

Topic: Navigating Resilience: A Sociological Analysis of LGBTQ+ Youth in Post-Colonial Namibia.

Name: Albe Jacobs

Student Number: G20J3931

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Supervisor: Professor Michael Drewett

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the complex dynamics of resilience among LGBTQ+ youth in post-colonial Namibia, focusing on navigating socio-cultural and legal systems marked by contestation and prejudice. By employing a multisystemic perspective grounded in ecological systems theory, this research examines the relationships between individual, structural, and familial factors that shape resilience. Drawing on several definitions of resilience, it considers resilience as both a response to significant adversity as well as a process of positive adaptation.

Namibia's post-colonial context, with its heteronormative societal norms and contested legal frameworks, presents unique challenges for LGBTQ+ individuals, exacerbated by historical colonial legacies and ongoing anti-queer sentiments. Using a social-ecological lens, the study investigates the role of intersecting social spheres—familial, structural, and community-based in either fostering or hindering resilience. It also critically engages with concepts such as sexual minority stress and the hidden costs of resilience, highlighting the tensions between authenticity and societal expectations.

Through an analysis of lived experiences, this research sheds light on how LGBTQ+ youth navigate resilience in a nation that simultaneously demonstrates progressive legal advancements and pervasive cultural resistance. The findings underscore the importance of inclusive support systems, equitable legal reforms, and cultural advocacy in addressing the marginalization of LGBTQ+ identities. By situating itself at the intersection of socio-cultural, legal, and ecological dimensions, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on youth resilience, offering nuanced insights into the realities of LGBTQ+ youth in Namibia.

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## **Key Terms**

LGBTQ+ - An acronym that outlines a range of gender and sexual identities; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer where the plus sign is intended to include those sexual and gender identities not covered by the acronym

Sexual Minority Stress - Refers to LGBTQ+ groups who face not only the stress of heteronormative society, but also stress specific to their sexual and gender diversity and the 'othering' that occurs within this space

Social spheres - Social-ecological theory splits the human experience of the individual into social spheres that when functioning efficiently, provide the individual with the resources and services to reach their full potential.

NGO- Non-Governmental organisation

NSFAF- Namibia students' financial assistance fund

WHO – World Health Organisation

HIV/AIDS – Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immunodeficiency Virus

SWAPO – South West Africa People's Organisation

VCRC – Voices for Choices and Rights Coalition

UNICEF – United Nations Children's Fund

STD – Sexually Transmitted Diseases

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## Chapter One

### 1.1 Context of Research

Navigating resilience among LGBTQ+ youth in post-colonial Namibia demands a nuanced exploration of the sociocultural and legal dynamics that shape their experiences. This study seeks to highlight the complex relationships between identity, the state and legal system, and societal attitudes in a nation still grappling with the aftermath of colonial rule. By examining the lived realities of these youth, this research aims to gain insight into the strategies LGBTQ+ employ to navigate a system rife with contestation and a society marked by both progressive change and enduring prejudice.

Youth resilience is defined differently across disciplines. This study employs Khanlou and Wray's (2014: 67) and Asakura's (2016: 270) definitions according to which youth resilience is a positive adaptation to stress caused by individual, structural, and familial factors/stressors. For Asakura (2016: 270), youth resilience must encompass significant adversity as well as positive adaptation (Theron, 2016: 319).

Within sociology, the concept of resilience has faced substantial contestation, depending on how it is defined. The definitions of resilience ranges from an ongoing process to an outcome of an action. Alongside this, the concept of resilience has been critiqued for being "voluntaristic" in that it neglects the role of social structures in economic and social spaces (Estêvão et al., 2017: 1).

Theron (2012: 333) outlines five points for resilience researchers to consider when undertaking the contested concept: the role of social ecologies when resilience does not occur, the hidden costs of resilience, ensuring that data is measured accurately and comprehensively, ensuring evidence based research, and finally how culture and context influence resilience. Twum-Antwi et al. (2020) in their research on promoting youth resilience by strengthening home and school environments discuss a multisystemic conceptualisation of resilience. Herein, Twum-Antwi et al. (2020: 78) link the resilience of the system and its caregivers to the resilience of the individual, emphasising the importance of the efficient functioning of these systems. The focus of this study however, is how LGBTQ+ groups navigate youth resilience. The LGBTQ+ community falls within a minority status due to a myriad of reasons, such as stigmatization, social marginalization, legal and

institutional disparities as well as cultural and historical oppression. LGBTQ+ communities often face stigmatisation and discrimination based on their gender identity and sexual orientation (Pieters, 2019: 86). As a result, LGBTQ+ communities are said to experience sexual minority stress. Sexual minority stress, similar to the conceptualisation of a double burden, refers to LGBTQ+ groups who face not only the stress of heteronormative society, but also stress specific to their sexual and gender diversity and the ‘othering’ that occurs within this space (Levitt et al., 2016: 67-68).

Nghipandulwa (2015) has explored the experiences of transgender youth on tertiary campuses in Namibia. Nghipandulwa (2015) outlines how campus climates and environments impact the overall well-being of trans youth. Nghipandulwa (2015: 1) focuses on LGBTQ+ youth resilience from a multisystemic perspective and within a particular environment. Levitt et al. (2016: 68) in their study regarding resilience in the face of sexual minority stress discuss resilience as a choice between authenticity and self-determination. Sexual minority stress as discussed above can be exacerbated by factors or resilience deterring factors such as lack of support systems or, in the case of Namibia, tensions/contestations that exist within the judiciary system. Maracinni (Maracinni et al, 2022: 27-28) discusses support systems and networks as one of the identity specific stressors that lead to negative consequences among LGBTQ+ youth. While this ties into the multisystematic conceptualisation of resilience, it will be discussed towards the end of this study. Maracinni further emphasises that factors such as anti-queerness and homo-negativity are biases that may lead to lack of acceptance and understanding within ones social and personal environments.

In the case of post-colonial Namibia, the judiciary system is another factor that adds to homo-negative and anti-queer sentiments within the nation. Namibia is a young democratic state in the South-West corner of Africa. Between 1920 and 1990, Namibia was handed over to Great Britain as a Class C mandate. This mandate was exercised by the Union of South African Authorities, and as such, Namibia was run as a colony of South Africa. Namibia gained independence in 1990. The subsequently developed Namibian constitution is a liberal-democratic document developed under surveillance of the United Nations, due to Namibia’s atypical form of reaching independence through constitutional conquest (Keulder 2000: 82).

While authors such as Pieters (2019) have delved into the contestations within the Namibian legal system, authors such as Nghipandulwa (2015) and Twum-Antwi et al. (2020) look at a multisystemic conceptualisation of youth resilience for LGBTQ+ members in specific environments as touched on above. It is within these realms that this research aims to situate itself. By looking into the tensions that exist between Namibian society, the judiciary system and the state/parliament, we can explore how LGBTQ+ youth navigate resilience through the maze created by the aforementioned contestations. Morris (2013: 1) defines social ecologies as the interdependent relationships that must exist between individuals and communities who share collective spaces. Morris extends this definition by further describing social-ecology as “a study of social structure in relation to the local environment” (Morris, 2013:1-2). Social-ecological theory splits the human experience of the individual into social spheres that when functioning efficiently, provide the individual with the resources and services to reach their full potential. It becomes clear through the work of Twam-Antwi et al. (2020), Levitt (2016), and Nghipundulwa (2015) that ecological systems theory or at the very least a multisystemic perspective aligns with one of the main premises of youth resilience; the ability for one’s environment to provide the individual with the resources and support to reach what has been termed wellbeing. Watson et al. (2010) join this discussion through their work on negotiating multiple ecological systems when advocating for LGBTQ+ youth. Ecological systems theory aligns with youth resilience in that both consider the individual through specific spheres/levels. In the same way that ecological systems theory looks at the individual as the centre of social interactions and the interdependence of these social spheres, youth resilience looks at the spheres/levels such as the individual, structural and familial for insight into the resources needed from these spheres.

Much like Twum-Antwi et al. (2020), this study takes a multisystemic approach to youth resilience through ecological systems theory. Unlike Twum-Antwi et al. (2020:78), considering resilience within particular environments/spheres, this study will explore youth resilience not within a particular sphere or environment but rather within a particular social space; being a LGBTQ+ person in a nation that has yet to recognise your rights.

Lastly, it is important to note that within this study, sexual and gender diverse persons are referred to as forming part of the LGBTQ+ community. The use of the term ‘community’ within this study

reflects the shared identity, collective experiences and solidarity that forms the foundation of the relationships created within this community.

## **1.2 Research objectives**

Primary objective:

- To explore how LGBTQ+ youth navigate resilience within the tensions that exist between parliament, the constitution and the rest of society.

Secondary objectives:

- To explore the functioning of LGBTQ+ youth within their relative social spheres.
- To explore how LGBTQ+ youth navigate the intersections between sexual and gender identity as well as and cultural norms and expectations;
- To explore the lived experiences of Namibian LGBTQ+ youth as they relate to non-heterosexuality in a post-colonial state.

## **1.3 Research design and theoretical underpinnings**

### **1.3.1 Introduction**

Understanding the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in Namibia requires a comprehensive and more importantly, qualitative approach. The study adopts an interactionist perspective to capture the breadth and depth of the experiences that occur not only between individuals but between individuals and the institutions they subscribe to and fall under. This all ensures a holistic understanding of resilience in this unique sociocultural and legal landscape. The integration of various data sources aims to provide a rich, contextualized analysis that highlights both the challenges and the adaptive strategies employed by these youth communities.

This section will detail the research setting, participant selection criteria, data collection methods, and analytical procedures. By outlining the methodology and ethical considerations underpinning

this study, this chapter aims to provide a clear roadmap of the research process, ensuring transparency and reproducibility. This comprehensive approach is essential for generating insights that are both academically robust and practically relevant, contributing to the broader discourse on resilience and minority rights in post-colonial societies.

### **1.3.2 Qualitative research**

The first step to understanding the choices throughout this study is to understand the approach that underpins it. This study takes on a qualitative approach as it aims to collect empathetic and meaning-laden data. Qualitative research is ‘defined as a naturalistic mode of research that seeks an in-depth understanding of individual experiences, events, and social phenomena *within their natural settings*’ (Chandler et al., 2019: 527). Qualitative research allows researchers to answer questions such as why, emphasising that the goal throughout qualitative research is gaining a well-rounded or holistic understanding of a lived experience or social phenomena and the social setting within which it occurs and finally, how this influences and affects meaning-making (Gupta, 2024: 1). Beuving and de Vries (2015: 19) define qualitative research as an approach used to “describe, interpret and understand the social reality through the medium of language”. more specifically, qualitative data aims to collect idiographic data. Idiographic data is defined by Bryman (2012: 69) as data that is detailed, descriptive and based on empathetic understanding. This aligns with the study as the focus centres around the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ youth and how they navigate youth resilience. This produces meaningful, empathetic and descriptive data surrounding individual experiences about gender and sexual identity and the dynamics of existing in a post-colonial state that has allowed individuals’ livelihoods and safety to fall through the cracks since the dawn of Namibia’s democracy. The study focuses on Namibia and its current socio-political climate riddled by insecurity, discrimination, marginalisation and, ultimately, how that has forced LGBTQ+ youth groups to become resilient.

### **1.3.3 Interactionism**

Having grasped the overarching approach of this study, it is possible to look into the theoretical/research paradigm that underpins it. Unlike the qualitative approach discussed in the

section above, which lends itself more to the strategies and methods used to conduct research, a research paradigm refers to a broader conceptual framework that guides the researcher in terms of belief, assumptions and values that they informed by and intend to follow throughout the study. The research paradigm in question here is interactionism. Interactionism refers to the idea that society is both created and maintained through repeated interactions between individuals. This paradigm focuses on micro-level processes, taking a bottom-up approach in response to dominant positivist and top-down paradigms (Carter and Fuller, 2015: 1). This paradigm aligns with the approach to youth resilience taken by this study. Herein, youth resilience is conceptualised as largely promoted through the various protective factors and support networks available to youth communities throughout their social environment and various social spheres. One can then assume that youth resilience is fostered or hindered through the interactions young people have with the individuals that make up their social spheres and social environment.

#### **1.3.4 Interviews**

In the previous section, it was determined that the approach adopted within the study dictates the methods and strategies used to collect data. By adopting a qualitative approach, an interactionist paradigm, and a cross-sectional design, the most appropriate method for data collection was interviews. Within this study, this allowed the researcher to collect personal, and descriptive data about individual experiences. Information provided by strategic informants produced data as it relates to social phenomena such as political homophobia and the affects that has had on LGBTQ+ youth groups. This method enabled tackling of the research objectives as it allowed the participants to elaborate on their answers, providing time to dissect and provide meaningful data.

Qualitative research employs flexible, open-ended questions, allowing for the addition of ideas after the study has begun, as well as allowing for the participant to elaborate further and provide new insights. Within qualitative research, the focus is placed on the participant's perspectives rather than the research agenda as with quantitative research (Bryman, 2012: 470). Thus the study employed semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. Face-to-face interviews are simply interviews in which the participant is spoken to directly (Bordens, 2002: 280). Semi-structured interviews are characterised by a guide of specific questions however; the interviewee/participants have a large deal of freedom when it comes to answering these questions. This approach allowed the researcher

insight into the participant's perspectives and interpretations. The interviews were carried out at mutually decided and designated “safe spaces”. This included spaces such as the participants or the researchers home and office, suitable public spaces as well as online. Finally, the interviews lasted 30-45 minutes per participant.

### **1.3.5 Participants**

When it comes to qualitative research, purposive sampling is one of the most common approaches. Purposive sampling is defined as the selection of participants based on the research questions (Bryman, 2012: 416). This can be seen in the selection of participants within this study, where the research focused on LGBTQ+ youth in Namibia, participants were then selected from the LGBTQ+ community in Namibia. The study, however, used a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is characterised by the researcher approaching participants that meet the research criteria and then relying on these initial participants to put them in contact with other participants (Bryman, 2012: 424). Ten participants were selected within an age range of 18-30 to ensure that their experiences fitted into the post-colonial time frame in which the study took place.

### **1.3.6 Strategic informants**

This study also made use of strategic informants. Strategic or key informants are defined as “a source of information”, interviewed for the purpose of information regarding the socio-political climate of the group/social phenomena (Tremblay, 1957: 688). The strategic informants interviewed during this study included only NGO/activist organisations despite various other government and religious organisations being contacted.

The study attempted to interview six strategic informants including the Ministry of Gender Welfare and Poverty Eradication, Equal Namibia, Voices for Choices and Rights Coalition and the Namibian Council of Churches as well as the SWAPO Youth League. These organisations were selected as together they would have provided a holistic understanding of the LGBTQ+ community and the perceptions of society thereof from a social, religious, cultural and political standpoint. Where organisations such as the Ministry of Gender Welfare and Poverty Eradication could

provide a political as well as cultural perspective and the SWAPO youth league could provide a socio-political youth perspective. The Council of Churches would then have been able to provide a religious and cultural perspective.

Unfortunately, Voices for Choices and Rights Coalition and Equal Namibia, both pro-LGBTQ+ activist organisations were willing to participate. One can assume that the turbulent socio-political climate at the time the research was conducted contributed to the unwillingness of government and religious organizations when it came to making statements and/or being interviewed. The lack of response from previously vocal anti-LGBTQ+ organisations may be seen as feedback in itself, where their unwillingness to contribute as authoritative organizations placed in power to work in the best interest of all Namibians alludes to their willingness to support further research and the LGBTQ+ community as a whole.

### **1.3.7 Thematic analysis**

Thematic analysis refers to the identification and analysis of common themes throughout the data. Themes can include repetition of topics, indigenous categories and typologies, metaphors and analogies, similarities and differences, linguistic connectors and theory related material (Bryman, 2012: 580). Within this study, thematic analysis enabled the highlighting of patterns and commonalities within the participant responses that could then be analysed.

Thematic analysis was employed as the primary method for analysing data. The process began with getting familiar with all the data. Transcripts were read multiple times to gain an in-depth understanding of the content and perspectives. This was followed by an informal coding phase, during which data segments were systematically coded using an inductive approach.

Coding was conducted manually with attention paid to semantic and latent meanings in the text. Codes were then organized into themes by identifying patterns and relationships across the data and participants. These themes were then refined to ensure they accurately represented the extracts, datasets and participant experiences. The final themes were defined and formulated into chapters, and quotes/extracts were selected to support each theme, ensuring transparency and credibility of the findings.

### **1.3.8 Ethical considerations**

Babbie (2020: 63-70) outlines six of the main ethical agreements within social research. These ethical agreements include; voluntary participation, no harm to participants, anonymity and confidentiality, deception, analysis and reporting, institutional review boards, and professional codes of ethics. It is then up to the researcher to ensure that these ethical agreements are adhered to throughout the study. Within this study, voluntary participation was addressed by ensuring participants signed an informed consent form, confirming that they were informed about the objectives and goals for this study, that their participation was voluntary and that they could choose to terminate the interview at any given point in time. Due to the kind of data the study aims to collect (empathetic, meaning-laden), there was a risk that the study might provoke negative emotions, particularly those focused around sexuality, the availability or lack of support networks, and discussions surrounding safety. This was addressed by ensuring that interviews took place in mutually decided and designated safe spaces such as the home or office spaces of either the researcher or the participant. Anonymity and confidentiality have been addressed firstly by identifying the participants numerically i.e. Participant One, Two etc. throughout the study and data collection process, and secondly by ensuring no identifying information was collected or transcribed. Deception was addressed by ensuring participants were made aware of the information they may be requested to share. This was also covered within the informed consent form. Analysis and reporting will be addressed through publishing this study. Institutional review boards were addressed through the Rhodes University ethics committee, a higher degree's committee dedicated to ensuring that the Rhodes University produces ethical research. The ethical considerations within this study were minimal and low risk, however, interviewing human participants placed this study on a medium risk level.

### **1.3.9 Conclusion**

The study has been structured to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to resilience within this community. By employing a qualitative approach as well semi-structured interviews, the study aimed to capture both the breadth and depth of lived experiences of Namibian LGBTQ+ youth. The inclusion of diverse participants across various demographics allowed for a more representative and generalisable understanding of resilience among LGBTQ+

youth. Ethical considerations were paramount, with measures in place to protect the privacy and well-being of participants. Through this robust design, it is hoped that valuable insights generated can inform interventions and support mechanisms, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for LGBTQ+ youth in Namibia.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Namibia, as a post-colonial state, stands at the crossroads of identity, constitutional principles, legal frameworks and cultural dynamics, offering a unique lens through which to explore the influence of gender and sexual identity on youth resilience. In the aftermath of a colonial legacy that has shaped the nation's socio-political landscape, the intersections between identity, the Namibian judiciary system and cultural norms become integral in understanding the challenges and opportunities faced by Namibian youth.

The complexities of navigating identity in a post-colonial context continue to impact youth across the global south, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the realm of gender and sexual identity. Namibian youth often struggle with the evolving landscape of gender roles, sexuality, expectations, challenging traditional norms, all while negotiating a path within the boundaries of a constitution that does not guarantee equality and protection of fundamental rights for everyone.

This exploration delves into the nuanced relationship between gender identity and youth resilience in Namibia, illuminating how social, constitutional and legal principles as well as cultural frameworks either foster or hinder the development of resilient individuals. By examining identity formation, culture, the Namibian constitution and its legal frameworks, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the experiences of Namibian LGBTQ+ youth, providing insights that can inform policy, promote inclusivity, and empower a generation navigating the complex interplay of the legal system, constitutional rights, and evolving cultural paradigms.

This chapter begins with an in-depth examination of the Namibian constitution, aiming to outline the constitutional and legal contradictions that form the core of this study and the adversities faced by LGBTQ+ youth in Namibia. The chapter then outlines sexual and gender identity, how these concepts are perceived in Africa and finally outlining the Namibian cultural landscape in relation to LGBTQ+ youth, detailing the cultural obstacles faced by LGBTQ+ communities in Namibia. This provides a contextual background for the remainder of Chapter Three, which then delves into youth resilience, particularly youth resilience within LGBTQ+ communities in Namibia.

## **2.2 The Namibian constitution**

The Namibian constitution is a liberal-democratic document developed following an atypical process where independence was reached through constitutional conquest under international surveillance rather than decolonisation processes or military conquest, both more common processes at the time. Keulder (2000: 82) raises the question of the constitution's legitimacy within the Namibian context. Keulder (2000: 82) questions whether foreign imported principles can be applied to the Namibian context. This presents the starting point of the constitutional and legal contradictions that form part of the core of this study, as it is possible that the importation of foreign principles and a journey towards independence under surveillance have contributed to the contradictions found between the Namibian constitution and its legal frameworks that are discussed in more detail in the following sections. It is also important to note that the integration of foreign principles into the Namibian constitution was not done under duress. Keulder (2000: 83) outlines that the Namibian leaders understood and wilfully wrote foreign principles into the constitution in order to gain independence. It must however be understood that the principles came as part of the process towards independence. Rejection of these principles was a non-option.

Unlike neighbouring South Africa, the development of Namibia's constitution was assisted by the international community and the first independent elections were held under the guidance of the United Nations (UN). International involvement and elections under the UN were necessitated by the fact that Namibia was under South African rule, with independence only being achieved after long-term struggle and war. The "assistance" provided by the UN meant that Namibia did not have full control over the development of its constitution, as with most forms of aid, the assistance came with conditions and the implementation of several UN principles.

When neighbouring South Africa came close to the end of colonial occupation, its neighbouring and newly independent nations could assist in the development of its constitution. The South African constitution was then developed largely without international assistance, yet at the same time, using the Namibian constitution as a guiding example (Keulder, 2000: 82). While one guided the other, the constitutional documents of Namibia and South Africa are not the same, particularly in the ways they chose to deal with their colonial past and the trauma left in its wake. Where South Africa based its constitution on truth and reconciliation, Namibia based its constitution on the building of a new, united future, distancing itself from the past.

While the nation's constitution is set to distance itself from the colonial past, it is not clear whether this was successful. Article 1 defines Namibia as a "sovereign, secular, democratic republic" Keulder (2000: 86). At its core, this requires the separation of the church and the state. Keulder (2000: 86) then goes on to emphasise that "democracy in Namibia is, thus, not intended to be unqualified majority rule". However, 90% of Namibians identify as Christian, often creating friction when defining the state as secular. Despite this tremulous start, Keulder (2000: 79) outlines how the Namibian constitution has received shining reviews from the international community for its "process of constitution-making and the document's content" at large. The next section goes into detail on the Namibian legal system and its functions.

### **2.3 The Namibian legal system**

Namibia is a nation founded in 1990 after centuries of struggle. Formally South West Africa, Namibia was a German protectorate in 1884 and a Crown colony in 1890 (Amoo and Skeffers, 2008: 17). In 1915, Namibia was occupied by South African forces after the first World War. It was later named as a protectorate of South Africa in 1920 and remained as such until the Namibia's independence in 1990. This outlines over a century and a half of colonial occupation and provides some insight into the circumstances regarding Namibia's journey towards liberation and the decisions liberation leaders had on their plates.

As indicated, between 1920 and 1990, Namibia was a colony of South Africa and as such was governed using its laws. After independence, however, Namibia kept the legal framework as is, periodically amending laws only as deemed necessary. This aligns with Amoo and Skeffers' (2008: 17) contention that "in order to prevent the creation of a legal vacuum, Article 140 of the Constitution logically provides that all laws in force immediately before the date of independence shall remain in force until repealed or amended by Act of Parliament or until they are declared unconstitutional by a competent court". This highlights how in many instances, laws have remained unchanged and have left Namibians held to the standards of a world that no longer exists. An example of this is the Abortion and Sterilisation act 2 of 1975 which South Africa scrapped in 1996. Namibia has kept this apartheid era law in place as protection of its Christian values despite self-defining as a secular state as mentioned in the section above. This is yet another unfortunate example of the contradictions between the constitution and the legal framework within the nation.

This links once again to the development of the nation's constitution as discussed above, where Namibia was "forced" to adopt liberal principles that may not have aligned with its values at the time (Amoo and Skeffers, 2008: 17-18).

### **2.3.1 A brief on the intersection between the legal system and the constitution**

The adoption of the Namibian constitution was a response to the South African apartheid regime that Amoo and Skeffers (2008: 17) describe as "devoid of law". Independence allowed Namibia to adopt the constitution which serves as "the supreme law of the nation" (Amoo and Skeffers, 2008: 17). Any other frameworks functioning within the state are then legitimised through the constitution.

Article 131 lists the rights and freedoms provided to all Namibians (Amoo and Skeffers, 2008: 18). These rights and freedoms include "protection of life; protection of liberty; respect for human dignity; abolition of slavery or forced labour; equality and freedom from discrimination, arbitrary arrest and detention; access to a fair trial; the guaranteeing of privacy and respect for family; the rights of children; the right to acquire property; the right to political activity; the right to administrative justice, culture, and education. The fundamental freedoms contained in Chapter Three include freedom of speech and expression; freedom of thought, conscience and belief, freedom of religion; freedom to assemble peaceably and without arms, freedom of association; freedom to withhold labour; freedom to move freely throughout Namibia; freedom to reside and settle in any part of Namibia; freedom to leave and return to Namibia; and freedom to practise any profession, or carry on any occupation, trade or business" (Amoo and Skeffers, 2008: 19).

However, there are exceptions to this rule of law. According to the Namibian constitution, these rights are awarded to all Namibians except in instances where morally grey areas not wholly covered within the constitution arise. This is outlined in Article 5 through 21 and it states the following; "The fundamental freedoms referred to in Sub-Article (1) hereof shall be exercised subject to the law of Namibia, in so far as such law imposes reasonable restrictions on the exercise of the rights and freedoms conferred by the said Sub-Article, which are necessary in a democratic society and are required in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of Namibia, national

security, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence” (Amoo and Skeffers, 2008: 19).

This gives the Namibian judicial system, as one of the three main branches of the constitution, the authority to rule over these “morally grey or unclear cases”. The cases considered under these circumstances can fall into several categories. These categories include; “the constitutionality of legislative provisions or practices relating to corporal punishment, the restraining of prisoners by chaining them to each other by means of metal chains, and homosexual relationships”. Recent events such as the Luhl-Delgado (Igual, 2023) case have illustrated how the Supreme Court steps in to rule over what is considered morally grey areas where the Constitution falls short. In the Luhl-Delgado (Igual, 2023) case, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the LGBTQ+ couple. Unfortunately, a win for the LGBTQ+ community was met with nationwide disappointment by religious sectors and politicians alike. Reactions such as these, made by those in power are often referred to as political homophobia. Political homophobia is discussed further in Section 2.5.1.

The Luhl-Delgado case is a clear example of the contradictions queer Namibians face when navigating the constitutional and legal frameworks. The Luhl-Delgado case unfolded when the same sex couple (a Namibian and his Mexican spouse) had their first child via surrogacy in South Africa (High Court of Namibia, 2021). Upon their return, the Namibian government through the Ministry of Home Affairs had requested a paternity test be done to prove that one of the parents was Namibian in order to grant the child citizenship by descent. The Luhl-Delgado family refused to carry out a paternity test stating that the child had a South African birth certificate stating them both as parents. The high court of Namibia then voted in favour of the couple, granting their child citizenship in 2021 (High Court of Namibia, 2021). This decision was retracted by the Supreme Court after an appeal by the Ministry of Home Affairs on the basis of technicalities relating to the date of the child’s registration. This case paints a picture of the red tape and obstacles LGBTQ+ communities in Namibia are forced to navigate. The case highlights Namibia’s inability to effectively deal with cases they deem morally ambiguous in a manner that follows not only their constitutional framework as it relates to article 5-21 (referenced earlier in this section) but in relation to article 131 as well, which outlines the provision of rights, liberties and equality to all Namibians.

Unfortunately, the LGBTQ+ community would face the Namibian legal system again, alongside several other same-sex couples in a fight for the recognition of their marriages performed abroad. While same-sex marriages are illegal in Namibia, some queer Namibians have their marriages performed abroad or in neighbouring nations such as South Africa (Supreme Court of Namibia, 2023). Upon settling in Namibia, queer couples are often excluded from social services such as residency permits and the ability to adopt due to the fact that they are not recognised as spouses. In a victory for LGBTQ+ persons in Namibia, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of recognising same-sex marriages performed abroad in 2023. While this does not change much in terms of the social services provided to same-sex couples in Namibia, it is a step in the right direction in terms of equality.

The two aforementioned examples provide insight into the maze that is the Namibian constitution and judicial system. In an idyllic world, these systems should function simultaneously as there exists a symbiotic relationship between the two. In Namibia however, these systems seem to clash against one another when it comes to “morally grey” areas and the decisions the state must make in these cases. There seems to be no unified structure/framework that deals with social arenas not fully outlined in the Constitution, leading to a scramble between the legislative and state branches.

A large part of the anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments in Namibia are linked to the nation's cultural landscape. With close to 90% of the nation identifying as Christian (Keulder, 2000: 86), and a political scene rife with homophobia, Namibia's multicultural landscape creates various intersecting obstacles for sexual minority youth. This is discussed in more depth in the next section.

## **2.4 Namibian cultural landscape**

Namibia is a multicultural country with more than eight ethnically diverse cultures and over 26 languages with English as the only officially recognised language in Namibia, despite only a small minority of the nation declaring it as their first language. This is largely due to the nation's colonial history and the attempts to remove Afrikaans as the nation's official language and lingua franca (Fredericks, 2007: 2).

Bhana et. al. (2007: 135) state that “in South Africa, as is the case with similar societal contexts”, it is not uncommon for culture and tradition to define what is or is not appropriate when it comes

to gender and sexuality. It is then possible for culture to be used as a tool to control sexuality and enforce patriarchal and heteronormative expectations and standards, forcing individuals to behave in ways deemed culturally acceptable. One can then link this to the Namibian context, where much like the rest of Africa, culture predefines gender roles and sexual expectations. Deviating from these cultural expectations and standards often results in social and even familial exclusion and marginalisation as well as violence in extreme cases. However, this is not always the case, and the experience of LGBTQ+ youth in Namibia remains subjective and diverse.

The cultural landscape in Namibia remains contested in terms of the acceptance or rejection of sexually diverse persons. While many traditional and political leaders have publicly stated that sexual diversity and homosexuality is un-African and un-Namibian (Currier, 2010: 112), researchers and activists alike have pointed to examples such as the inclusion of terms for sexually diverse persons in many indigenous languages spoken in the country, with some cultures alluding to a history of sexually diverse persons as culturally significant. However, like many colonies, Namibia has experienced a large loss of its indigenous belief systems, disconnecting communities from knowledge bases not tarnished by colonial indoctrination. Buckle (2020) aligns with this perspective, outlining how African nations were forced to adopt colonial values regarding same-sex relationships between the 18th and 20th centuries. According to Buckle (2020), there is no present evidence illustrating the persecution of individuals on the grounds of sexual orientation in pre-colonial Africa. Currier (2012:446) delves into gender and sexual movements as decolonialising efforts that often oppose nationalist efforts in regards to democracy and decolonialisation. McClintock (1995) and Hoad (2007) cited in Currier (2012: 446) consider the recognition of anticolonial nationalism and the attached perception of gender and sexuality in the following extract stating the following; “Feminist and queer scholars recognize that anticolonial nationalists invoked colonialist precepts of gender and sexuality at the same time that they disavowed colonialism”. This extract outlines the colonialist and heteronormative stances nationalist politics in Namibia seem to follow. In the case of Namibia, this aligns with the assisted development of the Namibian constitution discussed in Section 2.2. Lorway (2008: 20) provides an example using the Nama/Damara language, where the participant shares a name reserved for sexually diverse persons in the indigenous language. The term “!gamas” is the Nama/Damara term used to describe a goat (or animal) with both sets of genitalia/reproductive organs. The argument

in this instance relates to the word's very existence. Scholars and activists alike have questioned why indigenous languages would have terms for that which does not exist.

In agreement with Lorway's sentiments, Li (2009: 3) states that African language studies and literature have indeed revealed words and terms associated with homosexuality that were used pre-colonial Africa. Eprecht, Philips and Murray (cited in Li, 2009: 3) strengthen this claim by stating that homosexuals in Southern Africa faced less discrimination in pre-colonial times compared to their post-colonial realities. Li concludes that the increase in homophobia in post-colonial spaces is more than likely a result of Western influence.

Sipungu (2015: 14) considers social and anthropological research which indicates the existence of homosexual identities across space and time, and within every social sphere of society. The idea that homosexuality is un-African and the disdain needed to engage in political homophobia seems to be an unfortunate remnant of colonial oppression, haunting our societies.

The next section explores the intersections between gender and sexual identity and how individuals within sexually diverse communities navigate the post-colonial Namibian cultural context and the contradictions that have been discussed in the sections above.

#### **2.4.1 Political homophobia**

Political homophobia is by no means a concept that is new to Southern Africa and Africa at large. According to Currier (2010: 111), political homophobia has its roots in colonial, Christian practices and principles. Political homophobia refers to the public denouncement of sexual minorities, often for political gain. Currier (2010: 110) outlines this, stating that in 1995 the SWAPO government implemented political homophobia as a gendered political strategy to not only silence political opponents and the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community in Namibia but in an attempt to avoid criticism of their leadership. The leading example of political homophobia is the claim that homosexuality is "un-African" and of western importation and as such deserves no place in post-colonial Africa. Examples of politicians implementing these very strategies have been observed in Namibia as well as Zambia (Currier, 2010: 112).

Muparamoto (2018: 1-2) outlines similar occurrences in Zimbabwe in the early 1990s where LGBTQ+ rights groups were barred from engaging with the public via public platforms. These sentiments, coming from the former late president Robert Mugabe and the greater Zimbabwean society, claimed homosexuality as immoral and having no space in their society. Robert Mugabe went on to call LGBTQ+ communities “perverts that offend ‘the law of nature and the morals of religious beliefs espoused by our society” (Muparamoto, 2018: 1-2).

Spurlin (cited in Sipungu 2015: 14) consolidates the conceptualisations of political homophobia, arguing that colonialism and Western imperialism sits at the core of the conceptualisations of homosexuality as a Western import or as un-African.

Unfortunately, remarks like this by Southern African leaders fall in line with observed patterns and policies within the region. It is suggested that another result of political homophobia is the ability to ignite African nationalism, thrusting trust back into culture and tradition but instead only prove the leader’s inability to provide equality to their communities, highlighting a state in crisis (Currier, 2010: 111). Political homophobia only further destroys the everyday experiences of sexual minorities, exacerbating the marginalisation, silencing and lack of access to social services they already face. Currier claims this is due to the role of the state in the reproduction of the status quo, enforcing and enabling heteronormativity and continuing to silence gender and sexual diversity (Currier, 2010: 111).

While political homophobia has become recognised as a political tactic or distraction method of sorts, it remains important to note that the homophobic sentiments expressed by political leaders and elites may not solely be tactical but rather reflections of their true personal beliefs or a combination of thereof.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, Namibia's status as a young post-colonial state presents intricately connected and intersecting spheres of identity, constitutional principles, legal frameworks, and cultural dynamics that deeply influence how the youth that form part of LGBTQ+ communities are able to navigate resilience. Through this exploration, it becomes evident that the legacy of colonialism continues to reverberate through Namibian society, shaping the experiences and perspectives of its younger

generation. The intersections between identity, the Namibian constitution, legal systems, and cultural norms serve as focal points for understanding the multifaceted challenges and opportunities confronting Namibian LGBTQ+ youth.

As the nation continues to navigate its path towards self-determination and development, it is imperative to recognize the pivotal role that gender and sexual identity play in shaping resilience narratives. Moreover, this exploration underscores the need for comprehensive approaches that integrate legal frameworks, constitutional principles, and cultural sensitivities to ensure the effective protection and promotion of youth rights, well-being and the prevention of marginalised communities from falling through the cracks of contradictions. By embracing Namibia's cultural heritage while upholding the principles of equality and justice within its constitution, the nation can pave the way for a future where all youth are empowered to thrive and contribute meaningfully to society.

## **Chapter Three: Literature Review**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Youth resilience is in no shape or form a new topic within the post-independence space. While youth resilience has become popular within academia and the research realm, resilience within LGBTQ+ communities has been largely overlooked. This is particularly true for LGBTQ+ communities within Africa where young democracies in the process of cementing their political footing and discourse more often than not frown upon sexual diversity and claim it as an enemy to national, “African” discourse. Namibia is an unfortunate example of this. This bleeds into the cultural landscape, and as a result breeds an exclusionary society.

While the Namibian nation has been praised for its progressive and liberal constitution post-independence, protections of the LGBTQ+ community have all but been neglected. This is exacerbated by the contradictions between the constitution and the nation's legal system, which often leave LGBTQ+ communities to fall through the cracks.

In Africa at large, cultural traditions intersect with modernity and as a result, LGBTQ+ communities across the continent face a unique set of challenges. Individuals across the continent struggle with societal norms that often clash with their identities and desires. Yet, amidst the struggles and adversities, there exists a profound resilience within the LGBTQ+ community—a resilience born out of necessity, nurtured by solidarity, and driven by a relentless pursuit of acceptance and equality. The term “community” is used throughout this study to refer to individuals that identify as LGBTQ+. The term community speaks to the safe space and potential for belonging and transformation that is created when individuals can come together and support one another.

This chapter delves into the intricacies of LGBTQ+ resilience in Africa and in Namibia in particular, exploring the multifaceted dimensions of youth resilience, sexual minority stress, and politics. It shines a light on the diverse experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals across the continent, highlighting the triumphs, setbacks, and ongoing efforts to carve out spaces of belonging and affirmation in societies where discrimination and prejudice remain entrenched.

Throughout history, Africa has been home to rich and diverse expressions of gender and sexuality, often revered and celebrated within indigenous cultures. However, the legacy of colonialism has

left a deep imprint, imposing Western ideologies that criminalize and stigmatize non-conforming identities. Today, many African countries maintain laws that criminalize same-sex relationships, creating a hostile environment where LGBTQ+ individuals are subjected to persecution, violence, and legal discrimination.

Despite these formidable obstacles, LGBTQ+ communities in Africa persist, drawing strength from their cultural heritage, familial bonds, and a growing network of allies. Moreover, the narrative of LGBTQ+ resilience in Africa extends beyond mere survival—it encompasses resilience as a form of resistance and resilience as a source of empowerment. In the face of systemic oppression, LGBTQ+ individuals assert their right to exist authentically, reclaiming their narratives and challenging the dominant discourse that seeks to erase their identities.

### **3.2 Youth resilience**

Youth resilience research first emerged in the 20th century when it was noticed that adolescents facing adversity showed favourable outcomes at inconsistent rates. According to Khanlou and Wray (2014: 67), these adversities comprised of “structural, familial and individual stressors”. While the definitions may differ depending on the discipline and the context in which it is used, more often than not, definitions are based on adaptation as a response to stress. Fergus and Zimmerman (as cited in Asakura, 2016: 270) further develop this definition, setting out two main points; that resilience requires both significant adversity and positive adaptation.

Khanlou and Wray (2014: 65) have described youth resilience as “ordinary magic” where youth “overcome daunting social circumstances and traumatic life events” (Theron et al., 2013: 64). Resilience is the ability to adapt and move past adversity and stress beyond what the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2016) has termed “normal life stressors”. However, the adversity/stress within this definition is not merely situational as the phrase “daunting social circumstance and traumatic life events” suggests, but rather a situation or condition experienced by a collective that increases the risk of negative psychosocial outcomes (Asakura, 2016: 270). Poverty, mental illness, lack of education and lack of familial support are all examples of subjective situations or conditions that may exacerbate the risk of undesired outcomes.

The concept of resilience exists as a process rather than a singular occurrence, crucial to long-term maintenance and well-being (Khanlou and Wray, 2014: 64). It is not (as commonly assumed), a positive attribute only held by some nor a skill that can be picked up, but rather the ability to adapt. An ability that is fostered, promoted, or deterred. The conceptualisation of resilience as a processes sees it developed over time and throughout multiple social and individual intersections. Khanlou and Wray (2014: 64) have also described resilience as existing on a continuum, where an individual is perpetually located on various parts within this continuum depending on the protective factors and systems at play at the time. Resilience is often understood to be a positively aligned concept/process, moving away from negative associations that come alongside adversity (Asakura, 2016: 270). In line with this, Khanlou and Wray (2016: 65-66) outline how the resilience process itself builds on the already positive and present characteristics of individuals, pushing negative qualities to the back burner. Gentz, Zeng and Ruiz-Casares (2021) outline that despite critiques regarding a definition for resilience, the concept is generally evaluated based on the meeting of developmental expectations, subjective wellbeing, competence in various social and personal domains and finally, little to no presence of psychopathology.

There are three main perspectives often used in resilience research. While these perspectives will be explored in more depth in Chapter Four, the following brief assists in understanding the baseline of current resilience research. The perspectives include; the individual factors approach, the constructionist approach and the ecological/ecosystemic approach (Khanlou and Wray, 2016: 66). Herein, the individual factors approach emerged from psychiatry and focuses on individual risk factors. The constructionist approach sees resilience as a product of individuals' interactions with their environments. Finally, the ecological/ecosystemic approach looks at the interactions and intersections between individuals and the various social systems they are surrounded by. Ecological systems theory or the social-ecological model is the most commonly used perspective in terms of resilience research as it encompasses the varying levels outlined in the previous perspectives (Khanlou and Wray, 2016: 67). By applying this perspective, it is possible to take a deep dive into the various factorial levels associated with resilience. These levels look at individual factors, familial factors, and social/environmental factors. At the individual level, the focus is on personal characteristics such as social skills and temperament, interactions with social institutions such as family, and school, and the developmental transitions that occur throughout a set period. At the familial level, it is important to note that this level interacts with the individual level. At its

core, however, the familial level looks at the challenges the family faces as an institution and the positive characteristics associated with the family. These positive characteristics/factors include attachment, communication, parenting and external support. Lastly, the socio-environmental level looks at both the social and physical environment. This includes opportunities, inclusion, access, equality and overall social conditions (Khanlou and Wray, 2016: 67).

Youth resilience, particularly as an ecological concept brings to mind the Yoruba proverb; “it takes a village to raise a child”, outlining how important the functioning of the social systems at play are when it comes to positive and desired outcomes for youth in unconducive environments. Whether resilience is affected by externally assessed factors such as institutions within the microsystem (i.e. family, school, and peers) or internal factors within the core (i.e. self-regulation and self-esteem), it remains clear how socio-environmental factors and various social locations remain integral to desired positive outcomes and resilience.

### **3.3 Youth resilience in Namibia**

Resilience, as a concept, embodies the capacity of individuals and communities to navigate adversity, adapt to change, and emerge stronger from challenging circumstances. In the context of Namibia, a post-colonial state marked by a multicultural landscape and a dynamic socio-political space, the exploration of resilience becomes a crucial lens through which to understand the lived experiences of its youth. This section seeks to unravel the complexities surrounding youth resilience, casting a spotlight on how Namibian individuals, confront and surmount obstacles in the post-colonial context.

In 2025, Namibia will be celebrating its 35th year of independence from colonial rule. The remnants from this era continue to cast a dark shadow over the nation. This can be seen in the upkeeping of apartheid-era legislations such as the Abortion and Sterilisation act 2 of 1977 as well as the sodomy law or criminal procedure act 51 of 1977, which directly contradict the nation’s secular status. After more than a century of oppression, the nation is still largely reeling from the trauma of the apartheid regime, and the intergenerational transmission of trauma has passed on this baton to the generations that follow.

Alongside the harrowing mental and emotional turmoil caused by the regime, the nation continues to struggle with various socio-economic crises such as high levels of income inequality and some of the highest youth unemployment rates in the world. These socio-economic crises expose Namibian youth to a myriad of socio-economic and personal challenges such as poverty, high risks of HIV/AIDS, orphanhood and violence. Namibia also experiences large-scale issues with the education system, with only 40% of young people being able to progress to senior secondary education in 2008 (Van de Brug, 2012: 277) and this number dropping to 21% after the implementation of the revised education system (Unicef, 2023). This paints an unfortunate picture, with education highlighted as one of the most common promoting/protective factors for resilience (Jacobs, 2023: 11), the inaccessibility of this institution deters resilience amongst youth.

By linking this to the definition of resilience as the ability to positively adapt despite challenging circumstances, outlining the common circumstances at play provides a clearer picture of the adversity/challenges faced by Namibian youth. LGBTQ+ communities navigate and experience resilience slightly differently compared to the rest of heteronormative society.

### **3.4 Gender and sexual identity**

The relationship between gender and sexual identity has been described by heteronormative society as the binary distinctions between man and woman, male and female. These binary distinctions have allowed for the nearly interchangeable use of the terms 'gender' and 'sex'. Assigned to these binary conceptualisations is a myriad of gender/sex specific standards, roles and expectations (Matungo, 2018: 45). Heteronormative culture not only made heterosexuality the default position, but assigned identities according to these roles and expectations. Where heterosexual, cis-gendered men are associated with hypersexuality, aggression and are expected to act as providers, heterosexual, cisgender women are often associated with passiveness, mothering and household duties (Bhana et al., 2007: 133). Deviation from these standards have historically been met with negative reactions.

The binary conceptualisation of gender and sexual identity is a largely Western conceptualisation. This conceptualisation is at present seen as the most commonly held definition of gender and sexual orientation due to colonial oppression at the hands of the West and the spread of white

evangelism across their colonies. However, the 21st century has been coined as the post-gay era. The post-gay era is characterised by the public acceptance of sexual diversity (Asakura, 2016: 268). Gulapo et. al.'s (2014: 434) conceptualisation of gender falls in line with society's evolution towards moving away from defining sexual and gender diversity as deviance from the norm.

Gulapo et al. (2014: 434) view both sexual orientation/identity and gender identity as being split into two distinct categories respectively. Sexual orientation/identity is described as the continuum from heterosexuality to homosexuality, with orientations such as bisexuality and asexuality falling somewhere on this continuum. The conceptualization of sexual orientation/identity existing on a continuum has been widely contested as it suggests that diverse sexual orientations are simply a combination of hetero and homosexuality which is inconsistent with the diverse perspectives and lived experiences of those within the LGBTQ+ community. Gender identity focuses more narrowly on the distinction between cisgender and transgender identities (Gulapo et al., 2014: 434). Diamond and Butterworth (2008: 365) define sexual identity development as the process by which individuals come to recognize themselves as attracted to the same sex and identify as homosexual/non-heterosexual. Gender identity development however is defined as the process by which children come to recognise themselves as permanently male or female (Diamond and Butterworth, 2008: 265). However, the definition put forward by Diamond and Butterworth (2008: 265-266) is to a large extent exclusionary, in that it neglects those who identify as non-binary, not identifying as unambiguously male or female. Diamond and Butterworth (2008: 365) do however, emphasise that conceptualisations of gender and sexual identity are far more fluid and flexible than before and criticise the dichotomous approach to gender that focuses on one "true" gender. However, this discussion is carried out in relation to transgender and transsexual individuals, who reject the notion of a "true" identity as it fails to capture the complexity and fluidity of their experiences.

Bhana et al. (2007: 135) posits a slightly different definition, describing gender as a "stylisation of the self", a process that is open to reinvention and repetition. This definition aligns more with the fluidity and complexity outlined in the experiences of trans individuals in Diamond and Butterworth's (2007) work. The next section narrows the scope down to the African context and the conceptualisations of gender and sexual identity in Africa.

### **3.4.1 Gender and sexual identity in Africa**

Sandfort and Reddy (2013: 33) claim that Africa is the continent with the most countries in which homosexuality is illegal. It has been thought that this is due to the continent's colonial history and the subsequent spread of Christianity, with religion being one of the leading factors resulting in Africa's low levels of acceptance of sexual and diversity. Buckle (2020:2) makes a link between countries previously colonies of Britain and at present part of the Commonwealth, with discriminatory laws within their constitution. According to Buckle (2020:2), 50% of countries that form part of the commonwealth continue to have anti-same-sex laws (such as Namibia's sodomy law (Criminal Procedure Act 51 of 1977)) within their constitution. Botswana is another example, having only recently repealed its anti-same-sex laws.

Both Bhana et.al (2007) and Buckle (2020) attempt to label homophobia and the strict patriarchal and hierarchical constructions of present-day African societies as European imports, stating that Africa's pre-colonisation was characterised with less stringent rules and norms regarding male and female roles and expectations and particularly, far more flexible to same-sex relationships as compared to the post-colonial realities.

### **3.5 LGBTQ+ youth, resilience, and sexual minority stress**

As previously indicated, LGBTQ+ is an acronym used to refer to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer community, where 'queer' is used as an umbrella term to refer to all sexually diverse persons. The + symbol at the end of this acronym refers to the orientation and identities not mentioned within the acronym. This includes but is not limited to, intersex and asexual individuals. It has become commonplace to use the extended acronym LGBTQIA that includes these identities. These terms may be used interchangeably (Pieters, 2019:81).

Any form of sexual diversity is often perceived as a deviation from heteronormative society and its binary expectations. Nonconformity to heteronormative standards is often met with marginalisation, discrimination and exclusion. Those who do not conform are 'othered' by the greater society. This process of 'othering' happens regardless of whether the environment is accepting or non-accepting of sexual diversity and non-binary conceptualisations of gender. In all cases, sexual and gender diversity stands as deviance from the norm. The process of 'othering',

exclusion and marginalisation causes what is known as sexual minority stress (Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009: 274). Sexual minority stress is the response to the sanctions placed on sexual minorities as a result of their non-conformity (Hequembourg and Brallier, 2009: 274). Meyer (2003 cited in Hequembourg 2009: 274), adds an additional dimension to this definition, adding that subjective intersection of various social processes and spheres alongside subjective lived experiences add on to and form part of sexual minority stress.

In the above section, where resilience confronts the stressors or adversities that individuals and communities alike experience, LGBTQ+ communities are faced with a double burden. This means that not only does this community face stressors along with the rest heteronormative society, but in addition to this faces stressors unique to their sexual and gender identity and the community they form a part of. This is not to be confused with “normal stressors”, as this conceptualization (that stress is normal and part of everyday life) contradicts the core meaning of resilience, which is based on stress that goes beyond normative standards (adversity). This aligns with an intersectional framework, dealing with what Diamond and Butterworth (2008: 366) describe as the intersecting of multiple social groups and identities, producing unique and subjective experiences that are not reducible to the original identities of which they are comprised. It is important to note that sexual minority stress is not caused by non-conformity itself, nor does being a part of a sexual minority group itself create vulnerable persons, instead it is societal reactions to non-conformity and the sanctions placed upon these communities that create vulnerability and unique adversities. One can argue that this is in some manner “forced resilience”, yet it begs the question, is the very notion of resilience not forced and if not, what is the alternative?

Asakura (2016: 269) outlines the concept of the double burden in their study “Conceptualising resilience of LGBTQ+ youth”. In this study, Asakura (2016: 269) states that “there are both similarities and differences in the way LGBTQ+ youth and their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts navigate resilience”. Asakura (2016: 269) further outlines common factors which promote heteronormative society, such as a supportive teacher and family connectedness that serve as “resilience resources” as well as common promoting factors for LGBTQ+ communities such as familial support and peer acceptance of homosexuality. It becomes clear that despite the difference in some of the resilience promoting factors, there is a clear overlap. LGBTQ+ communities must exist within heteronormative society, yet are more likely to report depression, suicide risks and

substance abuse than their heterosexual peers (Asakura, 2016: 269). One can then deduce that the intersections of heteronormative factors and sexual minority factors create additional strain within LGBTQ+ communities on a global scale.

### **3.6 LGBTQ+ youth in Namibia**

While it is not illegal to identify as LGBTQ+ in Namibia, the country's sodomy law (Criminal Procedure Act 51 of 1977) remains in place, deeming certain forms of sexual relations between two men as unnatural and punishable by arrest. However, this law is not enforced, nor has anyone been prosecuted in response to their sexuality (Buckle, 2020: 3). In fact, the nation is one of the only two African countries to currently have a permanent pride flag adorn one of its streets (Iguar, 2023). Despite this, LGBTQ+ youth in Namibia continue to face marginalisation and discrimination at a social level, cultural level, constitutional level and at a legal level. This results in inaccessible social institutions, services and benefits (Hequembourg, 2009: 274). The irony here paints a picture of the myriad of contradictions LGBTQ+ youth in Namibia are forced to navigate. While studies such as that by Professor Pieters at the University of Namibia (2019) have looked into the constitutional and legal contradictions that affect LGBTQ+ youth, this study aims to address how Namibian LGBTQ+ youth navigate resilience within this heteronormative maze. This study aims to address the gap created by the lack of research at the intersections of youth resilience, sexual LGBTQ+ and the legal and constitutional tensions within Namibia.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter ties together the concept of youth resilience within the Namibian landscape, outlining how members of the LGBTQ+ community navigate resilience, delving into deterrence factors such as sexual minority stress and political homophobia. These deterrence factors form unique circumstances for LGBTQ+ youth. Alongside this, LGBTQ+ communities must also be resilient against the adversities that the rest of heteronormative society faces, forming the double burden as discussed in the first chapter. Within the Namibian context, it can be assumed that LGBTQ+ youth in Namibia face similar adversities from a constitutional, legal and to some extent a cultural perspective. These burdens and experiences are once again diversified by the intersections of race,

class and status. By acknowledging the diverse lived experiences of Namibian LGBTQ+ youth and addressing the systemic barriers they face, those in power can foster environments that promote inclusivity, empowerment, and holistic development.

The journey towards resilience for Namibian LGBTQ+ youth requires a collective commitment to dismantling systemic inequalities, challenging harmful stereotypes, and fostering environments that nurture individual strengths and identities. By exploring the socio-political landscape in which sexual minority groups must be resilient, sexual minority stress and political homophobia are but the tip of the iceberg. The intricacies within this social space encompass the cultural, constitutional and legal intersections that form the unique experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in Namibia.

## **Chapter Four: Theoretical Frameworks- Social-ecological theory and Queer theory**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Within the literature review chapter, this thesis discusses the double burden of sexual and gender minority stress faced by LGBTQ+ communities as adversities or stress that must be overcome within the definition of youth resilience as the ability to produce desired outcomes despite adversities or stress. The following chapter aims to place this understanding of youth resilience, more particularly, LGBTQ+ youth resilience, within the socio-ecological framework to dissect the social ecologies that are meant to enable and nurture not only the internal capacities of the LGBTQ+ communities but also to assess the capacities of the social-ecologies (as both protective and obstructive factors) themselves. In simple terms, this study will attempt to examine how social ecologies enable and constrain youth resilience. The placement of LGBTQ+ youth resilience within the socio-ecological framework will be carried out through the analyses of the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in Namibia as they navigate their way towards wellbeing, as well as discussions with key strategic informants.

Alongside this, the thesis will place this study within the Queer theory framework. Herein, the study will briefly look at LGBTQ+ youth resilience through queer theory's lenses including intersectionality, agency and empowerment, and performativity.

### **4.2 Social-ecology theory**

Jansen (1980: 433) defines social-ecology as a branch of or existing within human ecology. Where human ecology is the interaction between people and their physical environment, social-ecology deals with the social aspect, more particularly, the societal impacts of said environment. Morris (2013: 1) in his work on the social-ecology of criminology, defines social-ecology as the relationships that exist between individuals/communities who share a collective space/territory. Morris (2013: 1) goes on to describe social-ecology as "a study of social structure in relation to the local environment". This allows us to frame social-ecological theory as the interactions between individuals and the interrelating social systems/structures and the environment. Where the environment is able to provide the individual with the resources necessary for resilience. The resources such as support and skills are provided by the environment through the relationships and

interactions with individuals within the relative spheres. Social-ecological theory allows us to dissect individual interactions with their environment and how these interactions affect the environment, more particularly, how various spheres of society interact and depend on one another. This framework is often referred to as ecological systems theory.

The main premise of social-ecology stems from Bronfenbrenner's (2000) ecological-systems model (originally within the discipline of psychology) which aimed to provide insights into the relationships within one's community and how this affects childhood development. Bronfenbrenner's model was split into five systems; the microsystem, the mesosystem, exosystem, the macrosystem and chronosystem (Hess & Schultz, 2008 cited in Kraus, 2008). Herein, the microsystem refers to the individuals, institutions and groups in direct contact with the child. The mesosystem refers to the interactions of the microsystems within the child's life followed by the macrosystem that refers to social settings out of the child's control. The exosystem refers to cultural influences as the interactions between micro and meso-systems. Finally, the chronosystem refers to major events and cultural shifts.

Within ecological systems theory, Theron (2016: 37-40) outlines the role of ecological stakeholders within these respective spheres. Ecological stakeholders are defined as individuals who are assigned specific roles regarding socialisation. According to Theron (2016: 37-40), ecological stakeholders hold responsibility for the life trajectory of those they socialize. The ecological stakeholders such as parents within the familial unit or a guidance counsellor within the school/university are seen as responsible for the life outcomes of those "under their care". The ecological stakeholders are then responsible for providing those under their care with the necessary resources and the social landscape that allows them to reach their full potential and well-being. Theron's conceptualisation of ecological stakeholders' aids in painting a picture of the support systems and the resources they provide within the framework.

Here it starts to become clearer as to the implementation of the concept of Bronfenbrenner's model and social-ecology into resilience research, as it allows for a micro to macro analysis of the social spheres that influence development of youth and how they navigate resilience.

Within the social-ecological framework, that is the understanding of the human experience as different interrelating social spheres that either promote or obstruct resilience, Masten (cited in Ungar, 2018: 33) defines resilience as "the capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to

disturbances that threaten system functioning, viability, or development. The concept can be applied to systems of many kinds and many interacting spheres, both living and non-living, such as a microorganism, a child, a family, a security system, an economy, a forest, or the global climate” (Ungar, 2018: 33-34). This suggests LGBTQ+ communities/groups are systems in themselves. Although this conceptualization exists, such as when Masten (cited in Ungar, 2018: 33-34) discusses community resilience as the ability of a social group to navigated stressors using its “inherent strengths”, this is not the case within this study. Throughout this thesis, the unit of analysis remains the individual, more particularly, an individual as part of a LGBTQ+ community but also at the centre of their own unique social-ecological system.

Masten (as cited in Ungar, 2018: 33) also provides a system-wide definition of resilience, defining it as the system's ability/capacity to positively adapt to adverse conditions in a manner that sustains efficient functioning. In an individual sphere, this suggests that resilience is defined as an individual’s ability to adapt despite uncondusive circumstances in a manner that maintains well-being. This ability however, is a trait of the interrelating spheres, and not of the system/individual it/themselves (Masten, 2014). This suggests that the efficient functioning or wellbeing can only be achieved through the collective functioning of these interrelated spheres. The failure of one sphere thus reduces the individual’s capacity towards resilience.

We can now conclude that the inefficient or malfunctioning of an ecological system is what necessitates resilience, however, this is not where it ends. Ungar (2018: 33-34) takes it a step back to ecological resilience, and defines ecological resilience as the amount of adversity a system can absorb before transformation occurs. This highlights how the ecological system can revert back to equilibrium and suggests that there is a saturation point when it comes to the malfunctioning a system can take. The results here are either the transformation or the complete breakdown of the sphere/system. The potential for transformation however, suggests that there exist alternative regimes which allow the spheres to keep to their essential functioning despite facing significant adversities. According to Quinlan (cited in Ungar 2018: 3), this is a key aspect of complex adaptive systems – the ability or capacity to regenerate and transform, giving hope to marginalised and minority communities, that while the current state of their unique social-ecological system may be less than ideal, the capacity for transformation remains. It is important to link this back to the core; individuals and their human experience within these spheres. The “malfunctioning” of the system

may result in a breaking point and pivotal space for transformation for the individual and the centre of said “system”, and the system reverting back to equilibrium, the resilience of the individual.

#### **4.2.1 Social-ecological theory and youth resilience**

When it comes to resilience, the social-ecological systems framework becomes the social-ecology of resilience. Within this thesis, LGBTQ+ youth resilience as a social-ecological process looks at how the micro, mezzo and macro spheres work and interact in a process that results in the promotion of the internal capacity of LGBTQ+ youth as well as their social capacities to ensure their wellbeing (Asakura, 2018: 15). Herein, social capacity refers to the ability of groups and/or individuals to actively engage in interaction, community and form relationships. Internal capacity refers to inherent capacities, resources and strengths that an individual possesses that enables them to respond positively to challenges (Gangas, 2016: 28).

According to Asakura (2018: 15), the social-ecological framework for resilience is based on two main premises; a) resilience permeates far deeper than the individual’s capacity but also the capacity of their social-ecologies to provide them with the resources needed to navigate themselves through this non-linear process and towards wellbeing; and b) the resources needed to navigate towards wellbeing are population and context-specific, particularly because resilience processes are often socio-culturally unique. Within this study, well-being is conceptualised as the individual’s full potential, in laymans terms, the results that would have been reached given all desired conditions. The study will attempt to assess whether this is a reachable condition within varying environments as well as how the condition is reached.

While Luthar et al.’s (2000: 543) original conceptualisation of youth resilience is as an individualised process, Ungar’s (2011 cited in Asakura, 2018: 15) social-ecological systems framework embodies a more holistic approach that looks at how multi-sphere support systems come together and lead the individual towards wellbeing. It is important to note how the social-ecological model still takes a micro practice approach, that is, guiding the individual to strengthen their navigation capacity (Asakura, 2018: 18).

In Chapter one, resilience was defined, at its core, as a positive adaption or response to stress. Youth resilience focuses on the idea that positive adaptations to adversities can be promoted or

deterred depending on the stressors or promoting factors the individual is exposed to within their respective social spheres. According to Khanlou and Wray (2014: 67), these adversities comprised of “structural, familial and individual stressors”. This conceptualisation corresponds with the social-ecological model, where one is able to analytically split the human experience into intersecting and interrelating yet distinct social spheres. Gartner and Sterning (2018: 3) corroborate Khanlou and Wray’s (2014) division of spheres in relation to adversities in their social-ecological model for interpersonal and environmental micro-aggressions/negative reactions. Herein, Gartner and Sterzing (2018: 3) divide the human experience into three spheres; individual, family, and structural, where the individual sphere is characterised by age, sexual orientation, and gender identity, amongst others. The family sphere is characterised by factors such as parental education, poverty, and religion. Lastly, the structural sphere is characterised by factors such as community, poverty and state-sphere provisions and protections. This provides us with a slightly more in-depth understanding of the spheres, what occurs within them and the kind of resources they can provide.

The social-ecological theory of resilience recognises the spheres in which we find ourselves can act as a promoting factor for resilience as well as a resilience-diminishing factor (what has earlier been referred to as obstruction factors) (Kofinas et al. 2013, Carson and Peterson 2016 as cited in Ungar, 2018). According to Ungar (2018: 34), there are multiple ways in which systems or individuals can show resilience. It is herein that Ungar (2018: 34) suggests that only when the resources are available, can the system or individual achieve wellbeing. It is important to note that wellbeing is not a final state, but rather situational and looks different for every individual. This is to say, that socially undesired patterns are the result of the lack of capacity and lack of social resources.

#### **4.2.2 Social-ecological theory and LGBTQ+ communities**

Maracinni et al. (2022) use the social-ecological framework to analyse and discuss how schools can better care for and cater to LGBTQ+ students in regard to the risk of suicide-related thoughts. Within their work, Maracinni et al. (2022: 28) highlight how minority populations, more particularly sexual and gender minorities, face increased risks of suicidal behaviors and thoughts compared to their heterosexual peers. In addition to these risks, Maracinni et al. (2022: 41) demonstrates how minority populations face higher risks of ostracisation, stigmatization and

violence. Bruner et al. (2017:287) illustrate similar findings using the ecological systems framework to address interventions for interpersonal violence within LGBTQ+ communities. Bruner et al. (2017: 287) discuss how LGBTQ+ youth are once again at higher risk for harassment, victimisation and discrimination compared to their heterosexual counterparts. Maracinni et al. (2022: 28) link this to “identity-specific stressors” such as homo-negativity and anti-queerness. These identity-specific stressors contribute to these increased risks by preventing resilience promoting factors and acting as resilience obstruction factors themselves. The aforementioned biases (homo-negativity and anti-queerness) can be seen throughout the various social spheres such as familial rejection, peer rejection, and sexual discrimination in school (Hong et al., 2011 cited in Maracinni et al., 2022). Both Bruner et al. and Maracinni et al. outline school (education) as a sphere and institution wherein youth groups spend the majority of their time. As such, these studies have used the school environment as a site through which support and positive experiences can be provided to work against the increased risks LGBTQ+ communities face.

These studies also provide insight into the importance of transformation within these social spheres when it comes to the safety, protection and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ communities. Maracinni et al. (2022: 28) go on to discuss how environments and institutions within these spheres can be used to promote protective factors such as implicit messaging about the acceptability of sexual and gender diversity and providing access to various intervention programs. Alongside this, institutions and organisations such as schools (in the case of Maracinni et al. 2022 and Bruner 2017) can be used to promote safety and acceptance through inclusive policies and positive relationships (particularly with the adults present in these spaces) (Espelage et al., 2019; Hatchel, Polanin, & Espelage, 2019; Hong et al., 2011 as cited in Maracinni et. al, 2022). It is however important to remember that the positive potential of spaces such as these are mirrored by the equal potential to harbour harmful stressors such as harassment, discriminatory policies, aggression, and violence. Both positive and negative experiences alike have the ability to permeate social life at large, touching on social interactions, relationships, safety, values and beliefs that can influence perceptions of the institutional climate at large and extends into the community (Maracinni et al., 2022: 28)

The discourse surrounding the unequal experiences of risk of negative outcomes for LGBTQ+ communities paints a picture that is corroborated once again by Maracinni et al. (2022), where sexual minorities experience the world and institutions such as the school environment (in the case

of Maracinni et al. (2022) and Bruner et al. (2017)), differently to their heterosexual peers, often facing increased obstacles and negative feelings regarding factors such as safety and acceptance.

Following the discussion in Chapter Three, the stress associated with minority identity makes LGBTQ+ communities more susceptible to a multitude of psychosocial problems such as substance abuse, sexual risk-taking behaviours, and eating disorders (Maracinni et. al, 2022: 30). Applying the social-ecological framework to LGBTQ+ youth resilience provides insight into the varying spheres of influence throughout the four social spheres discussed in the last section of this chapter. Alongside this, the framework allows insight into the impact these social spheres have on an individual's capacity. Cohen et al. (2016), in their work on adaptive capacities in social-ecological systems, discuss a gendered take on capacities within social-ecologies. Herein, Cohen et al. (2016) looked at several dimensions of capacity and how they interacted with gender within the system. An example looked at how women and children faced increased difficulty interacting within the system when faced with capacity diminishing factors such as limits to education or disability (Cohen et al. 2016: 309,310).

#### **4.2.3 Social-ecological theory in Africa**

Applying the social-ecological model to African contexts necessitates the analysis of the specific laws and systems of the nation in question as well as a systematic look at varying societal spheres and the resources they push towards youth and LGBTQ+ youth resilience. At an individual sphere, it is important to consider the subjective experiences of LGBTQ+ youth. Experiences such as discrimination, stigma, transphobia, and internalised homophobia are just some of the factors that lead to the prevalence of mental health issues among LGBTQ+ youth that we see today. When exploring the interpersonal sphere, we consider the relationships with friends, family and intimate partners, where supportive relationships act as a buffer against negative outcomes as discussed above. At the community sphere, we consider community attitudes, norms and practices. Within the African context, it is important to take into consideration the stigmatisation of LGBTQ+ identities and the persecution members of these communities may face when they are openly out. While it may seem easy to consider stigma and discrimination at every sphere, it is important to consider the African context, as many LGBTQ+ communities in Africa may not have the same level of support discussed in the first two spheres.

At the institutional sphere, we need to consider the policies, laws and practices of the institutions within which the individual spends the most time. These include schools, healthcare facilities, legal systems, and, in the case of this thesis, the constitution and judiciary system. Here, countries with anti-same-sex laws present significant dangers to LGBTQ+ communities. Finally, at the societal sphere, we consider broader societal factors such as culture, religion and politics. Interventions at this stage include social movements, cultural sensitivity and dialogue between key players such as activist groups and religious circles. Ngwenya et al. (2022: 2-3) illustrate this in their work; *Behavioural and socio-ecological factors that influence access and utilisation of health services by young people living in rural KwaZulu-Natal*. Herein, Ngwenya et al. (2022: 2-3) discuss the individual, interpersonal, community, organisational and public policy spheres. These spheres align with those discussed within this chapter. Ngwenya et al. go on to use this socio-ecological model to devise healthcare interventions based on how concepts and beliefs traverse within these systems (Ngwenya et al, 2022: 2-3).

### **4.3 Queer theory**

The main premise of Queer theory is the rejection of fixed gender norms and binaries and the conceptualisation of gender and sexuality as fluid and changing. At its core, it aims to dismantle heteronormativity and critiques essentialist views on sexuality and gender (Grzanka, 2019: 5). Within the realm of youth resilience and more particularly, LGBTQ+ youth resilience, queer theory allows the use of lenses such as intersectionality, performativity, as well as agency and empowerment. These lenses will all be considered briefly in this section in order to provide theoretical context for the application of the social-ecological framework.

#### **4.3.1 Intersectionality and LGBTQ+ communities**

Intersectionality dissects the way interlocking systems of privilege, power and oppression come together and form unique, subjective experiences for every individual. The lens assists in viewing the individual as more than a singular identity but rather the combination of several intersecting, inseparable identities; including race, class, geographic location amongst others (Grzanka, 2019: 7). Within the realm of minority groups, it is important to emphasise that individuals who take up

various minority identities may be impacted by various forms of discrimination, stigmatisation and oppression, causing significantly higher spheres of stress and strain due to their unique social placements.

Applying an intersectional lens to LGBTQ+ youth resilience allows one to see youth resilience exactly as intended, comprising multiple intersecting layers and spheres yet at the core, the focus is on the individual. When discussing intersectionality within the realm of LGBTQ+ youth resilience, the LGBTQ+ label no longer stands on its own. Instead of seeing an individual that identifies as part of the LGBTQ+ community, it is important to view the individual through their other identities as well. This includes race, ethnicity, class, status and education. This is because these intersecting identities will influence and affect the resources the individual has access to and as a result, may further exacerbate the social exclusion they face already (Schumacher et al. 2022: 31-32). Within this study, the intersectional lens is applied in order to more wholly understand the individual at the core of the system. The individual and their identity is not simply young and queer but rather a composite of multiple intersecting identities such as young, queer and black or young queer and homeless. It would be inappropriate to look at LGBTQ+ youth resilience without considering other contextual factors such as the several dimensions discussed in this section.

### **4.3.2 Performativity**

Judith Butler (cited in Valocchi et. al, 2005: 762) in her work on queer theory completely rejects the idea of a solidified, singular conceptualisation of gender identity. Instead, Butler poses the view of gender identity and identity at large as the repeated performance of shared symbols and meanings. The main premise here is that gender identity is forged by repeating the actions and conventions that are thought to produce them. Gender identity is produced and reproduced by consciously and unconsciously adhering to certain norms and values assigned to gender rather than embodied inherently (Valocchi et. al, 2005: 762).

However, applying the lens of performativity to LGBTQ+ resilience is not carried out as one might expect. Instead, to apply performativity on to LGBTQ+ youth resilience one must discuss the performativity of resilience. The idea here centres around LGBTQ+ youth performing resilience in the same way as the performance of sexuality and gender as conceptualised by Judith Butler

(2009: i-ii). One can then suggest that resilience is produced by simply repeating actions that lead to well-being. However, this raises the question, once an individual is provided with the resources i.e. support and skills, they need through their social-ecologies, what pushes them to enact and repeat the actions necessary to achieve well-being? The answer is discussed in the next section.

### **4.3.3 Agency and empowerment**

Valocchi et al. (2005: 755) discuss how individuals and groups can exercise their agency in ways that allow them to mobilise and enact transformation to the institutional structures that control the understanding and meanings of said identities. A simple example of this is the word “queer”. Formally used as a derogatory slur for those within the LGBTQ+ community, the word was reclaimed by LGBTQ+ communities and is now used across contexts as an umbrella term for LGBTQ+ individuals. Agency becomes the catalyst for social transformation and resilience, without it, the train can never leave its tracks. Margaret Archer (2002) considers agency and social realism, where she defines relative autonomy and causal efficacy. Relative autonomy refers to an individual’s degree of independence from the societal structures that influence them. This encompasses retaining the ability to reflect and make decisions outside of structural control. Causal efficacy refers to the power of individuals to affect their social environment. This negates the idea of humans as passive recipients of social forces and instead illustrates them as individuals capable of reflecting on their context and taking transformative action. Their actions have causal effects on society, allowing them to reshape or influence their social world (Archer, 2002: 11-12).

## **4.5 Conclusion**

The social-ecological theory of resilience provides a holistic and in-depth analysis not only of the individual but of the social structures and environments they exist within and how these structures and environments influence and impact their ability to reach their full potential. Social-ecological theory provides a lens through which we can analyse the various spheres of social existence as well as the intersections and interdependence that exists within these spheres. The malfunctioning of these spheres and the interactions therein result often result in undesirable outcomes. It is also understood that these undesired outcomes can only be avoided through resilience. When it comes

to LGBTQ+ communities, the higher rate of social-ecological malfunctioning as a result of heteronormative societies' perspectives on sexual diversity leads to unique forms of resilience.

The addition of Queer theory allows one to provide a more well-rounded account. Instead of considering the individual as simply a queer person facing uncondusive circumstances, the view widens and highlights the many other intersecting identities they may hold. A queer woman, a queer black woman and a queer, black, disabled woman will have different experiences of similar social structures and spheres due to their subjective positioning. In Addition to this, Namibia as a multicultural space, necessitates an intersectional perspective to ensure that the hierarchical structures within minority groups are addressed as well. Finally, Queer theory also allowed the brief exploration of performativity as well as agency and the power dynamics within transformational spaces.

## **Chapter Five: Data Analysis**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a detailed thematic analysis of the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in Namibia, and the various factors that shape their lived experiences. Drawing on qualitative data collected from participants who identify across the spectrum of sexual and gender identities, this chapter explores how resilience is developed, and challenged within different social, legal, and cultural contexts. The analysis is organized around key themes such as resilience, the role of social ecologies, hidden costs of resilience, deviance and moral panic, and the influence of culture and context.

The study analysed face-to-face and transcribed interview responses from ten participants, employing thematic analysis methods to determine patterns and commonalities amongst participant responses. The ten participants were selected from the LGBTQ+ community in Namibia. The participants selected ranged across the LGBTQ+ spectrum identifying as either cisgender or non-cisgender as well as straight/heterosexual passing and non-straight/non-heterosexual passing. Participants identified themselves in terms of whether they are “out” to their social spheres. This means participants identified whether or not their social spheres knew about their homosexuality or not. Finally, the participants identified themselves according to their sexual orientation, taking on labels such as gay, lesbian, queer, trans, trans-fem, stem and stud. These labels all attempt to illustrate whether the individual is masculine, feminine or non-binary presenting. All participants ranged between the ages of 18 to 35 years of age and are unmarried.

The analysis begins by understanding the societal perception of LGBTQ+ identities is critical to this analysis, with the section on deviance and moral panics exploring how non-normative sexual and gender identities are often framed as deviant, leading to social backlash and moral panic. These societal reactions, in turn, influence the resilience and well-being of LGBTQ+ youth.

Furthermore, this analysis takes on examining resilience as the core theme, highlighting how LGBTQ+ youth navigate societal pressures and personal challenges. It delves into the importance of social ecologies, such as family, friends, and broader community networks, in either fostering or limiting their ability to be resilient. The discussion further explores the hidden costs of resilience,

shedding light on the emotional and psychological toll that often accompanies efforts to adapt in unsupportive and heteronormative environments.

The analysis also investigates the influence of culture and context, with a focus on how traditional norms and values in Namibia shape the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals. In addition, this chapter discusses the resources available to LGBTQ+ youth and their role in supporting resilience, while also considering the barriers they face in accessing these resources.

The chapter concludes by exploring the interplay between cisgenderism, performativity and the legal framework in Namibia. By examining the failures and successes of the legal system, including the landmark ruling recognizing same-sex marriages performed abroad, this chapter assesses how legal developments impact the lives of LGBTQ+ youth and their ability to achieve resilience in an evolving yet restrictive legal environment.

This thematic analysis provides an in-depth look at the multifaceted experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in Namibia, offering insight into how they navigate societal, legal, and cultural challenges in their pursuit of well-being and acceptance.

## **5.2 Deviance and moral panic**

While Namibia has received praise for its progressive and liberal constitution, this is not always reflected socially (Mapaure, n.d: 18). In a time nearing national elections, parliamentarians and those in positions of political power have incited political homophobia across the country. This process is encapsulated by the concept of moral panic within the sociology of deviance. Moral panics are defined as a widespread, disproportionate societal reaction to a perceived threat. Moral panics (Cohen, 1999) are characterised by media amplification of particular events or behaviours and fearmongering which often end in calls for increased social controls (Tettey, 2016: 1). Moral entrepreneurs are defined as individual, groups or organisations that take the lead in labelling certain behaviours or social events/occurrences as deviant, in need of control or as in the case of this study, un-African. Moral entrepreneurs are responsible for actively promoting, enforcing, strengthening and changing of social norms and laws to address what they perceive as immoral (Becker, 1963). The current social climate in Namibia is a clear example of this, reflected in

participant responses and media coverage showcasing politicians and churches pushing anti-same-sex agendas.

This process effectively allows for the positioning of those labelled as deviant as scapegoats or “folk devils” (Cohen, 1999: 306). Moral scapegoats or folk devils are then depicted as diseased, the cause of social unrest and in need of remedy, intervention and measures. As in the case of Namibia, inciting violence nearing national elections, moral crusaders as outlined above, strive for greater consensus and tougher stances in times of social turmoil and uncertainty. This “solid footing” created by moral entrepreneurs then becomes alluring even to those that do not usually support the particular agenda. The LGBTQ+ community in Namibia have been painted as the root cause of the decay of Namibian traditional values with rule-makers going as far as to oppose comprehensive sex education in state run schools.

Once social ills have been re-interpreted so that they become symptomatic of moral decay, it opens society up to the political agenda which casts liberal rights as arcane, and pro-criminal (Vincent, 2009: 216). Pro-homosexuality is seen once again, as un-African, as un-Christian, and criminal. This creates fertile conditions for a populist approach, dichotomising the socio-political space and creating stark distinctions between the underdog and the privileged and effectively putting the rights of queer Namibians in jeopardy. Here, queer Namibian rights are jeopardised by the vilification, demonisation and exclusionary nature of the populist approach, which paints those that may deviate from sexual and gender binaries as the cause of the loss of “traditional Namibian values”. The crux of this populist approach lies in shifting the blame of social ills onto groups/individuals instead of acknowledging the weaknesses, failures, biases and bigotry that exists among those in power. This provides insight into the gap that exists between Namibian constitutional democracy, and popular sentiment.

### **5.3 Resilience**

Theron (2012: 333) provides five points for resilience that allow insight into the various facets of youth resilience. This study will analyse participant responses in line with the five points outlined by Theron (2012), ensuring that the concept of resilience is dissected within the participant responses and allowing for the highlighting of resilience patterns. These five points include; the

role of social ecologies when resilience does not occur, the hidden costs of resilience, ensuring that data is measured accurately and comprehensively, ensuring evidence-based research, and finally how culture and context influence resilience. Herein, three out of these five points will be used to analyse the data and break down youth resilience into its constituted parts.

### **5.3.1 Role of social ecologies**

Social ecologies refer to the interconnected networks of relationships, institutions, and systems that shape and support individual well-being and development. These ecologies influence how people cope with challenges, access resources, and foster resilience. Within the context of LGBTQ+ youth, social ecologies encompass multiple spheres of life, such as family, friendships, religious spaces, and broader community networks, all of which play varying roles in either supporting or inhibiting individuals' personal development.

Participants illustrated the role of their social ecologies and how these systems of support show up in their lives, emphasizing that not all ecological spheres offer the same degree of stability. The participants' narratives demonstrate the fluidity of social ecologies, revealing how LGBTQ+ youth often must reconfigure their support networks in response to rejection or inconsistent familial support. Many participants highlighted the importance of peer groups as the most stable and consistent source of encouragement. Through their friendships, these youths actively create inclusive and affirming spaces, compensating for a lack of familial or institutional support.

The participants illustrated a range of ways in which their social ecologies or social spheres show up for them and to what degree. The distinction made most prominent by all the participants was the familial and peer-friend groups as the most dominant forms of support in their lives. Other support systems/spheres such as religious support systems or workspace support systems did not feature in the lives of any of the participants within this study. Between the two dominant support spheres, the peer-friendship group/spheres came across as the most stable and consistent form of support for the majority of the participants. Where other support systems may have faltered or fluctuated in the amount or type of support it gives, by actively surrounding themselves with tolerant and accepting friends, LGBTQ+ youth have managed to actively create support systems for themselves that prove far stronger than those put in place to support them. This is compared to

the familial support system where the majority of the participants felt that their relationship and the amount of support they received from their familial support system has changed as a result of their coming out or fear the possibility of that change were they to come out.

Participant Four, who identifies as a cis-gender, gay man outlined the following, where he describes the distinctions between the kind of support he receives from his peer-friend support groups and his family:

“Well, my friends are very like accommodating or accepting. Yeah, they accept me for who I am. But my family on the other side? Yeah, that's where the trouble comes, because my parents don't accept it. Grandparents you know, especially when they are both 80 years old. Yeah. So my family doesn't accept this at all, so it makes it very difficult for me to be the person I want to be at the end of the day because it's a struggle” (Author’s interview with Participant Four, August 2024, Windhoek, Namibia).

Participant Nine, who identifies as a cis-gender, lesbian woman, had an experience one could consider on the opposite end of the spectrum when compared to Participant Four above:

“Yeah. Church was never really a thing for me, but like I said, my family has been very open and supportive. Mainly because I have a brother that's also gay, and I have a few cousins as well that are gay, so it's never really, it was never really a thing of “ohh this one is gay” or you know, there's a little bit of awkward, awkward this” (Authors interview with Participant Nine, September 2024, Online interview).

We see both these participants attempt to and reach for resilience, using their support systems in different ways. Where Participant Nine got the necessary support and resources at home from a “primary sphere”, participant four had to actively curate a support system made up of individuals that would essentially take over the role, bridge the gap created by the lack of familial support.

Similar to Participant Nine, Participant Six outlines why they have decided to step away from church. This extract captures the sentiments of all the participants within this study, where the lack of acceptance and ridicule has slowly pushed them away from religious spaces as well as the acknowledgement that they would find no support there.

Participant Six, who identifies as a straight, transgender woman, outlined their experience with religious spaces in the following extract:

“Yes, definitely. I mean, I know I stopped doing church because they kept coming at me with the whole, and you know repeatedly saying you need to go dress appropriately and come as a man to church and that. The church space is not going to be affirming to me as a woman, then I don't think I want to be in that space” (Authors interview with Participant Six, September 2024, Online interview).

By actively building and fostering friendships with peers who are tolerant, accepting and allied to the queer community we see how Participant Six, from a theoretical perspective attempts to revert back to equilibrium after losing support from one of their spheres or ecological stakeholders, and filling the gap (Ungar, 2018: 33-34). Chapter Four, Section Two, focused on the potential for transformation suggests the existence of alternative regimes that allow the system to continue its functioning despite adversities. This links to the lived experiences of majority of the participants where a foundational support system such as family support is replaced by peer-friend support networks when what one could consider a “primary” support system malfunctions (Ungar, 2018: 33-34). Quinlan (cited in Ungar, 2018: 3) refers to this as adaptive systems and emphasises how this concept gives hope to marginalized and minority communities as the potential for transformation or the capacity to regenerate persists regardless of whether the state of the system is ideal. The transformation towards efficient functioning is a trait of the interrelating spheres instead of the individual themselves where the malfunctioning of one sphere may reduce an individual's capacity towards resilience. While shifting from one primary sphere to another, one must recognise that the capacity for resilience may be reduced however, the system will always tend towards efficient functioning.

Below, Strategic Informant One discusses the support networks available to the community from an activist perspective:

“Actually gauge what the needs are in a community. If you travel between various regions you also get a sense of how their context is completely different. So, I think it's it's really that the support networks have been established through workshops that have been ongoing from with different organizations, some that only focus, for example on HIV, the others that maybe only focus on food security, others may focus more on you know the other

coexisting identities and coexisting layers of how some would cope to survive, which is sex work for example. And then also you find, for example, other workshops that have been set up in such a way that support networks do come out of them when you're looking at, for example, the reproductive justice workshops that we've been conducting in the five regions in the last 3-4 years that I've been in the reproductive justice movement, but also partly at the at the forefront, not partly, but very, very, very front, front and centre of the queer movement at the time in the in the last 2-3 years, in the last five years I would say is that these support networks come when we become innovative and example the feminist festival that we hosted in 2021, where we've seen that, yes, it's a feminist festival and you start to then look at what does feminism look like within queer identity and ideology? And then looking at how many queers attended the feminist festival, even though they don't necessarily identify as feminists? But they are still in a struggle for ownership, for self-ownership, for identity recognition, for dignity. So other support networks and communities that came out of initiatives like Drag Night Namibia has a huge network already. And then you find, for example, there's a Namibia Pride Week committee that has been set up where a few initiatives have come out of it in order to ensure that there is visibility and with visibility, people find the community and hence their support networks are set up. And so there have been quite a few over the years, just through the innovations from different queer movements, individuals that have themselves also decided to find other alternatives beyond just protesting in order for a community to exist" (Authors interview with Strategic Informant One, August 2024, Online interview).

The participants' experiences illustrate how social ecologies function dynamically in the lives of LGBTQ+ youth, adapting to challenges and shifting toward equilibrium. When familial or religious spheres fail to provide adequate support, peer friendships and activist communities take on a more prominent role, ensuring continued resilience. The adaptive nature of these social ecologies highlights the importance of diverse support networks and innovative community efforts in fostering well-being within marginalized communities.

### 5.3.2 Hidden costs of resilience

While resilience and conceptualisations such as “grit” or “follow through” may seem worthy of praise at first glance, it is important to emphasise the price many are forced to pay when choosing to express themselves in an affirming way. By “choosing” to be resilient, many young queer Namibians give up the many rights and liberties that are constitutionally promised to heteronormative Namibians. The right to protection and the right to freely express oneself comes to mind almost immediately. However, the hidden costs of resilience may not always be as blatant. The ‘othering’ that often coincides a queer identity often results in the othering within multiple spheres. An othering from one's culture, an othering from one's religious system, an othering from one's family, and an othering in the workplace (Levitt et al., 2016: 67-68). Participant Three, who identifies as a trans-fem, gay man, outlines this ‘othering’ from their perspective:

“Yeah, it's as simple as something as small as like, I'll go into an interview with my Afro out, no jewellery or anything. I won't even put it in a stud (earring). I'll be like, I'll wear a full pants suit and everything. Then it's something as small as like, OK, I've put on like diamond studs (earrings) not even like hoops (earrings), just a diamond stud one day to work and I can tell, like, OK, or I'll, like, brush my eyebrows out a little bit, uh, you know, like, oh, I've styled my outfit a little bit differently, I don't even have to do something as extreme or like as far as like wearing wigs or braiding my hair. The smallest thing for me, I think it's because I am so naturally and visibly queer. The smallest thing that emphasizes that makes it easy, makes it more visible and overwhelms and causes changes in most places” (Authors interview with Participant Three, August 2024, Windhoek, Namibia).

Strategic Informant One discusses the concept of ‘othering’ and how this impacts the community differently across class and status lines:

“Economically it costs them their jobs. Just the visibility already could cost them. But again, it would be so surprising because sometimes it feels like I'm speaking only towards one sector or one class of the community when there are many subclasses of some of us who have had privilege. I can say for myself, I necessarily didn't, I didn't face any deterrence per se, even in this pursuit of, of equality in my activism, I've not necessarily felt the same levels of disadvantages because of my privileges financially and the resources, the fact that I can travel that I've come from a very good background in my education, in my education

background, and so. But what I'm seeing mostly is a lot of us queer people that are aging, that are growing, going into our 30s. We want more for ourselves. We want families. We want to settle, and we want to own, you know, our own houses and so forth. Of course, we can do that individually. If you're saying that, just as you as an individual, you want to buy a house and so forth, but, we are also in long term relationships where this could have easily been done much, much quicker” (Authors interview with Strategic Informant One, August 2024, Online interview).

The above extracts outline two different experiences of the costs that accompany life as part of the LGBTQ+ community. Participant Three outlines feeling the ‘othering’ commence based on how they perform gender as they become more comfortable followed by the space/environment reacting negatively to a perceived “crossing of heteronormative boundaries”. Strategic Informant One similarly discusses ‘othering’ caused by visibility and how their privileged position impacted the kind and intensity of obstacles they faced.

### **5.3.3 Sexual minority stress**

As outlined in Chapter Three, sexual minority stress refers to the “double burden” experienced by members of the LGBTQ+ community that adds strain onto the more “normalised” stress/stressors that coincides with being a young person within heteronormative society (Asakura, 2016: 269). Homophobia and transphobia are two dominant examples of sexual minority stress and the weight LGBTQ+community members carry as the cost of being who they are. Hequembourg and Brailer (2009: 274) outline sexual minority stress as the response to the sanctions placed on LGBTQ+ community members as a result of their non-conformity. In addition, Hequembourg and Brailer outline an additional dimension of subjectivity, where the interactions of various social processes add up and form sexual minority stress.

Participant Six outlines the following harrowing ordeal:

“Well, I mean, yeah, like I said, they are attached to each other. On a day-to-day basis, you will stand there by this street and it will take you an hour to get a taxi to work. By now I've even told my boss, even my boss knows, sometimes my boss will drive me back home because Hierdie manne sal stop (these men will stop) right there by you and then he goes

waarso (where to) and then rolling down the window, and then he sees and then the moment he notices you are trans he pulls away.

You are lucky if he just pulls away without hurling a transphobic remark or a slur at you. It's a blessing if he doesn't slur at you. Most of the times they do. If the driver side is where you're standing, some even spit at you. So yeah, I know it and you will get in the car and then he's like a meter ahead and then he will notice this and then he'll tell you to get out of his car. You know like, Ek like nie badluck in my kar nie (I don't like bad luck in my car), get out" (Authors interview with Participant Six, September 2024, Online interview).

The experience outlined by Participant Six illustrates the additional strain faced by LGBTQ+ youth in their daily lives. Not only does Participant Six have to battle public transportation to get to work every day like the rest of heteronormative society, but are additionally expected to battle through instances of homophobia and transphobia as well. The term "double burden" is once again illuminated, showcasing the various roles LGBTQ+ youth are forced to play within power dynamics that continually place them in a position as the oppressed. Within this unequal dynamic LGBTQ+ youth are still expected to be the educators, and the activists and continue to be made punching bags for the ignorance of heteronormative society.

However, sexual minority stress as described above is not always as blatant or violent as the first extract may seem. Often times, sexual minority stress can result from our social spheres and societal pressures to conform to heteronormativity. Sexual minority stress can also be described as the stress and anxiety that comes from the awareness of one's non-conformity and the awareness that majority of society may not accept who you are. As participant six outlines below, sexual minority stress can range from violent physical acts to being unsure if there will be restroom facilities that are safe for one to use.

"I mean just going out in public, I have to plan right? I literally have to plan and say I'm not getting off at this taxi rank because I know I will get harassed here. This taxi rank is safer so I will get off here. I will use this route because I can avoid, you know and I know I will shop in this shopping centre because I can use the public toilet here, right. If I am going out, that's how I select my clubs. Where do I know that if I quickly have a problem? The establishment will respond in a positive way. Number one is toilets. Can I use the

female toilet when I go to the establishment? You know, those are the things” (Authors interview with Participant Six, September 2024, Online interview).

Participant Six continues to share experiences that range into multiple social spheres. In the next example, Participant Six outlines how her education has been compromised throughout primary, secondary and tertiary education. When we discuss hidden costs of resilience, it should spring to mind that for participant six and many like her, the cost of being oneself comes at the expense not only of one’s safety but one’s entire livelihood.

Participant Six outlines the following experience with the education sector:

“Well, I mean education in itself was traumatizing, right. I would, I would have loved to have a girl’s uniform. David (Dawid Bezuidenhout Highschool) girls uniform was so cute. I had to wear the guy stuff, so no, education was never for me, you know. And even in tertiary spaces. I remember I dropped out during my first year (at university) just because of the pressure of getting to the gate and always having to fight the security guard because of the way I look versus my student card, you know” (Authors interview with Participant Six, September 2024, Online interview).

Participant Six above outlines lived experiences, where homophobia and transphobia have stood as obstacles and caused various struggles, setbacks, physical, mental and emotional harm in her personal life. To take this point a step further, it is important to link this to Chapter 5.3.2, where Strategic Informant One outlined how class and one’s positioning within society impacts the kinds of obstacles one may face as well as the intensity of these obstacles. Where Strategic Informant One detailed that their privilege made it easier for them to overcome obstacles like traveling, education and finances. Participant Six’s extracts above outline how intersections such as class and gender or class and sexuality can alter the way one engages with resilience and one’s full potential. Participant Six having to use public transport vs a private car, attending government schools with less consideration and increased control of self-expression are both examples of obstacles that are/can be exacerbated by class intersections, particularly within lower economic environments.

#### 5.3.4 Influence of culture and context

As outlined in Chapter Two, Namibia is a multicultural society made up of 11 ethnic groups (Fredericks, 2007: 2). Each of these ethnic groups may follow their own indigenous belief systems and traditions, however, Namibia has a large Christian influence with almost 90% of the population identifying as Christian (Horne, 2008). As a result, the dominant perceptions held by the ethnic groups regarding homosexuality may differ. An example of this was outlined by Strategic Informant two as well as Participant Six where the Nama and Damara groups are known to be more tolerant and accepting of homosexuality and the LGBTQ+ community at large.

Participant Six, who identifies as part of the Damara community, expressed the following:

"Well I mean, even if you see in the country and it's repeatedly also thrown around by politicians that the Damara>Nama community is more tolerant and more accepting towards LGBT persons, and particularly trans people" (Authors interview with Participant Six, September 2024, Online Interview).

The participant elaborated further from a professional and activist perspective as well;

"Yeah, yeah, no. So, I, Yes, so we as Damara, people are more tolerant, more accepting, I think. And I can almost attest to it, even from the basis of my work. It's always been easier infiltrating work in the areas where Damara and Nama speaking people are in terms of sensitizing, advocating. Even when it comes to friends and family engagements, it's easier to engage with that particular ethnic group than any other" (Authors interview with Participant Six, September 2024, Online interview).

Participants One, Three, Five, Seven and Eight all identified as Oshiwambo. According to these participants, homosexuality is not tolerated nor accepted within Oshiwambo culture. Cisgender men such as Participant One detailed fear regarding familial rejection, homelessness and fear of the job market if he were to come out. Participant Three, who identifies as trans-fem, however, identifies as half Oshiwambo and half Damara. This participant detailed how them coming out may have been met with animosity at first but has blossomed into familial acceptance and support. Similarly, Participants Two and Four identified as coloured and baster men respectively and outlined how their sexual orientation and coming out has changed the relationship they able to have with their family. Participant Two however, emphasises that his immediate family is exempt

from this and the obstacles he faces within his familial support networks are concentrated within his extended family.

Participants Five, Seven and Eight identified as Oshiwambo women and according to them, have not experienced fears relating to familial rejection nor any negative reaction from their social spheres. While Participant Eight is not straight passing, her experience mirrors that of Participants Five and Seven. The variations in experiences based on cisgender vs non-cisgender as well as straight passing vs non-straight passing individuals is discussed further in Chapter 5.5 (below).

Strategic Informant One outlines a slightly different perspective regarding the influence of culture and context, one where stepping away from culture can feel freeing to LGBTQ+ youth. According to Strategic Informant One these feelings of liberation can exist parallel to the loss of cultural values that coincide with stepping away.

“So culture, I would say, is a lot of queer communities have decided to abandon their culture, which has made them resilient in the sense that they don't feel like they are held back by something or that they are sort of downtrodden by something which is like their culture, because if they stick to their culture, they need to hide. Yeah, but if they decide to abandon their culture, it sort of gives them that sense of ownership and freedom and determination. But what I can say is also with culture it's a very tricky thing because culture is also one of the factors in which one can find resilience because we can use culture as a tool to also influence the perceptions that people have about queer people within a certain cultural space or traditional practice. And this you can find generally around what does culture look like in same sex weddings and marriages and what has that negotiation been like? If you're looking at countries like South Africa that have had queer relationships get where they get, where you can get married, then and even now, and I think that is why there's a big push back on this same sex relationship that that are recognized or maybe a solemnized outside of the countries because culture is at the centre of it and some of them feel that there is no sense of culture if you do that outside of the country, because once again Namibia has values” (Authors interview with Strategic Informant One, August 2024, Online interview).

By bringing this altogether, we are able to illustrate how the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in Namibia showcase the intricate relationships between resilience, culture and identity, guided by

Namibia's multicultural nature and the range of perceptions that exists across the 11 ethnic groups. This section demonstrated how youth resilience is often influenced by cultural backgrounds and the dominant perceptions held by their communities. This can be seen in the extracts from participants that identify as Nama and Damara, describing their experiences as more positive and tolerant. This point was strengthened by Participant Six's perspective as a trans activist, outlining how engaging and advocating for LGBTQ+ issues on a personal and professional level was much easier as compared to other ethnic groups. This directly contrasts the experiences of participants who identified as part of the Oshiwambo community, where homosexual and non-cisgender identities are largely not accepted. Cis-gender men identifying as part of the Oshiwambo community expressed fears of familial rejection and societal exclusion, however even in these conservative spaces, exceptions such as Participant Three's experience of acceptance exist.

This section also explored the differences in experiences of cisgender versus non-cisgender individuals as well as straight-passing versus non-straight passing individuals. Cisgender and straight-passing individuals reported fewer challenges related to social acceptance whereas non-cisgender and non-straight passing participants reported higher levels of fear, rejection and violence. This highlights the complexity and layering of identity as it intersects with societal perceptions and cultural expectations.

Culture plays a multifaceted role within resilience. As noted by Strategic Informant One, some LGBTQ+ individuals feel compelled to distance themselves from culture in order to find a sense of liberation and personal freedom where as others may use culture as a tool for reclaiming and shaping their identities. This paradox highlights the constraining and empowering qualities of culture within resilience. For some, stepping away from culture provides autonomy and ownership when it comes to their gender/sexual identities and for others, culture is seen as a source of resilience.

In conclusion, the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in Namibia is shaped by their interactions with their cultural, familial, and social environments. While some find acceptance and support within their communities, others face exclusion, requiring them to forge resilience through distancing from traditional norms. Culture remains both a challenge and a source of strength for LGBTQ+ individuals, influencing not only how they are perceived but also how they understand and express their own identities.

## 5.4 Resources

### 5.4.1 Skills building

Participants One, Three, Seven as well as Strategic Informants One and Two outlined the need for resources that allow those within the LGBTQ+ community to build skills that can help them in various settings and environments. Participant Seven also spoke from an activist perspective, after having given most of her young adult life to advocating for trans rights, she wonders what lies on the horizon after 35 and losing her title as a youth activist.

“I think; I'm also not getting any younger. So actual skills building, you know? This movement keeps giving you trainings that just give you merit certificates. I need a qualification guys. When this movement is done with me, where am I going to go. What am I doing when all I know is activism? Human rights and then what? You know what I mean? And I can't keep doing this, I am turning 35 this year, I think is that in a few months, right? And after next year will no longer be regarded as youth once I've turned 36. So the way I access opportunities in themselves is going to become scarce” (Authors interview with Participant Six, September 2024, Online Interview).

The extract above highlights a common issue faced by activist and more particularly, those within the LGBTQ+ community. While their work is recognised as an important cornerstone that provides experience and exposure, it does not always translate to concrete and in-demand qualifications that are recognised outside of activism and advocacy circles. Participant Six expresses concern about aging out of the "youth" category, where many opportunities are concentrated, and how the limitations of activist training, which often result in merit certificates but not formal qualifications that can support career advancement.

This suggests that LGBTQ+ activism and the community as a whole might benefit from incorporating more robust skills-building programs that provide participants with formal qualifications or skills that are transferable to other career paths. As individuals in this community age or shift focus as mentioned also by Strategic Informant One in section 5.3.2, their ability to access resources, opportunities, and employment may become more restricted.

The need for comprehensive skills-building resources extends beyond the activist community and resonates with many individuals within the LGBTQ+ community who face similar challenges in

accessing sustainable career opportunities. While activism provides valuable experience, the lack of formal qualifications or transferable skills can limit opportunities for professional growth in broader industries. This challenge is particularly pressing as individuals age or transition into new stages of their lives, where youth-targeted opportunities are no longer available. To ensure long-term empowerment and economic security, it's crucial to create accessible pathways for skills development that provide both formal qualifications and practical experience.

#### **5.4.2 Access to social services**

When discussing resources, the participants all echoed similar sentiments regarding access. Participants claimed that the first point of order should be ensuring equal access and provision of social services to queer youth. Services such as healthcare, judicial services and social grants were all areas highlighted by participants as needing better levels of access for queer youth.

Participant One outlines how there are no laws in place that protect queer people and queer youth who are harassed, endangered or assaulted due to their sexual or gender identity. This can also be seen in the omission of the LGBTQ+ community and same-sex relationships within the Combating of Domestic Violence Act 4 of 2003.

Participant One who identifies as a cis-gender, gay man stated the following:

“I do feel like they should be laws put in place that protect queer people who are arrested physically, sexually in whatever form of harassment or endangerment that they're put in” (Authors interview with Participant One, August 2024, Windhoek, Namibia).

Participant One goes on to further state:

“Proper Healthcare Systems put in place that cater to the needs of queer people, especially trans people. We have the more like the protection also goes into like obviously legal and like workspaces. And I mean it's a big stretch to ask for like social support but the same way people get unemployment, or people get a social grant. I feel like they should be systems in place for queer people who may be disowned or like a shelter or like grants and, what's the other word like? Yeah, systems to help them get on their feet” (Authors interview with Participant One, August 2024, Windhoek, Namibia).

Participant One specifically points out the absence of legal protections for queer individuals who face harassment, assault, or endangerment based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. This gap is evident in the omission of LGBTQ+ individuals from laws such as the Combating of Domestic Violence Act 4 of 2003, which fails to recognize the unique vulnerabilities of queer people in domestic violence cases. Additionally, the need for healthcare systems tailored to the needs of trans people was underscored, as well as the importance of legal protections in workplaces. This is looked at in the next extract by Participant Three:

“Access better health care access, better social grants, because a lot of us, as quiet as it's kept a lot of us, are denied access to, like student funding from NSFAS because we are queer or because somebody in the system knows that we fear a lot of us, unable to go to the hospital unless we're private. Private medical aid people. We can't just go to Katutura hospital, in the central hospital, where the clinic is here in town and be like, I cannot get an HIV test because already anybody getting an HIV test already is like stigmatized. But then when you're a queer person, getting an HIV test or STD test in general, all of a sudden you're a stigmatized person. Nobody wants to help you, or you get the slowest person to help you” (Authors interview with Participant Three, August 2024, Windhoek, Namibia).

The section on access highlights the significant barriers queer youth face in obtaining equitable social services, particularly in areas such as healthcare, legal protection, and social support. Participants emphasized that the lack of inclusive laws and services places LGBTQ+ individuals, especially queer youth, at a greater risk of marginalization and harm.

Furthermore, the lack of social support mechanisms such as shelters or social grants was highlighted as a critical issue. Many queer youth who face disownment or homelessness due to their gender identity or sexual orientation are left without safety nets to help them rebuild their lives. Participant One suggested that, similar to unemployment grants, there should be systems in place to offer financial and social support to LGBTQ+ individuals who are vulnerable or in need of assistance.

Overall, ensuring equal access to social services for queer youth requires a comprehensive approach that includes legal protections, healthcare access, and social support systems specifically designed to address the needs of the LGBTQ+ community.

## **5.5 Cisgenderism**

The term cisgender has largely been defined as “non-transgender” or identifying with the gender as assigned at birth. Similarly, the term cissexual has been defined as “non-transsexual”. Throughout this study and the interview process, a common theme throughout has been the varying and unequal scales of homophobia/transphobia or negative attitudes that are faced by cisgender participants as compared to non-cisgender participants.

Non-cisgender participants reported instances of violence, refusal of services, exclusion from social services and near constant hate-speech. Cisgender participants, on the other hand, experienced significantly less of these negative impacts. Further, straight-passing cisgender participants experienced little to no negative occurrences/impacts as a result of their sexual/gender identity (Cava, 2016: 1).

### **5.5.1 Performativity**

Gender performativity as coined by Judith Butler (2009: i-ii), rejects the conceptualisation of gender as a solidified or homogenous experience. Gender performativity conceptualises gender as the repeated performance of shared symbols and meanings where gender identity is created through the repeating of the actions and conventions that are thought to produce them.

Participants One, Two, Three and Four all identify as gay or trans-fem men. These participants outlined how they often must change their behaviours to appear more masculine and straight passing within certain spheres. The spheres and spaces included; public spaces, amongst unaccepting family members, at work, at church and particularly when using public modes of transportation.

Participant One shared the following:

“Yes, I definitely it does affect my ability to navigate social spaces. There are only certain spaces where I really feel comfortable being, you know, as queer as I can be, less because people's judgment, but more for concern of my own safety, physical safety” (Authors interview with Participant One, August 2024, Windhoek, Namibia).

Participant One explains how their need to adjust their behaviour stems less from concern about others' judgment and more from fears about their physical safety. This perspective sheds light on how LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly gay and trans-fem men, often feel compelled to alter their behaviour in order to conform to traditional standards of masculinity. Similarly, Participant Two, who identifies as a cis-gender, gay man shared the following experience:

“I think just navigating family and friends. But also me not being outwardly presenting makes this kind of easier, but for example. I'm constantly, consistently aware when I'm around my grandma, for example, not to present a certain way, not to sit a certain way, not to act a certain way. Trying to act more masculine than I actually am. I don't think I have experienced it around friends. I do, however, watch what I say around some friends and family. But yeah, it's more of a thing of watching how I act and what I say around certain people. The less accepting ones that is” (Authors interview with Participant Two, August 2024, Windhoek, Namibia).

This is a clear example of gender performativity at play, where the participants have been forced to change the ways in which they perform gender or rather perform according to the norms and standards of what is expected of heterosexual men to avoid instances of homophobia and transphobia. Participants One, Two, Three, and Four—who identify as gay or trans-fem men—describe the pressure to appear more masculine and straight-passing in various environments, including public spaces, among unsupportive family members, at work, in religious spaces, and while using public transportation. This forced performativity is a form of self-preservation in the face of potential harm or discrimination based on their gender/sexual identity.

These examples illustrate how gender performativity is not a voluntary act but often a survival mechanism. This constant negotiation of gender identity can have a profound impact on their sense of authenticity and well-being, as they are forced to suppress their true selves to conform to societal expectations.

Overall, the participants' experiences of performativity reflect how gender, rather than being innate, is constructed and performed under social pressures. This also highlights the need for greater understanding and acceptance of diverse gender expressions to reduce the burden of performativity on LGBTQ+ individuals and create spaces where they can authentically express themselves without fear of harm or discrimination.

## 5.6 Failures and successes of the legal system

In May 2023, the Namibian Supreme court passed a progressive ruling, recognising same-sex marriages performed abroad (Onwe, 2024). The Supreme court recognised “spouses” according to section 2(1) of Namibia's Immigration Act. This ruling does not mean that same-sex marriages may be conducted but rather follows through on the common law principal, that marriages legally performed abroad, must be recognised in Namibia. This ruling as well as the common law principal that was followed, aligns with the Namibian constitution that rejects discrimination on the bases of sex and gender. This was a large step forward for Namibia's LGBTQ+ community and a beacon of hope for Namibian LGBTQ+ youth (Southern African Litigation Centre, 2023) (Allsop, 2024).

On the 11th of July 2023, the Namibian government appealed this ruling, with the National Assembly passing a private members bill, redefining the term spouse and with the intention to amend the marriage act. The National Assembly bill was introduced in reference to Article 81 and 45 of the Namibian Constitution, proposing that marriage be defined as “a legal union entered into between persons of the opposite sex”. On the 12th of July 2023, the National Assembly rushed in a second bill; the Civil Registration and Identification Bill. This bill aimed to emphasize that marriage would refer to the legal union between a genetically born man and a genetically born woman (Southern African Litigation Centre, 2023).

Parliaments and its rejection of the Supreme Court's ruling has completely disregarded the Namibian constitution, the judiciary and the rule of law, despite Article 79 assigning the interpretation of the Constitution to the Supreme court. This effectively puts the states democracy at risk. Strategic Informant Two corroborates this, by outlining how the governments decisions have led to democratic backsliding in Namibia (Southern African Litigation Centre, 2023).

Below, Participant Six outlines the misunderstandings they have found to exist in this space;

Participant Six:

“So in theory, yes, right, and again, as somebody that continuously does engagements with parliamentarians and you know ministers, they will continuously tell you our laws are gender neutral, right? But when they say that, my response is the understanding of gender and sex are misconstrued in this country as one. So when you say gender, you actually mean sex. And so your laws even, when you say men and women, are speaking towards

physiology and so would not necessarily be able to, even when you do interpretation of law, speak directly to me as a transgender woman in terms of protecting me in the way I need to be” (Authors interview with Participant Six, September 2024, Windhoek, Namibia).

In conclusion, the Namibian legal system's handling of LGBTQ+ rights have been marked by both progress and regression, highlighting the complexities of legal reforms in a socially conservative space. The 2023 Supreme Court ruling recognizing same-sex marriages performed abroad represented a significant step forward for the LGBTQ+ community, aligning with constitutional principles that reject discrimination based on sex and gender. However, the Namibian government's efforts to overturn this ruling through the introduction of restrictive bills redefining marriage and gender demonstrate a concerning pushback against these wins.

The government's actions not only undermine the authority of the judiciary but also threaten Namibia's democracy by disregarding the constitution and the rule of law. As noted by Strategic Informant Two, these developments represent a form of democratic backsliding, where the government's refusal to respect judicial decisions weakens the country's democratic integrity. Moreover, the legal system's failure to protect transgender individuals, as pointed out by Participant Six, further highlights the disconnect between the country's laws and the lived realities of LGBTQ+ communities.

Overall, while the Supreme Court ruling provided hope for the LGBTQ+ community, the subsequent backlash reflects the deep-seated challenges that remain in achieving full legal equality and protection for sexual and gender minorities in Namibia. Addressing these issues requires not only legal reforms but also a broader cultural and societal shift toward inclusivity and respect for the rights of all individuals, regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

## **5.7 Achieving well-being**

Morris (2013: 1) describes social-ecological theory as the interactions between interrelating structures and the environment. Within this definition, Morris emphasizes that the environment is “responsible” for providing the individual at the center of this systems with the support and resources necessary for resilience. These resources are provided by the environment through relationships and interactions with individuals within the relative spheres, with the intention that

the individual reaches well-being. Below, participants Two and Three outline how “negative motivations” sit at the core of what pushes them towards well-being;

Participant Three:

“A lot of it has, I want to say it's a thing that I call like negative motivation in a way, because I have a lot, all because of all the anxiety that I've acquired over the years because I'm queer and everything. I've sort of forced myself and other people around me have also sort of like instilled in me because I'm queer. I can't fail. There's no room for me to make mistakes” (Authors interview with Participant Three, August 2024, Windhoek, Namibia).

Participant Two:

“Hmm. The role that it played. I think I've always had a feeling of this is all already a mistake. So I can't be making any other mistakes. So I have always had to be better than any of the other family children like I felt the need to be better because I'm like they cannot say, they can say anything, but they can't say I'm nothing, I'm not” (Authors interview with Participant Two, August 2024, Windhoek, Namibia).

Strategic Informant One gives insight into some of the dominant coping mechanisms that persist within the LGBTQ+ community across the globe. Herein, the informant outlines the importance of remembering that for many, identifying as queer and living life as queer can be traumatic and often results in undesired coping mechanisms. This extract alongside the extracts above illustrates how reaching well-being and the concept of resilience itself is often less glamorous as what it may seem in mainstream media. This coincides with the work of Estêvão et al. (2017: 1) who discuss how painting resilience as a positive attribute may not always be appropriate.

Strategic Informant One outlined the following:

“In my opinion, to be very frank, I would say the most common coping mechanisms which are unhealthy is alcoholism and these are found mainly to be again around our social events and we don't necessarily seek for outlets. And sort of mechanisms that would ensure that. We are mentally formidable because yes, we may be intellectualized more. We may be radicalized more, but our sense of self and our sense of esteem is still very much a space in which you are able to see that we are not necessarily coping in a healthy way. And I

think it's yes it I can I can classify and I can subcategorize and stratify, but it's across the different class groups. I've worked within spaces where it's more sort of an elite group privileged group, but alcoholism is still at the centre of how we cope and how we connect and relate. Despite the fact that movements that have been founded, queer movements still come out of trauma, and they still go through trauma, not just the trauma that of course, this existential one from the political side, but also within our own movements, at the time I was still at the forefront and it's something to be said about what it means to be courageous versus what it means to have confidence and what the coping mechanisms actually look like within the community. So I think there is this thread, there's general thread of abuse of substances. And then on top of that, it's the addiction to validation because we don't necessarily get validated within spaces and because we are so existentially self-conscious of who we are and where we are, and so forth. That affects the way that we cope. And so that's a general thread that you will find within the community. And I think it's not just something I've seen in Namibia, but in my travels working in Uganda for example, the thread is very much common and the conversations are very much alike, and that that has that there's much to be said about what, what, why there is this universal kind of approach or experience within the community around our self-worth and esteem and how we cope?" (Authors interview with Strategic Informant One, August 2024, Online Interview).

The section on achieving well-being highlights the complexities faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in their pursuit of resilience and emotional well-being. Drawing on Morris' (2013) social-ecological theory, the idea that one's environment should provide the necessary resources and support to foster resilience is central. However, participants and strategic informants in this study reveal that the reality of navigating well-being within the LGBTQ+ community is far more challenging than often depicted. Instead of positive motivations driving them toward well-being, many participants describe "negative motivation" rooted in anxiety, trauma, and the need to avoid mistakes due to their queer identity.

Participant Two and Participant Three describe how their well-being is shaped by the constant pressure to be perfect in response to the stigma and discrimination they face. This sense of needing to prove themselves, whether to avoid further judgment or to counter societal expectations—has pushed them toward resilience, but in a way that feels burdensome rather than empowering. Their

experiences illustrate how, for many in the queer community, the pursuit of well-being is intertwined with a deep-seated fear of failure or rejection.

Strategic Informant One also sheds light on unhealthy coping mechanisms that prevail in the LGBTQ+ community, such as alcoholism and addiction to validation, which are often a response to the trauma associated with living as a queer individual. This coping pattern, rooted in both external discrimination and internalized struggles, underscores the paradox of resilience. While resilience is often celebrated as a positive attribute, for many LGBTQ+ individuals, it is a survival mechanism that can mask deeper struggles with self-worth, mental health, and esteem.

These insights challenge the mainstream portrayal of resilience as something inherently positive or glamorous. Instead, they highlight how resilience can emerge from a place of trauma and how coping mechanisms, whether healthy or not, are shaped by both the external environment and the internalized pressures faced by LGBTQ+ individuals. The work of Estêvão et al. (2017) supports this nuanced understanding, suggesting that resilience is not always a sign of well-being but can sometimes be a reflection of the complex and often painful process of survival in an unsupportive environment.

Ultimately, achieving well-being for LGBTQ+ individuals requires acknowledging the unique challenges they face and offering more than celebrations of resilience. It calls for creating environments that provide meaningful support, resources, and spaces for healing, rather than forcing individuals to rely on negative motivations and unhealthy coping strategies in their journey toward well-being.

## **5.8. Data limitations**

Due to the nature of this research and the current political climate in Namibia, particularly regarding 2024 as an election year, it proved quite difficult to speak political leaders and those in positions of political or social power. This is due to the fact that many have chosen to not take a stand on such a volatile issue, less than six months away from national elections.

This resulted in the study being unable to accurately outline the situation on the ground from governmental and religious perspectives as well as the political dimension consisting purely of an

activist perspective. This may paint a more one-dimensional picture of the range of opinions that actually exist within Namibian society.

## **5.9. Conclusion**

A consideration of resilience among the LGBTQ+ youth in Namibia, has shed light onto the complex interplay of social ecologies, hidden costs, and cultural contexts. Participants' experiences depicted the multidimensional and dynamic nature of resilience, shaped not only by personal strength but also by external factors such as support systems, societal acceptance, and community networks. While some participants thrive due to affirming environments, others face additional challenges on their path towards resilience.

The May 2023 Namibian Supreme Court ruling recognizing same-sex marriages performed abroad represents both a legal victory and a reflection of the changing attitudes toward LGBTQ+ rights in Namibia. Although this ruling is a beacon of hope for the community, it also highlights the limits of Namibia's legal system. The court ruling, while a step forward, underscores the incomplete nature of LGBTQ+ rights in the country, as same-sex marriages cannot yet be conducted domestically nor are there any laws in place to recognise and protect the LGBTQ+ community. This ongoing struggle for recognition and full marriage equality illustrates both the successes and failures of the legal system, which continues to evolve yet falls short of providing comprehensive legal protections for LGBTQ+ individuals.

The concept of sexual minority stress is highlighted as a significant hidden cost of resilience for many participants. The pressure to conform, or to hide one's identity in unsupportive environments, highlights the emotional and psychological cost that often accompanies resilience. These experiences of stress reveal how resilience is not simply a positive outcome but can involve personal sacrifices, anxiety, and isolation.

The concept of sexual minority stress remains important in understanding the hidden costs of resilience, as legal recognition alone does not eliminate discrimination, or the emotional cost paid by LGBTQ+ individuals. The legal system's partial recognition of same-sex relationships may offer validation for some, but the lack of broader protections perpetuates stress and insecurity for many within the community.

Furthermore, the role of culture and context in shaping resilience cannot be overlooked. Participants' resilience is deeply influenced by the socio-cultural landscape of Namibia, where traditional values and societal norms around gender and sexuality may either hinder or support their journey. The ability to remain resilient is often tied to access to supportive networks, while cultural resistance to LGBTQ+ identities can exacerbate these challenges.

Gender performativity, as conceptualized by Judith Butler (2009: i-ii), adds another layer of complexity to the discussion. The legal system's recognition of same-sex marriages performed abroad can be seen as a form of 'performative progress', where the law acknowledges non-heteronormative identities but still upholds traditional gender and marital norms within the country. This highlights the tension between progressive rulings and the continued reinforcement of cisnormative and heteronormative structures in Namibian society.

Furthermore, the persistence of cisgenderism within the legal and social frameworks continues to marginalize non-cisgender individuals. While the Supreme Court ruling benefits some members of the LGBTQ+ community, the broader legal system remains shaped by cisnormative assumptions, further reinforcing the challenges faced by transgender and non-binary individuals.

In summary, the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in Windhoek is multifaceted, involving both internal strengths and external influences such as legal recognition, social support, and cultural context. The Supreme Court ruling provides a hopeful step toward equality but also highlights the ongoing legal and societal barriers that remain. Understanding resilience in this context requires a recognition of the performative aspects of gender, the hidden costs of resilience, and the enduring presence of cisgenderism within both legal and social systems. These dynamics reflect the broader, ongoing struggle for true equality and inclusivity for all gender identities and sexual orientations in Namibia.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion and Limitations**

### **6.1 Limitations**

As with all studies, this study has its own set of limitations. The first limitation has to do with observation and interviewer bias (Bordens, 2002: 152). Bordens (2002: 152) uses the terms experimenter bias and demand characteristics where the interviewer's attitude and demeanour may affect the participant's responses as well as the participant changing their responses to fit into what they think the interviewer may be expecting. This can be mitigated by ensuring that the researcher not only has experience in conducting interviews as well as ensuring aspects such as standardisation. This means asking questions with the same tone and attitude, following a question guideline as well as preparing standardised responses to questions that may arise throughout the interview. Another limitation has to do with qualitative research and more particularly the unstructured nature of the semi-structured interviews the study employed. Responses to semi-structured questions may be harder to analyse and code (Bordens, 2002: 152). This however, was mitigated by using a thematic analysis approach.

### **6.2 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study addressed youth resilience amongst LGBTQ+ communities in Namibia, focusing on the complex and interconnected factors influencing their ability to navigate adversity within the unique post-colonial landscape as well as a changing socio-political and challenging legal and cultural contexts. The study focused particularly on the lived experience of LGBTQ+ communities, underscoring the multifaceted nature of resilience shaped by the unique intersections of individual agency, familial dynamics, structural barriers, and cultural influences.

This research underscores the dualities inherent in Namibia's post-colonial context, where progressive legal strides coexist with anti-queer sentiments rooted in colonial histories and sociocultural resistance. It highlights the need for affirming support systems that span multiple levels, from familial acceptance to community solidarity and equitable legal protections. Moreover, the study identifies gaps in advocacy and cultural engagement, calling for a reframing of resilience not only as a process of individual survival but as a collective and systemic effort.

The study employed a multisystemic and social-ecological framework, outlining resilience as a process with multiple moving parts, “a machine” that when functioning efficiently provide the individual with the skills, resources and support they need to reach their full potential. The research illustrated that, as with all frameworks and machines alike, malfunctioning of the system is inevitable. By exploring the lived experiences of the participants within this study, the study was able to outline how Namibian LGBTQ+ youth were able re-establish support networks where others faltered, overcome structural and social adversity using resources provided by peer and activist organizations, managing to bring their systems back towards equilibrium by employing various coping mechanisms such as performative as employed by Judith Butler (2009: i-ii), and often having to plan their lives around the possibility and inevitability of harassment, stigmatization and violence.

While this was the case for many young LGBTQ+ cisgender men and transgender women, cisgender women and transgender men did not share the same volatile experiences. The discrepancy illustrated by this study opens up the door to further research regarding the tightly policed expectations of masculinity, where femininity, while still influenced by societal standards seems to provide more room for deviation without the same social penalties.

By situating LGBTQ+ resilience within a broader socio-ecological framework, this research contributes valuable insights to the global discourse on youth resilience and LGBTQ+ advocacy. It challenges stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, and community leaders, to address the marginalization of sexual minorities through culturally responsive interventions and sustained legal reforms. Ultimately, this study underscores that fostering resilience among LGBTQ+ youth requires a holistic approach that promotes justice, inclusion, and equity, while also validating the lived experiences and inherent strengths of these young individuals in navigating their identities within a post-colonial and heteronormative society.

The findings emphasize the critical need for inclusive policies, culturally sensitive advocacy, and robust support systems to foster resilience and promote the well-being of LGBTQ+ youth. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of resilience as a dynamic process, offering valuable insights for stakeholders seeking to address the persistent challenges faced by sexual minorities in Namibia and similar sociocultural landscapes. Implications for further research look

firstly at the policy and legal gaps, focusing on the partial recognition of LGBTQ+ rights and the critical gaps in domestic laws when it comes to LGBTQ+ persons and same-sex relationships. These gaps are often exacerbated by the cisnormative and heteronormative frameworks that make up legal and social systems. Socio-cultural gaps exist along the lines the lines of resistance in regards to traditional values and societal attitudes that shape the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth. This includes hidden costs of resilience such as sexual minority stress. Experiences such as the hidden costs of resilience are influenced by multiple intersecting factors such as race, class, gender identity and cultural context which necessitates tailored approaches to support and resources.

Recommendations for the issues outlined include legal and policy reform such as domestic legal recognition as well as inclusive legal frameworks. Other recommendations include community-based support systems such as safe spaces, mental health services, capacity-building initiatives, awareness campaigns, and inclusive curriculums. Lastly, recommendations include advocacy for performative progress and substantive change. It is clear that the situation at hand requires a hands on approach, one that focuses on spheres such as distance education that touches on the issues LGBTQ+ persons face in society such as outlined by Participant Six, despite a suggestion such as distance education being likened to a band aid over a bullet wound.

This research has been done in the hopes that the recommendations and findings from this study may be used to bring Namibia back to what Namibians know it to be, one that is tolerant, one that is loving and for the good of all its people.

# Appendix One



Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee  
Main Admin Building, Trevelyan Road, Makhanda, 6109, South Africa  
PO Box 94, Makhanda, 6140, South Africa  
T: (27) (0) 33 602 3311  
E: ethics.committee@ru.ac.za  
<https://www.ru.ac.za/researchgateway/ethics/>  
NHREC Registration number: RC-24/114-046

01 October 2024

Mr ADe Jacobs

Email: adujacobe@gmail.com

Enkwenkweni: 2024-7994-8984

Dear Mr Jacobs,

Re: Navigating Exile: A Sociological Analysis of LGBTQ+ Youth in Post-Colonial Namibia's Conflicting Legal Framework.

Researcher: Mr ADe Jacobs

Supervisor(s): Professor Michael Dineen

This letter confirms that the above research proposal has been reviewed and APPROVED by the Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee (RU-HREC). Your Approval number is: 2024-7994-8984

Approval has been granted for 1 year. An annual progress report will be required in order to renew approval for an additional period. You will receive an email notifying you when the annual report is due.

Please notify the committee immediately should any substantial changes be made, for whatever reasons, during the research process. This includes changes in research questions, the study's context or objectives, etc.

Please also notify the committee of the completion of the research. The purpose of this is to indicate whether the research was conducted successfully, if any aspects could not be completed, or if any solutions arose that the ethical standards committee should be aware of.

If a thesis or dissertation arising from this research is submitted to the library's electronic thesis and dissertations (ETD) repository, please notify the committee of the date of submission and for any reference or cataloguing number allocated.

Sincerely,

Dr Janet Hayward

Chair, Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee (RU-HREC)

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