each transcript.
25 August 2023	**Activity: Data Analysis_ Refresher course on Atlas T.i** **Notes:** I have gone through the YouTube videos uploaded by Unisa to refresh my knowledge about Atlas T.i , now I have been analysing my data. Atlas Ti can be a bit tricky but it's a useful tool to analyse.
October 2023	**Activity: Data Analysis – Themes** **Notes:** Data analysis was an existing yet challenging activity, I had to rework and take an in-depth analysis to derive themes from the data. I noted that most of the data related to risk factors faced by LGBTQ+ youth. I realised that the findings were very consistent with most of the articles I have studied and indeed rural communities are risk saturated places for LGBTQ+ people. I had to make several notes to make sense of the data and classify the data into several themes, I realised that my participants gave me chunks of information and it was overwhelming to capture their narratives without leaving any important details of their narratives behind. I kept on making notes, classifying and reworking the data as demonstrated in the pictures below which I took from my note book:

Activity: Meeting with Prof Mohangi to discuss chapters 5, 6 and 7

Notes:

Prof highlighted that I need to revise chapter 5 by adding discussions into quotes with no discussions and to also speak a bit about intersectionality as embedded in my research question. In Chapter 6, I

had to move some stuff from chapters 6 to 7 because I attempted to discuss the themes in chapter 6 and also answer my research questions for chapter 7.

8.12 APPENDIX K: PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS (EXTRACTS FROM FIELD NOTES)

Participant name and date	Time	Comments
06-08-2023	14:30-16:05	**Participant 1** **Observations**: On my arrival at Vredefort, I came across a few stores, and I could tell that this is a poverty-stricken community with a lack of resources. Upon arriving at this participant 's home, we sat in a garage. His mother was around. I realised that his family had accepted his sexuality. This made me very comfortable to have my interview there. I also noted the smile on his mother 's face when she greeted me. This participant seemed very comfortable, energetic and welcoming as well. **Notes:** **Risk factors:** the participant is currently exposed to unemployment as a risk factor affecting him and other lesbians in Vredefort. She is also concerned about the community that treats the LGBTQ+ community (a need for visibility in the community) as if they don't exist. Previously, he faced non-affirming remarks from his family, including some of his peers. Being in the closet is described as "hell" (not feeling free to express oneself). Alcoholism affects local lesbians owing to heterosexual male scrips of masculinity and unemployment. He needs to transition to being male but has no resources in the local clinic, and he fears how the community will receive him after transitioning. **Resilience enabling factors:** affirmation from church (being allowed to dress like males and be part of a male subdivision at church), sense of connection with God, spiritual community, being free to express self in a religious space, friend relationships for heterosexual peers, sense of safety in the community, positive relationships and sense of connection to the community and with community members, positive LGBTQ+ identity, self-relying statements (about finding a job), soccer as a way of expressing, positive outlook on life, financially and emotionally supportive parents and partner, ability to mentally reframe negative statements from family to lack of knowledge about LGBTQ+ identity and lack of visibility in the community **Resilience enabling resources:** community awareness about LGBTQ+, which involves schools, a need for support groups, local organisations focusing on LGBTQ+ issues, and bringing LGBTQ+ resources to local clinics.

Reflections: Amid the adversity this participant faces, there are themes of resilience and a need for a community to support resilience, bringing health, mental health, and awareness to the community.

Photo taken by researcher on the day of interview.

The photo was taken in a town about 3 km from the township of Mokwallo in Vredefort. I noted that there are few structural supports in this community; in my arrival, it was on Sunday, I noted people walking on the streets drunk. Some were wearing dirty clothes. I realised that this community is faced with different typical risks such as unemployment, poverty, and alcoholism found in rural townships. My participant is indeed resilient, she reported not to be a heavy drinker, she has completed her grade 12 and holds a university of technology diploma.

08-08-2023

16:00-17:20

Participant 2

Observations: The participant seemed happy overall, but there were moments of sadness.

Risk factors: being raped, low self-esteem and confidence, homophobic bullying, suicide attempt, non-affirming father. They are feeling threatened by cultural expectations such as going to initiation school.

Resilience factors: avoidance of self-negative statements, using female friend experiences as a coping mechanism, always expecting criticism, keeping quiet, emotional and financial support from mother, financial support and a sense of deeper connection with father. His father introduced him to his ancestors (ancestral ceremony/ritual). Support from a female friend who encouraged him to speak and normalised the trauma, Good experience with the school principal and teachers, LO subject and LGBTQ+ topic, which facilitated the opportunity for him to speak to other learners about gender and sexuality. Also, it facilitated curiosity about gender and sexuality in heterosexual peers at school. The school principal allowed him to use the girls' bathroom as he was not comfortable with homophobic bullying. LGBTQ community event: support from social workers, local police and municipality.

Reflections: The home environment is the core resilience-enabling factor, especially his relationship with his father.

10-08-2023	9:30-11:00	**Participant 3**

Observations: I met this participant outside the local library; she was well-groomed, wearing heels with confidence. I noted that the library personnel were very welcoming and very professional. They welcomed us well and secured a space for our interview I noted that she is popular in her community given the way the librarians greeted her. It also emerged in the interview that she likes going to the library to search information about different LGBTQ+ campaigns she likes hosting in her community.

Photograph taken by researcher in Ventersberg at the day of interview

Ventersburg is a small community with a library and clinic at the township, there are also schools around the township. In town there are few petrol filling stations and few shops. I could tell that there are few job opportunities in this community.

14:26	**Participant 4**

Risk factors: harsh treatment from brothers and father, bullying at school.

Resilience factors: relationships with God, neighbours, local tavern, community members, the school and other teachers, teaching others about gender and sexuality. This participant is unemployed, is a university dropout owing to effects of covid 19. However, he is presently volunteering his services at local old age home. In the interview he seemed to be very optimistic, he related many of his experiences relating to how he overcame adversities. I interviewed him in his home environment, I noted that he is from a poor family, and I realised that he is also struggling to meet the ends meet in terms of food and clothing.

Photograph taken in Botshabelo at the day of participant 4 interview.

Botsabelo is a big community, I could say is semi-rural but has areas where one can see that its residents live in poverty-stricken conditions. Other areas are better than others, I took the photo in one of the poverty-stricken places which one can see that this participant is facing a double risk of being gender and sexual minority, structural inequality and lack of resources in the community he is in.

11-08-2023	09:20	**Participant 5** **Observations:** upon my arrival at the clinic in Bloemfontein, the participant welcomed me; she then asked her manager for permission to use the kitchen. When we realised that it was not going to be possible for us to meet in a kitchen owing to disturbance, we opted to use my car for an interview and sit comfortably in the car outside the local clinic where she works. Notes: **Risk:** Mother passed away, and was raised by grandmother and uncle on the farm
11-08-2023	11:30	**Participant 6** I was welcomed by her mother, who was glad we were speaking, and we went to sit in the car as the house was occupied. This interview was conducted in Bloemfontein which is a metropolitan area but the participant grew up and attended school in welkom. **Adversity:** lack of family support, harsh treatment by teachers and social workers Resilience factors: used to use fantasy to escape the harsh treatment from the environment
11-08-2023	16:30	**Participant 7** Since she was a minor and was at school during the day, she gave me her cell number so I could make arrangements with her. I realised that her home

environment is welcoming. I was accompanied by her uncle, who directed me on how to go out of Bethlehem.

Notes:

Adversity: Lost her mother at the age of 10

Resilience factors: Relies more on internal resources

Photo taken by researcher on day of interview

As opposed to participants I have interviewed so far, this participant 's resilience narrative has more self-relying attitudes. She has made some account to her socio ecology, but she was more inclined to individualistic resilience attributes. At first, I saw this as a disturbance to the flow of idears from the first interview but I soo realised that each participant is unique. She is seventeen years, a bit younger than the rest of participants and her perspective in this research was valuable.

12-08-2023	09:00	**Participant 8**

I met this participant outside his home environment; upon meeting with him, I realised that he is more masculine. I could tell that he was far from his gender-transitioning process.

Throughout the interview, he spoke eloquently in Sesotho and was more relaxed. I realised that he had a very strong support structure at school. He related instances where his heterosexual friends and teachers were very supportive of him. He also mentioned instances of support from his home environment. I then realised that this participant has a supportive social structure that helps him cope with his everyday challenges. He is presently unemployed and is from a low-income family; he is experiencing difficulties with his gender transitioning process owing to a lack of resources in his community.

Photo taken by researcher on the day of participant interview

Qwaqwa is a beautiful place surrounded my the majestic mountains. I felt refreshed arriving in this community. Despite being rural , it has some beautiful places around. My participant also mentioned places such as mountains as resilience enabling, I strongly resonated with his narrative.

| 13-08-2023 | 15:00 | **Participant 9** |

I interviewed this participant in her girlfriend 's place. The living conditions were not good. They are both unemployed and are raising their partner 's child. Her resilience story started with non-affirmation in her home environment owing to religion, but her mother and siblings ended up affirming her sexuality. She is more like an activist in her community; she started an LGBTQ+ organisation a while ago with her friends. Despite poverty and unemployment, she has a positive outlook on life. Her interview reminded me that people can rise and shine despite all the odds they experience.

Photo taken by researcher on the day of interview

		The photo was taken at Welkom township called Matjhabeng where my research participant is staying. Matjhabeng seems like a semi-rural community because of a local industrial area being local mines. However, my participant struggled to find work employment owing to her sexual identity.
16-08-2023	10:00	**Participant 10** I interviewed this participant in Qwaqwa, at University of Free State. The participant was well dressed and very confident. The participant is presently involved in community activism for LGBTQ+ people. She was part of a local NGO that helps LGBTQ+ people linking them to community services. Her resilience narrative had themes of emotional and financial support from her mother despite the prevalent heteronormative culture in her community.
18-08-2023	17:00	**Participant 11** I interviewed this participant in a park in her local community. She is thriving through many odds owing to non-affirmation in her home environment. She has experienced depression-related symptoms in the past. However, in my interview, I noted that she was happy and wholeheartedly shared her story. I noted that she has few social support structures and is experiencing more risk factors.
05-09-2023	16:00	**Participant 12** Out of all the participants I interviewed, this participant was very eloquent in spoken English; he spoke English throughout the interview. I noted that he was on the debate team and participated in public speaking in high school. I interviewed this participant in Johannesburg at his workplace. He grew up and attended school in Free State, showed interest in this research and met the inclusion criteria. He is one of the participants who overcame the effects of minority stress through advocacy, active participation in extramural activities at school and reframing negative thoughts and sentiments from others.