Risk, resilience and resistance: exploring the situated agency of LGBTQ+ youth.

A dissertation submitted towards completion of MA Childhood and Youth

Rowan Bratchell
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Abstract

LGBTQ+ young people face significant challenges in surviving and thriving when compared to their cisgender and heterosexual peers. The first part of this dissertation explores existing research, identifying the ways in which LGBTQ+ youth demonstrate agency within challenging contexts. The literature suggests a tendency to essentialise the lives of LGBTQ+ youth as defined wholly by risk or resilience, placing these young people within narratives of victimhood and vulnerability. To attempt to capture the complex and nuanced ways in which LGBTQ+ negotiate agency, the second part of this dissertation proposes to employ participatory narrative methods to analyse how members of an LGBTQ+ youth group produce counternarratives.
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Part A: Extended review of the literature

Chapter 1 - Introduction

This dissertation lays out an extended proposal for a small-scale narrative study with members of a LGBTQ+ youth group. Although this proposal is the culmination of many years of academic interest, it truly began to take shape around a year ago beginning with exploratory literature searching. Through this initial exploration of the literature it became clear that the research situates LGBTQ+ young people within narratives of risk, resilience and resistance. This informed the development of the title of this proposal:

Risk, resilience and resistance: exploring the situated agency of LGBTQ+ youth

This dissertation endeavours to look beyond essentialised narratives of LGBTQ+ young people to examine the ways in which they demonstrate agency. To achieve this, a critical review of the literature is presented (chapter 2), followed by the conceptual and theoretical framework for the study (chapter 3). The second part of this dissertation (chapters 4 and 5) details the proposed study which would aim to answer the following research question:

In what ways do LGBTQ+ youth demonstrate agency through their production of counternarratives?

The dissertation then closes with a critically reflective post-script, after which references and appendices can be found. This introductory chapter outlines how the research topic was developed, provides a brief background, and an overview of the context and conceptualisation of the proposal.

1.1 What's in a name?

To explore the full spectrum of LGBTQ+ youth’s experiences, it is first necessary to define the key terminology. LGBTQ+ individuals are unified in their otherness, their distinct existence beyond the assumed norms of heterosexual and cisgender. Heterosexuality is the attraction to one’s opposite gender, and cisgender refers to congruence between gender identity and gender assigned at birth. This should not be confused with biological sex, which
despite binary categorisation exists on a spectrum much like gender identity and sexuality. Appendix 1 provides a useful visualisation of the spectrums of gender and sexual identity.

Any identity outside of heterosexual and cisgender can be considered part of the LGBTQ+ community, although individual sense of affinity with the community will vary. Each letter in this initialism refers to a specific subset of identity: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. The addition of a plus sign is used to represent other sexual and gender identities such as pansexual, asexual, non-binary and genderfluid. When discussing gender identity, transgender is often shortened to trans, which is sometimes used as an umbrella term to include anyone whose gender identity does not entirely align with that assigned at birth. Although the ways this community is referred to does vary, the term LGBTQ+ has been chosen here to ensure inclusivity without sacrificing brevity. For further definitions, full glossaries of LGBTQ+ terms are available online (e.g. Stonewall, 2018; MindOut, 2022).

Whilst researching LGBTQ+ youth, some topics surface time and time again. Bullying, traumatic coming out stories, homophobic families, hate crime rates, mental health issues, homelessness, the list goes on. Whilst this reality should not be ignored, it defines the LGBTQ+ community by their shared tragedy and trauma. Indeed, this victimhood narrative mirrors the way children and young people are often conceptualised as inherently vulnerable, in need of protection, and as social objects rather than social actors. The lives of young people who are also LGBTQ+ are therefore doubly defined by vulnerability. Alongside this however, the literature contains acknowledgements of the resilience that LGBTQ+ youth demonstrate in the face of such adversities, their inspirational responses to a lifetime of othering. The victimhood discourse is sometimes replaced by an admittedly more positive, but nonetheless equally essentialised representation of LGBTQ+ youth. This extended proposal has strived from its inception to explore beyond essentialising LGBTQ+ youth’s lives as “wholly traumatic or ecstatic” (Gooding et al., 2022, p. 1)

1.2 Context and conceptualisation

This extended proposal sits at the cross-section of several rapidly growing fields of research and practice. Firstly, childhood and youth studies, the topic of master’s study which has resulted in this dissertation. The themes of agency and identity within childhood and youth studies are particularly relevant to this topic, although throughout reviewing the literature it became clear that the topics of children and young people’s rights, the digital world, and social capital also resurface frequently. Furthermore, some of the ways in which topics
related to gender and sexuality are framed in the media can be seen as examples of moral panic. Additionally, this extended proposal intersects the fields of sociology, psychology, and queer and gender studies. These disciplines are commonly found amongst the results when conducting literature searches for this topic, and this cross-section of disciplines also reflects the researcher’s own academic background.

Heteronormativity and cisnormativity are two key concepts emerging from queer and gender studies which are fundamental in understanding and contextualising the persistent othering that LGBTQ+ youth face. Heteronormativity refers to the assumption that heterosexuality is the default and preferred state of being (O’Brien, 2008; Harris and White, 2018). Similarly, cisnormativity assumes that the normal or ideal state is cisgender. This dissertation shall use the term cisheteronormativity to encompass the powerful combined forces which privilege heterosexual and cisgender. Within a cisheteronormative system LGBTQ+ identities are considered deviant from the norm. A discourse of cisheteronormativity is communicated to us and reinforced through social beliefs, politics and policies, and in the media.

This proposed study is also situated within resilience research. From the beginning of the 21st century, resilience emerged as a buzzword across the social sciences, as well as in the world of policy (DeVerteuil and Golubchikov, 2016). Despite this emerging into its own field of study, resilience remains a difficult to define term. White and O’Hare describe it as the perfect symbol of its time, “a conveniently nebulous concept incorporating shifting notions of risk and responsibility” (White and O’Hare, 2014, p. 947). As an academic subject, resilience somehow encompasses the myriad of ways in which individuals and groups may respond to adverse experiences, and what factors may support or undermine this. The literature explored in chapter 2 will demonstrate how resilience for LGBTQ+ youth is poorly defined, and how this manifests in the narratives which represent these young people. Additionally, further exploration of how this dissertation is embedded within theory can be found in the conceptual framework laid out in chapter 3.
Chapter 2 - Literature review

How do you solve a problem like resilience?

This literature review shall explore how LGBTQ+ youth demonstrate situated agency through acts of resilience and resistance found within the literature. A broader view of resilience, including how it can be defined and measured, must be established before considering how resilience frameworks can be applied to LGBTQ+ youth.

resilience [ ri-zil-yuhns, -zil-ee-uhns]  
*Noun.*  
the ability of a person to adjust to or recover readily from illness, adversity, major life changes, etc.; buoyancy.

(Anon, 2023).

The above dictionary definition connotes strength, robustness, steadfastness despite external changes. Doctor Michael Ungar, co-director of the Resilience Research Centre, opts for a definition of resilience that includes the psychological, social, cultural and physical resources that sustain wellbeing in addition to the individual and collective capacity to negotiate for these resources (Ungar, 2018).

In the reviewed literature, some authors defined resilience in their own terms, others quoted other authors’ definitions, and still others employed specific resilience frameworks. The difficulties of defining and measuring resilience is a significant tension within the literature, what Asakura described as a “paucity of robust conceptualisation of resilience and its related constructs” (Asakura, 2019, p. 271). The concept of situated agency has been employed by Gooding *et al.* (2022) to provide a more robust framework for resilience. Situated agency refers to the ways in which individuals live within, and beyond, the social limitations of their various contexts, cultural discourses, personal biographies, and spatial relations. The authors argued that situated agency highlights acts of resilience and resistance whilst also redirecting the focus to the context and systems in which LGBTQ+ youth exist.

This literature review does not endeavour to reconcile the tension between varied definitions of resilience. Indeed, it is perhaps impossible to define resilience in a meaningful and universal way. To do so would be to remove it from its social context, failing to ensure that
already marginalised communities can shape their own conceptualisations of resilience. With these considerations in mind, the literature review shall proceed to explore how LGBTQ+ youth enact agency, situated within their unique contexts, through actions of resilience and resistance. The following sections summarise the relevant resilience research (2.1), and present resistance (2.2) as an alternative, or an addition to, resilience frameworks. Further consideration shall then be given to three major sites of resilience and resistance in LGBTQ+ youth’s lives: kinship and community (2.3), identity and language (2.4), and schools (2.5).

2.1 Resilience

According to Asakura (2019), studies focused on LGBTQ+ youth have previously defined resilience for this population in terms of absence of psychopathologies, or the presence of socially desirable outcomes. These definitions, constructed by adult researchers and modelled on the successes of cisgender and heterosexual youth, may not speak to the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth. Members of marginalised communities will perceive and define resilience in accordance with their lived experiences (Williams et al., 2022). However, surprisingly few of the articles reviewed had definitions of resilience from LGBTQ+ youth themselves, which is a major limitation of the literature.

Centring the voices of LGBTQ+ youth in their study, Williams et al. (2022) were able to examine how these young people conceptualised resilience. The young participants discussed what they saw as the building blocks of resilience, which fell into four categories. Firstly, personal and emotional development such as self-sufficiency and self-awareness, honesty with self, comfort with being alone and emotional independence. Next were mental health skills including pragmatic emotional management, healthy and effective responses to adversity, and emotional regulation. The third category was collective resilience, for example giving back to the community (see 2.3). The final category of resilience as defined by these young people was rebellion, for instance refusing to conform to cisheteronormativity. The participants felt that rejecting these hegemonic norms empowered themselves and others (Williams et al., 2022). This rebellion, or resistance, will be discussed further in section 2.2.

Asakura (2017; 2019) also aimed to find out how LGBTQ+ young people understood positive adaptation, or resilience. This author also included adults who worked in support services with the young participants, offering their own perspective in addition to the young people’s. The adults often deeply acknowledged the strength of the young people they supported, and
they provided some context for the young people’s own responses. However, this study was not designed in participation with the young people who were considered research subjects rather than co-researchers. It is therefore impossible to conclude how the young people felt about including the adult practitioners in the study. Although this is one of the few reviewed studies to ask LGBTQ+ youth about their own definitions of resilience, it is nevertheless an example of the continuous de-centring of young people in research.

A recurring theme within the literature was resilience processes born of necessity, strategies which LGBTQ+ youth use when faced with various forms of adversity in their day-to-day lives. In anticipation of the discrimination and prejudice associated with their identities, LGBTQ+ youth employ a variety of self-governing strategies to maintain their safety. This requires them to assess their physical, social, psychological, and financial safety in each context to determine when, where and with whom they are safe to express their identities (Asakura, 2017). This ongoing safety assessment becomes particularly important in physically vulnerable spaces such as toilets and changing rooms, as well as religious spaces (Gooding et al., 2022). When safety is uncertain, LGBTQ+ youth may modify their behaviour, or self-govern in other ways such as secrecy and invisibility to hide their identity, often adjusting their actions to meet the comfort of others (Gooding et al., 2022). Access to safer spaces, even temporarily, can enhance LGBTQ+ youth’s ability to navigate more hostile social contexts (Asakura, 2017).

Without definitions from LGBTQ+ youth themselves, resilience will often be measured by how well they are assimilating and contributing towards cisheteronormative society (Robinson and Schmitz, 2021). In addition to reinscribing cisheteronormative ideals, resilience as a concept also works to uphold other forces of neo-liberal, capitalist society. Success in a cisheteronormative society often equates to specific forms of reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulation (Halberstam, 2011). In other words, all young people are assumed to achieve success through a narrow pathway of education and employment, material wealth including home ownership, and marriage and children. These ideals of success are inherently gendered and sexualised, and set LGBTQ+ youth up to fail (Linville, 2022). To reconceptualise resilience for LGBTQ+ youth, it is therefore necessary to redefine success as it is grounded in the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth.

2.2 Resistance
Although LGBTQ+ youth are contending with disproportionately high rates of discrimination and social exclusion, they are also committed to civic engagement, activism, community organisation, and solidarity (Torre and Avory, 2021). The literature includes examples of LGBTQ+ youth countering dominant narratives, seeking liberation, fighting for themselves and others, and acting individually and collectively to dismantle the very powers which seek to control them. Rather than an alternative, resistance offers an addition to the conceptual and practical limitations of resilience.

Throughout the literature, resistance generally fell into one of three types, which were identified through coding the findings from the literature. Firstly, there were acts of overt resistance, carried out with the intention to resist. LGBTQ+ youth engage in a range of activities which seek positive changes for themselves and others (Asakura, 2017). These include collective action, and social and political activism carried out both online and in person (Meichenbaum, 2018; Torre and Avory, 2021). Young people may be drawn to activism due to a desire for social justice, as a form of sanctuary, or to build relationships with peers and adults (Akiva et al., 2017; Robinson and Schmitz, 2021). Social activism and collective action are responses to, and can mediate the effects of, the stress that marginalised communities experience (Frost et al., 2019). Frost et al. suggest that activism is especially salient as a response to minority stress for those young people most affected by multiple, intersecting forms of oppression.

The second type of resistance identified within the literature is counternarratives, ways of reframing and reshaping how LGBTQ+ individuals are seen and talked about, countering the dominant narratives concerning the LGBTQ+ community. In order to support their developing sense of self, LGBTQ+ youth employ strategies which contradict and de-legitimise the dominant narratives (Wagaman, 2016). LGBTQ+ coming of age experiences tend to be depicted as fraught and painful (Gooding et al., 2022). In reality however, “pain and struggle often live side by side to fierce resistance, all within the same body” (Torre and Avory, 2021, p. 228). Counternarrative resistance may take the form of reframing, whereby LGBTQ+ youth access and apply relevant knowledge to conceptualise their individual struggles as a result of a systemic problem (Asakura, 2017). This also shifts the responsibility onto society, rather than seeing LGBTQ+ youth’s struggles as personal failings. Having control and power over their own narratives can have positive effects on LGBTQ+ youth’s wellbeing (Wagaman, 2016).

Finally, there are acts of intrinsic resistance, or alternatively *existence is resistance*. This encompasses acts of resistance that may not be articulated or intended as such, but
nevertheless subvert norms and expectations simply through living authentically. Many of the examples explored in sections 2.3 and 2.4 fall into this category.

2.3 Kinship and community

Family and home can be sources of tension for LGBTQ+ youth who may have to navigate keeping their identity secret, or dealing with family members who are not accepting. Whilst this requires resilience of LGBTQ+ youth, family and home life can also be significant sites of resistance. The nuclear family is a cis-heteronormative institution, and as such expressions of LGBTQ+ identity, or acceptance of LGBTQ+ youth, become acts of resistance (Robinson and Schmitz, 2021). By simply being their authentic selves, LGBTQ+ youth are queering the nuclear family, a key example of existence is resistance.

Another way in which LGBTQ+ youth queer the institution of family is through their sense of chosen family. Chosen family, or sometimes referred to as found family, is created as a substitution for, or in addition to, one’s natal family. These non-biological kinship bonds are something anyone can experience in the form of extended family, or close friends who become like family. For LGBTQ+ individuals however, building their own sense of family with their LGBTQ+ peers offers a valuable lifeline in the face of tumultuous relationships with their biological families. LGBTQ+ youth often seek out and cultivate meaningful relationships with other members of the community, both their peers and adults (Asakura, 2017). These relationships bring validation, recognition, and the sense of a shared burden and solidarity through knowing others are experiencing similar things (Asakura, 2017). Opportunities for peer support are especially valuable, for example Verrochi (2020) found that a peer support workshop designed to promote agency allowed the young participants to reflect on coping strategies as a group.

The bonds of chosen family have subversive and transformative power, not least in their impact within sociological and anthropological kinship studies which have traditionally focused on biological kinship. The study of queer kinship has been predominantly centred on LGBTQ+ adults, however some studies have looked at university aged young adults. Pitcher and Simmons found that LGBTQ+ university students find ways to survive and thrive through their creation of connection, community, and kinship networks (Pitcher and Simmons, 2020). Similarly, Nicolazzo et al. concluded that trans students’ success was supported by queer kinship connections (Nicolazzo et al., 2018). From these findings it could be suggested that
queer kinship bonds are fundamental in both resilience and resistance processes for LGBTQ+ youth.

Queer kinship, whether informal or formalised through something like a youth group, is inherently spatial in addition to relational. LGBTQ+ youth meeting one another hinges on a space in which they can safely express their identities, recognise each other, and connect openly. When such spaces are not available, or are insufficient or inaccessible, LGBTQ+ youth are queering non-queer spaces (Gooding et al., 2022). This is a form of queer worldmaking (Otis and Dunn, 2021; Zaino, 2021), whereby the marginalisation they experience, and the lack of safe spaces, requires LGBTQ+ youth to create spaces in and amongst the cisheteronormative world. Through this worldmaking, LGBTQ+ youth are exerting agency over their social world, in direct opposition to the dominant narrative which paints these young people as subjects, or victims of, an unjust world.

Physical spaces such as LGBTQ+ youth groups and school clubs offer formalised opportunities for queer worldmaking, although LGBTQ+ youth may carve out safe spaces for kinship and community in a variety of settings. The internet and social media also present many opportunities for queer worldmaking, and the creation of LGBTQ+ subcultures on the internet has given rise to a field of study called cyberqueer (Wakeford, 2002; Robards et al., 2018). Cyberqueer spaces offer both increased visibility and anonymity, and can act as a catalyst for resilience by buffering discriminatory experiences (Craig et al., 2015; Gooding et al., 2022). Social media and other online platforms also provide LGBTQ+ youth with access to a variety of resources, information, and peer support (Fox and Ralston, 2016; McInroy, Craig and Leung, 2019; McInroy et al., 2019; Craig et al., 2021). The worldmaking capabilities, in addition to other resources, make online spaces a significant site in the resilience and resistance processes for LGBTQ+ youth.

The ways in which LGBTQ+ youth build relationships and a sense of community also reflect the fact that these young people often favour a collectivist understanding of healing (Asakura, 2017). LGBTQ+ young people often operate from an ideology of mutual aid and care for one another (Linville, 2022), rather than seeing resilience as a solely individual process. Additionally, Williams et al. argue that LGBTQ+ youth use the pain they experience to contribute positively to their community (Williams et al., 2022). The pain of oppression that an individual experiences may manifest in positive contributions to the community, meaning that the resilience of the individual and the collective become mutually assured. The experiences of LGBTQ+ young people also therefore counter the dominant discourse of individualistic culture.
2.4 Identity and language

LGBTQ+ youth are blazing new pathways for expressing gender and sexuality, and resistance is often enacted within how they use language to define, redefine, or resist definition. Language and identity are inextricably linked, and this relationship can be best understood through the linguistic and sociological concept of discourse. Foucault defines discourse as the amalgamation of ideas, attitudes, actions, beliefs and practices that form our systems of thought (Foucault, 1976). Through discourse, power is produced and reinforced, although language can also be a tool for exposing and undermining power (Foucault, 1976, 1978). Language does not simply describe; it creates the subject. Identity is therefore a product of this process, a manifestation of the ongoing discourse between and amongst individuals and groups (Foucault, 1978; Butler, 1993). Identity, language, and power are tightly interwoven, and this can be seen in how LGBTQ+ youth exert agency through their use of language.

Self-determination or self-identification, the freedom to define themselves on their own terms, is a fundamental element of LGBTQ+ youth's language preferences (Wagaman, 2016; Torre and Avory, 2021). Having the freedom to find or invent identity labels can give LGBTQ+ youth the power to construct and define their sense of self rather than having to fit into pre-existing labels. Through shifting power dynamics, self-identification can privilege unheard voices and unsilence those who fall into the gaps between narrow identity categorisations (Wagaman, 2016; Asakura, 2017). According to one young person, from Tilsen and Nylund's 2010 study, being defined by others is about making other people comfortable rather than being understood on one's own terms (Tilsen and Nylund, 2010). This refusal to assimilate, opting instead for proclamation and recognition, is a significant form of resistance through which LGBTQ+ youth assert agency in their day to day lives (Torre and Avory, 2021; Gooding et al., 2022).

Another trend emerging from the literature has been LGBTQ+ youth’s preference for expansive language which embraces complexity, multiplicity, and intersectionality. Whilst language can be limiting, it can also allow LGBTQ+ youth to identify without limits (Elund, 2019). The preference for expansive language is typified by the word queer, an intentionally non-specific word which can be used to refer to the entire LGBTQ+ community or as an identity label (Tilsen and Nylund, 2010; Torre and Avory, 2021). The word queer is also a major example of resistance occurring within how the LGBTQ+ community negotiate power
through language. Queer was historically a homophobic slur, and is still used in this way by some whilst also going through a process of reclamation (Worthen, 2023). Beginning in the 1980s, the journey of queer reclamation has shown that power can be upturned through language.

In addition to preferring expansive language choices, the use of the word queer as an identity or community label is an example of LGBTQ+ youth embracing marginality as a source of power. Rather than having to present in socially desirable ways, or reconcile their sense of difference, language choices may shift the responsibility of sense-making onto others. Opting for identity labels which centre their difference can give the power back to LGBTQ+ youth as they navigate oppression. Embracing marginality, or queer monstrosity as Gooding et al. (2022) refer to it, also presents a unique alternative to typical counternarrative development. Rather than countering the demonisation of LGBTQ+ people with narratives of assimilation or resilience, queer monstrosity acknowledges that power and joy can be found in marginality.

LGBTQ+ youth are actively working against marginalisation, oppression, and silencing through their language practices (Schreuder, 2021). Language can reinforce power, one such example being the deep entrenchment of a binary gender system in English and other languages. On the other hand, LGBTQ+ identities often challenge the notion of stable identity categories and language can be used to critically examine and dismantle the systemic ideologies which uphold power (Schreuder, 2021). Identity development and expression for LGBTQ+ youth can therefore be another form of queer worldmaking, and furthermore have the power to impact the social world (Wagaman, 2016). The preferences that LGBTQ+ youth demonstrate when it comes to identity formation and expression are further examples of the existence is resistance theme. Whether intentional or incidental, LGBTQ+ youth are disrupting hegemonic ideology through their identity and language practices (Schreuder, 2021).

2.5 Schools

Schools are sites of deeply entrenched cisgender normative ideology, (re)producing the norms and normative discourses which uphold these systems of power. This often results in practices which are exclusionary by default, contributing to the othering and pathologization of LGBTQ+ pupils. This occurs within the school infrastructure and environment, classroom culture, curriculum, and is embedded in the policies and pedagogy of these institutions (Barnes and Carlile, 2018; Madireddy and Madireddy, 2020; Atkinson, 2021; Fantus and
Newman, 2021; Russell et al., 2021; Harris, Wilson-Daily and Fuller, 2022). Furthermore, schools instil normative values of success for young people, setting LGBTQ+ youth up for failure whilst also requiring them to bear the burden of resisting the hegemonic environment (Linville, 2022). As such, attending school often demands high levels of resilience behaviours for LGBTQ+ youth. Schools present unique challenges and opportunities when it comes to resilience and resistance as this location has the potential to be transformed by the practice of teachers, administrators, education ministers, and other adults working in education.

Much of the literature regarding LGBTQ+ youth in schools focuses either on adverse experiences or the roles and responsibilities of adults to respond to or prevent such experiences. Indeed, supportive and informed educators are hugely important for LGBTQ+ youth to be able to thrive in schools (Johns et al., 2019; Harris, Wilson-Daily and Fuller, 2022). Researchers have also identified the need for extensive school policies to tackle the victimisation and social exclusion of LGBTQ+ pupils (Barnes and Carlile, 2018; Madireddy and Madireddy, 2020; Fantus and Newman, 2021; Russell et al., 2021). Top-down changes at the institutional and national levels are essential, however this focus on adult practitioners undermines the agency and transformative power that children and young people have. Some authors, for instance Barnes and Carlile in their guide for practitioners (2018), fail to establish how or even if young people’s voices have informed their recommendations.

In contrast to the dominant vulnerability and victimhood discourses prevalent in how both children and young people and the LGBTQ+ community are viewed, LGBTQ+ youth are active in challenging institutionalised cisheteronormativity in their schools. McGlashan and Fitzpatrick found, in their study of a New Zealand secondary school, that LGBTQ+ pupils met regularly to discuss issues, support one another, and plan activist initiatives (McGlashan and Fitzpatrick, 2017). LGBTQ+ pupils even push their schools towards institutional change, for instance in policy or pedagogy (Robinson and Schmitz, 2021). Fantus and Newman (2021) argue for engaging LGBTQ+ pupils as agents in shaping their school climates, which can empower them to stand up for themselves and one another. However, this source draws solely on adult perspectives and seems to assume that young people need adults to empower them. The question of whether LGBTQ+ pupils would prefer their peer leadership, community development and activism be supported by, or independent from, staff remains unanswered. Furthermore, it could be argued that instead of employing their own pupils to fight for change, schools need to be making institutional changes.
Conclusion and recommendations

It is clear within the literature that resilience is an insufficient concept, not least due to its definitional discordance. For LGBTQ+ youth specifically, resilience has become a double-edged sword. It is important to recognise and celebrate LGBTQ+ youth’s abilities to navigate their often-tumultuous existence, finding ways to strengthen themselves and each other. Through understanding resilience dynamics in their daily lives, adults working with LGBTQ+ youth are better placed to support them. However, by focusing on how these young people deal with and bounce back from prejudice and discrimination, the burden is inadvertently placed on LGBTQ+ youth to build resilience and navigate the systems that harm them.

Resistance is presented as an alternative, or perhaps ideally a supplement to, resilience frameworks. Examples from the literature show that LGBTQ+ youth are not simply subjects of the social world, powerless to the forces of oppression and prejudice. They are agents of change, shaping the world around them through their kinship patterns, community connections, identity negotiations, and language practices. Whether through overt or covert acts, LGBTQ+ youth are engaged in multiple forms of resistance in the face of institutionalised and systemic cis-heteronormativity.

Whilst the literature has given numerous examples of how LGBTQ+ youth act with situated agency through resilience and resistance processes, it has also been possible to identify areas where further research is needed. It would be beneficial to explore how LGBTQ+ youth define resilience, and whether they consider resilience to be important in their day-to-day lives. Other areas requiring future study are queer kinship for young people, identity and language development for LGBTQ+ young people in the UK, and queer worldmaking online. Across all themes explored there was a significant lack of participatory studies with young people, and as such this recommended research should strive to engage LGBTQ+ youth as co-researchers.

One challenge in conducting such studies with LGBTQ+ youth is the salience of recent or ongoing adverse experiences, which can interfere with how an individual reflects on said experiences. Some emotional, spatial and temporal distance can allow for more self-awareness when reflecting on events. On the other hand however, young people should not be assumed to be incapable of the same type of critical self-reflection as adults. This presents a valuable opportunity for future research to employ a longitudinal approach with a
cohort of LGBTQ+ young people as they progress into adulthood, benefiting from both in-the-moment insight and longer-term reflection.

The question of whether resilience or resistance are ‘enough’ is yet to be answered. This is arguably the most significant tension within the literature. It is undoubtedly important to inform and educate teachers, youth workers, and other practitioners to ameliorate the effects of institutionalised cis-heteronormativity. The ‘adult world’ should strive to better support LGBTQ+ youth and hold one another accountable for change. It is also crucial to acknowledge and support the ways in which LGBTQ+ youth are actively resisting these forces. However, in an ideal world this would not be necessary. Teachers, youth workers, and the like should not need to protect LGBTQ+ youth from prejudicial institutions, nor should the world require such high levels of resilience and resistance from LGBTQ+ youth. Whilst it is important to ensure that LGBTQ+ youth have the tools and support needed to survive and thrive into adulthood, one must also not lose sight of building a better world for current and future generations of children and young people.
Chapter 3 - Conceptual framework

3.1 Paradigm and positionality

The proposed study is the culmination of an entire lifetime of personal, professional and academic experiences. These experiences have developed into a specific perspective as a researcher, what is often referred to as researcher positionality. This positionality informs the researcher’s ideas of what is fact, whether a single objective truth exists, and how this can be measured. These elements are then unified within a research paradigm, the lens through which the research can be conducted and interpreted.

The researcher’s positionality is relevant whilst collecting data, interpreting and analysing data, and in applying or developing theory (Best, 2007). In this case, the researcher’s position is born of two parallel paths in life. Firstly, that of a queer and trans adult, passionate about LGBTQ+ issues and improving the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth. Secondly, of a sociologist with a particular interest in social research. The perspective of a sociology graduate was further developed through studying Childhood and Youth Studies. Personal, professional and academic experiences will have informed the choices made in designing the study. A crucial aspect of designing this study has therefore been regularly engaging in critical self-reflection to limit the effect of assumptions and biases.

Another unavoidable aspect of the researcher’s positionality is the power dynamic between an adult researcher and the young people involved in the research. The work of developmental psychology and related fields over the past century would have us believe in fundamental, unequivocal differences between adults and children. This developmentalism feeds into how research with children and young people is conducted, with adults needing to cross an assumed great gulf of development, culture and inequality to learn about the lives of children and young people (Best, 2007). Critical awareness of the limitations of such developmental frameworks is necessary to avoid further perpetuating the researcher/researched and adult/child power dynamics.

A researcher’s positionality tends to indicate specific choices when designing research, unified within the research paradigm. The most foundational elements of the paradigm are ontology and epistemology. According to Crotty (1998) and Grix (2002), the ontological and epistemological basis for a study must be clearly established first, creating a solid foundation on which to explore theories and choose methodology. Ontology is a branch of philosophy.
concerned with studying reality, the nature of being, and existence. Epistemology is concerned with theories of knowledge, how knowledge can be acquired and interpreted.

Ontology might ask 'what is reality for LGBTQ+ youth?', whilst epistemology considers 'how can we know this?'

Ontological perspectives are often framed as a dichotomy, with belief of an objective reality on the one hand, and on the other a subjective reality that is socially constructed by and amongst individuals (Bryman, 2012). An objective ontology leads to a positivist research paradigm, seeking a singular and objective truth. A positivist epistemology would therefore aim to verify \textit{a priori} hypotheses through studying observable phenomena, identifying causality and drawing generalisations from the data. As such, research with this ontological and epistemological perspective tends to involve obtaining quantitative, empirical data from larger sample sizes (Park, Konge and Artino, 2020). Positivist research paradigms value researcher objectivity, which centres the researcher as holding the power in the research dynamic (Shannon-Baker, 2023). This approach is therefore not suited to exploring the subjective experiences of LGBTQ+ youth.

On the other hand, there is the ontological belief that there is no singular, objective truth or reality that can be observed and measured as such. Anti-positivist approaches instead suggest that reality is created through individuals’ experiences, meaning that multiple or perhaps infinite realities exist. Constructivism and interpretivism are two distinct epistemological approaches under this ontological umbrella. Constructivism emphasises the ontology of reality being socially constructed by individuals through their cognition, thus creating multiple realities (Pretorius, 2022; Shannon-Baker, 2023). Within a constructivist paradigm the researcher co-constructs knowledge with the participants by exploring their descriptions and narrations of their lived experiences (Shannon-Baker, 2023). Interpretivism is instead focused on the individual’s feelings, perceptions and experiences of reality and how these interpretations affect their understanding of the social world (Pretorius, 2022). In an interpretivist study the researcher strives to limit their influence and centre the voices of the participants.

The proposed study aims to explore the subjective, socially and culturally constructed experiences of a group of LGBTQ+ young people. These young people will each have different experiences related to belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, in addition to influences from their background, family, school, local community, ethnicity, religion, class, and disability status. They will have some experiences in common but also many unique to each individual and their intersecting identities. These young people will interpret events in
their own words and assign meanings to their experiences as individuals and as a group. As such, this study is grounded in a subjective ontology and interpretivist epistemology (Crotty, 1998; Bryman, 2012).

3.2 Theories and concepts

Situated at the cross-section of several fields of research and practice, this study benefits from a broad conceptual framework. This wide web of theoretical and conceptual threads run throughout the reviewed literature and has been fundamental in shaping this proposal. Through this framework it will be possible to contextualise and understand LGBTQ+ youth’s experiences.

Maslow’s theory of self-actualisation and hierarchy of needs can be applied to LGBTQ+ youth to conceptualise the barriers that they face in surviving and thriving. LGBTQ+ youth experience higher rates of homelessness than their cisgender and heterosexual peers (Bhandal, 2023), demonstrating that even the first tier of physiological needs may not be met for some. Many LGBTQ+ young people will also experience difficulties in the second tier of needs, safety. It was seen in section 2.1 of the literature review that LGBTQ+ youth employ a variety of resilience processes to manage their identity and negotiate their safety across different contexts. The third tier, love and belonging, can present issues for LGBTQ+ youth who experience family rejection or social exclusion. Without these primary needs of housing, safety, love and belonging, LGBTQ+ youth will struggle to thrive. Conversely however, section 2.3 of the literature review discussed that relationships and a sense of belonging to a community are often sources of strength for LGBTQ+ youth. Models and theories such as the hierarchy of needs may not fully account for the complexity of LGBTQ+ young people’s relationships.

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory is particularly relevant to this topic and has been applied by previous authors studying resilience (e.g. Ungar, 2011, 2012; Asakura, 2016, 2017). Bronfenbrenner divided a child’s environment into five systems, believing that child development could be best understood as the complex system of relationships and interactions between people and environments across these five systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Darling, 2007). Applied to LGBTQ+ youth, resilience and resistance can be seen to play out across the micro, meso and exo system levels in their schools, amongst their peers, with family, and in their extended communities. The macrosystem is also significant, as this is where the ideology of cisgenderheteronormativity is (re)produced, filtering down into the other system levels. A social ecological theory of resilience accounts for the individual, the
environment, and importantly the interaction between them (Ungar, 2011, 2012). This has also been applied to LGBTQ+ youth specifically, for instance by Asakura (2016, 2017) who used a social ecological model of resilience as a sensitising concept. For the proposed study, it would be important to remember that whilst it is situated in a youth group, this does not exist in isolation.

Bourdieu’s theory of social capital also contributes towards the theoretical foundation of this study. The concept of capital has become highly influential within childhood and youth studies, particularly in terms of analysing material inequalities and poverty (Montgomery, 2018). A related concept from Bourdieu is habitus, the embodied traits and behaviours of an individual which shapes their dynamic interactions within the social and material worlds (Montgomery, 2018). Gendered and sexualised identities will influence habitus for all children as they enter young adulthood. A cisgender and heterosexual habitus gives young people access to types of social and cultural capital which will be harder for LGBTQ+ youth to negotiate. Furthermore, gendered and sexualised norms and inequalities become instilled and embodied through habitus (Morantes-Africano, 2023). In other words, cisheteronormativity, like habitus, is learned and embodied through socialisation in families, schools, and in the community.

In the specific context of the proposed study, Bourdieu’s concepts of social and cultural capital could be employed to understand the impact of the inequalities that the LGBTQ+ young people experience. However, this theoretical framework also has practical limitations. Whilst attempting to facilitate the development of social capital for marginalised young people is not inherently problematic, there are some troubling underlying assumptions. Firstly, it assumes that LGBTQ+ youth need adults to empower them or to improve their situations via increased social or cultural capital. For this group of young people, doubly marginalised by way of age and sexual and/or gender identity, this assumption separates them further from their sense of agency.

Secondly, it assumes that LGBTQ+ youth value and embody social capital in the same way as the adult researchers and practitioners or as their cisgender and heterosexual peers. Conversely however, there are examples within the literature of LGBTQ+ youth queering traditional conceptualisations of social and cultural capital. For instance, Schreuder (2021) observed the ways in which LGBTQ+ youth use language to promote their own ideas of valued capital. Other examples from 2.3 (kinship and community) and 2.4 (identity and language) demonstrate that LGBTQ+ often reject or reshape typical ideas of capital. Morantes-Africano (2023) argues that whilst Bourdieu’s concepts can be useful, a critical
and intersectional perspective should be taken by combining ideas from queer theory in order to thoroughly interrogate cisgender normativity.

Another significant influence in shaping this proposal has been the conceptualisations and theories of sexuality from within the field of childhood and youth studies. Children are socialised to be sexual beings from a very young age, receiving messages about sexuality and gender from many sources including their family, schools and the media (Kehily, 2018). Sexuality is given meaning within social relations (Weeks, 1986), beginning in the family home. This may look like different behavioural expectations for boys and girls, for instance the way some behaviour will be excused as ‘boys will be boys’. From a young age children may hear different adjectives used by adults to refer to their appearance or character depending on their gender, aware that boys and girls are treated differently even before they can conceptualise this verbally. There are also significant differences in the clothes and toys which are marketed to boys and to girls, with underlying expectations for gender roles.

The indoctrination into becoming gendered and sexualised beings continues as children enter formal education, with the ‘hidden curriculum’ in schools (Kehily, 2018). This concept of a hidden curriculum has been used by academics and educators to discuss how learning outside of the official curriculum may reinforce hegemonic gender and sexuality categories. Classrooms are rife with gendered and sexualised systems of power, such as hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005). This can manifest in ‘boysplaining’, reinforcing passive femininity and dominant masculinity (Schiffrin-Sands, 2020). Hegemonic masculinity also leads to gendered patterns of peer approval amongst children. For example, boys are more likely to be bullies, but gender non-conforming boys have the highest risk of peer rejection, and performance of typically masculine behaviours will gain peer approval regardless of gender (Von Marées and Petermann, 2010; Nayak and Kehily, 2013; Braun and Davidson, 2017).

Young people’s sexual cultures and early sexual experiences are often characterised by asymmetrical gender relations (Kehily, 2018). Sexual socialisation reinforces the gender binary, patriarchal power, and hegemonic masculinity, in addition to othering non-heterosexual identities. This demonstrates that all children and young people, and the adults they go on to become, can benefit from dismantling and reconsidering how we ‘do’ sexuality and gender. The norms, expectations, and desirability of a cisgender and heterosexual existence are instilled at home in the family, through the media, within consumer culture, at school, and in the community. As they grow up, this may limit their expectations for themselves. It can make venturing into sexual and romantic relationships fraught with
complicated emotions and may lead to them perpetuating harmful stereotypes or even participating passively or actively in gendered and sexualised violence. The stakes are higher for children and young people who go on to realise they are not heterosexual and/or cisgender. These young people, and their peers, are consistently receiving messages which pathologize LGBTQ+ identities.

Gendered and sexualised power does not always play out in predictable ways, and the agency of children and young people should not be overlooked. Nayak and Kehily (2013) observed female pupils, who by their age and gender may be typically framed as subordinate, exerting power over their male teachers. They utilised heterosexualised behaviour to temporarily overthrow male authority. Although power can be negotiated by children and young people, it nevertheless takes on gendered and sexualised forms (Nayak and Kehily, 2013). Whilst the forces of cisheteronormativity are pervasive, children and young people can appropriate and challenge these dominant discourses, demonstrating situated agency.

Sexuality, and even gender, can be divisive and controversial topics when discussing children and young people. The tendency to view children as vulnerable and needing protection can lead to some adults wishing to protect ‘innocent’ children from discussions of sexuality. This has manifested in concern, and often moral panic, about the sexualisation of increasingly younger children, especially girls. This early sexualisation is often closely tied to children’s engagement with consumer culture, for instance the popularity of the Playboy brand being labelled as tantamount to ‘corporate paedophilia’ (Rush and La Nauze, 2006).

A rather different, but related, moral panic took place in 2019 when the guidance for relationships and sex education in English schools received a radical update. It included requirements for primary and secondary schools in England to teach about LGBTQ+ identities and relationships (Glazzard and Stones, 2021). The new guidance was controversial, with significant parental backlash including protests (Allen-Kinross, 2019; Griffiths and Ramzan, 2019; Kotecha, 2019; Parveen, 2019). Whether discussing the ‘corporate paedophilia’ of the 2000s, or the inclusive curricula of 2019, adults’ concern is telegraphed with little to no consideration of how the young people themselves feel. This highlights the contradictory and complex nature of sexuality in the lives of young people.

With cisheteronormativity so deeply entrenched within many spheres of public and private life, queer theory offers a powerful conceptual lens in both theory and practice. Queer theory is less a single theory, more an amalgamation of multiple theories and concepts which span
various disciplines including media and literary analysis, politics, philosophy, and the social sciences. Broad as it is, it would not be possible to explore queer theory in depth here. However, the importance of queer theory as a central pillar to this study can be demonstrated by drawing on the work of one of the most seminal authors on gender and sexuality, Judith Butler. Butler is well known for their argument that gender is performative, something we ‘do’ as opposed to something we have or are (Butler, 1990). As discussed previously, dominant norms inform discourse, producing and reinforcing power (Foucault, 1978), and it is within these power structures that gender is performed (Butler, 1990, 1993a, 1993b).

Whilst Butler refers to gender specifically at times, gender and sexuality are mutually reinforced through the systems of cisheteronormativity, or through what Butler called the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990). Pathways of masculinity and femininity, and how these are culturally produced and socially sanctioned, unavoidably bring young people into the sphere of heterosexuality (Gulbrandsen, 2003). Children and young people are engaged in constant production and reproduction of gender and sexuality through their play, leisure activities, classroom cultures, peer relationships, and relationships with adults. Power dynamics, along lines of both gender and sexuality, exist throughout these areas of children and young people’s lives. It is clear from both the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, and the theory reviewed here, that there is a solid foundation on which queer theory could be united with childhood and youth studies' conceptualisations of gender and sexuality. Future studies could draw on queer theory to analyse the ways in which young people in a particular context employ agency and negotiate power in their performance of gender and sexuality.

3.3 Proposed methodology

The researcher’s positionality, research paradigm, and the web of theory explored above, have combined in shaping this proposal. Reference has been made throughout this process to Crotty’s framework for social research (Crotty, 1998). This framework demonstrates how abstract concepts and guiding principles feed into concrete research methods, and this chapter has demonstrated that process. Such a broad conceptual framework can allow for complexities and nuance to be understood. However, it also presents challenges when it comes to research design. A broad conceptual framework such as this can confuse matters when choosing methodology, with so many fields of research being drawn on.
The most foundational element of this study, the interpretivist research paradigm, could suggest any number of different qualitative research methodologies. Whilst several of these were considered, it was especially important to prioritise methods which are known to be effective for research with children and young people. Furthermore, it was necessary to identify which methods would work best with marginalised young people who are typically silenced within mainstream research. Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) was of particular significance, alongside the principles of participatory research with young people. Whilst the entire conceptual framework guided the process, the themes emerging in the literature made the ‘right’ methodological choice clear. To explore the full spectrum of these young people’s experiences, beyond essentialisation and dominant discourse, the interpretivist approach of narrative research shall be used. The following section, chapters 4 and 5, shall develop this choice of methodology and propose the research design.
Part B: Research proposal

Chapter 4 - Research proposal

The choice of topic for this proposal was not simply driven by the adversity which LGBTQ+ youth experience, nor by a desire to frame LGBTQ+ youth as inspirational figures. It is clear from the literature reviewed in chapter 2 that these essentialised narratives fail to acknowledge the full range of LGBTQ+ youth’s experiences. This proposal also does not aim to settle the resilience versus resistance debate but will unavoidably join the growing body of work which struggles with how these two concepts manifest for LGBTQ+ youth. The literature also shows that risk, resilience, and resistance co-exist in complex and nuanced ways in the lives of LGBTQ+ youth. LGBTQ+ youth demonstrate agency as they live within, and push the boundaries of, powerfully oppressive systems of cisheteronormativity. Furthermore, LGBTQ+ young people counter the dominant narratives that represent youth generally, and the LGBTQ+ community specifically. By centring counternarratives and agency within the proposed study, it is possible to ensure that the power to tell their own stories remains in the hands of LGBTQ+ youth.

The title of this extended proposal - *Risk, resilience and resistance: exploring the situated agency of LGBTQ+ youth* - is the result of years of personal, professional, and academic experience. This has included many experiences of fighting battles of agency and adultism with health professionals and social services as a teenager, coming out and existing as a queer and trans young adult, representing and fighting for the LGBTQ+ community at my university, and academic experiences across three different universities over the last decade. Alongside this development of researcher positionality, academic interest towards this topic has been evolving for about five years, beginning with an undergraduate dissertation on a similar topic. Content over the course of this master’s degree has given a new direction to this existing interest, providing more knowledge and contextualisation of LGBTQ+ youth’s lives. The concepts and theories delivered through the master’s modules and through independent study have allowed a strong theoretical foundation to provide a deeper understanding of what was previously only known anecdotally.

4.1 Research question
The skills and knowledge developed during my postgraduate studies, and in particular the emphasis on developing critical reflexivity, have been crucial to the development of this study’s research question. An earlier draft of the research question presented ethical concerns, and so this feedback was reflected on to ensure a more appropriate research question. Additionally, the literature continued to shape the choice of research question. In particular, Wagaman (2016) and Wagaman, Obejero and Gregory (2018) who discuss the merits of counternarratives and counterstorytelling, as both research methods and tools which LGBTQ+ youth employ. With the feedback in mind, and continued reference to the literature, the present research question was formed:

In what ways do LGBTQ+ youth demonstrate agency through their production of counternarratives?

The following chapter will illustrate how the proposed study would attempt to answer this question, detailing the research design, research methods, and approach for data analysis and distribution of findings.
Chapter 5 - Research design, research methods and methods of analysis

In what ways do LGBTQ+ youth demonstrate agency through their production of counternarratives?

The proposed study utilises participatory narrative research to explore the narratives of between five and eight young people who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community. These young people would be drawn from an existing LGBTQ+ youth group. This study would ideally serve as a pilot project, beginning on a small scale and utilising the feedback from the research group to inform a larger study in the future.

Situated as it is within an interpretivist research paradigm, this study had the potential to be carried forward with any number of qualitative methodologies. However, due to the centrality of narrative within the literature and the research question, narrative research became the clear choice. In planning the research design therefore, it was necessary to consider what a narrative is, both generally and in the context of research.

According to Squire et al. (2014) a narrative is first and foremost a set of signs such as writing, verbal or other sounds, visual, acted or embodied elements which convey meaning. For a set of signs to constitute a narrative there needs to be a sense of movement between the signs, essentially a story (Squire et al., 2014). A narrative must also carry a specific meaning, rather than a general meaning as in a theory. Therefore, in the context of this study, a narrative will convey meaning in the lives of a small number of LGBTQ+ young people. Whilst there may be generalisations that could be extrapolated from the findings, the narratives hold meaning for these young people specifically.

Narratives can capture many of the themes explored in the literature including power, agency, discourse, language, identity. Whilst much of the literature was influential in choosing narrative research, Wagaman, Obejero and Gregory (2018) provided a specific example of this approach when researching with LGBTQ+ youth. The authors employed counterstorytelling, an approach rooted in critical race theory and which sits at the intersections of narrative and participatory action research methods (Wagaman, Obejero and Gregory, 2018). It became clear throughout the literature that buzzwords such as resilience and resistance are relied on too heavily, failing to capture the complex and nuanced lives of LGBTQ+ youth. By using narrative methods, the intention is to freely explore the myriad ways in which LGBTQ+ youth demonstrate agency and negotiate their own stories.
Narrative research, also referred to as narrative inquiry, can be a somewhat difficult to define methodological approach which involves working with various types of narrative materials (Squire et al., 2014). The literature reviewed in chapter 2 demonstrated that stories are often told about LGBTQ+ youth by adults - academics, politicians, members of the press, or other adults they interact with in their daily lives. LGBTQ+ youth themselves may have little or no power in how these dominant narratives are created and communicated. Their lived experiences on the other hand will tell different stories. These are the counternarratives, the ways in which LGBTQ+ youth live within, beyond, and in opposition to how they are represented within discourse.

To begin the study, the researcher would attend a session of the youth group and provide a summary of the planned research. Following the initial expression of interest, a drop-in session would be arranged where the researcher could provide a more thorough presentation and answer any questions about involvement. This would ensure that the young people are fully informed from the beginning. A minimum of five and maximum of eight young people would be ideal to keep the focus group manageable. This is in accordance with the recommended size of focus group from the National Children’s Bureau’s guidance for research with children and young people (National Children’s Bureau, 2011).

5.1 The research group

The young people involved in the research would have some pre-established familiarity and comfort amongst themselves through belonging to the youth group. This would create trust when it comes to the focus group stage, hopefully allowing for open discussion. The researcher would be an outsider to the group, although the researcher’s LGBTQ+ identity would close this gap somewhat. When the researcher visits the youth group to introduce the study, this would also be a valuable opportunity to build some rapport and trust with the group. The researcher would liaise with the leaders of the group to agree which activities they could get involved with to create this familiarity. Ice-breaker activities would also be valuable at each stage of the research to ensure comfort amongst the research group and between the young people and the researcher.

In designing this study, it was important to ensure that the young people’s participation did not start and end at the data collection stage. This proposal, situated as it is within postgraduate study, could not be developed with direct input from LGBTQ+ youth. The
voices of LGBTQ+ youth, via the literature, have however been central in every decision made. For instance, a conscious choice was made to not refer to the young people as participants, instead opting to use the term research group. This study does not simply see young people as research subjects, and the research group will have a role in analysing, interpreting, and distributing the findings. Collaborating with young people as co-researchers is a principle of participatory action research with young people (Rodríguez and Brown, 2009). Some basic training in research methods and qualitative data analysis would be provided. These informative sessions would be developed alongside the leaders of the youth group and would be available to all members of the group.

Involving children and young people as co-researchers does present some challenges, such as their lack of relevant theoretical knowledge, in addition to practical and financial difficulties in delivering research training (Fløtten et al., 2021). Furthermore, Jones (2004) argues that children and young people cannot be held responsible for research, a responsibility which should only lie with the adult researcher. On the other hand, whilst young co-researchers should not be expected to write up a report to the standard of an academic journal, theoretical knowledge should not be considered more important than experiential expertise. Ultimately however, the goal here would not be to deliver thorough research training or theoretical knowledge. The intention is to effectively combine, in a unified research group, the theoretical and practical knowledge of the researcher with the experiential knowledge of the young co-researchers.

5.2 Methods

In designing the proposed study, it was crucial to ensure that the power remains in the hands of LGBTQ+ young people to tell their own stories. A major challenge within narrative research is that traditionally the researcher holds a lot of power in how they interpret what participants say, forming this into narratives which can then be communicated to academic audiences or used to instil policy changes in relevant settings. Whilst being able to disseminate the findings to these audiences is important, it should not need to come at the expense of empowered participation. Researchers taking control over how the narratives are formed from the raw transcripts removes power from the hands of the young people and fails to engage them beyond the role of subject.

This issue of power becomes especially salient when researching with young people who are placed within both researcher/researched and adult/young person power dynamics. Additionally, LGBTQ+ youth face further marginalisation and silencing within
research with children and young people. To unsilence these often-unheard voices, it would be desirable to capture the depth of individuals’ narratives, whilst not sacrificing the values and principles of participatory research. As such, this study shall be employing Participatory Narrative Inquiry (PNI), which aims to achieve this balance between traditional narrative inquiry and participatory research (Kurtz, 2014). PNI emphasises the interpretation of stories by those to whom they belong (Kurtz, 2014).

This study would have three phases, comprising two research methods in a multi-modal qualitative study unified within the narrative approach. Firstly, one-to-one semi-structured interviews would be conducted employing broad, open questions and prompts. Secondly, a focus group would be carried out with the entire research group. After this, the final stage would begin which involves data analysis and preparing the findings for dissemination.

Examples of some interview questions and prompts can be seen in appendix 2. These have been developed to be broad enough to allow free exploration, whilst avoiding any potentially sensitive or distressing topics. The goal of the interviews would be to rely on these questions and prompts as little as possible. The primary question ‘what does resilience mean to you?’ will be started with in all cases, and then the researcher will gauge how the young person is responding, providing further questions and prompts as necessary. Ideally, only a few additional prompts or questions would be needed to allow the topics to be explored freely. Whilst the questions are a guide, the young people would be free to take the conversation in any direction. This freedom is crucial as it gives the young people power over their own stories, allowing them to find what is important and assign meaning as they go. The researcher would keep notes to supplement audio recordings of the interviews, for instance noting body language or gestures as they relate to what the young people are saying.

After a break of about a week to allow rest and reflection, the young people would attend a focus group together. During the break the researcher will begin processing the transcripts, but it is important to note no analysis will occur yet. At this stage the only intention is to identify commonly occurring words or phrases. These would be used to create cue-cards and a word cloud as visual representations of the themes occurring within the interviews. These would be placed on the table for the focus group and the young people would be free to explore the topics as a group, with the researcher taking a passive role and only acting as facilitator when necessary. Again, the freedom and openness of this focus group would create a space in which the young people can assign meanings and interpret their collective narratives. As this will involve back and forth between multiple individuals, the focus group would be video recorded to allow for easier transcription and to ensure distinction of who is
saying what. This would also capture non-verbal communication that can be added to the transcripts.

5.3 Ethics

Ethical considerations begin at the earliest planning stages of any research endeavour. When planning research with children or young people, it is essential to ask oneself if the research is necessary, are the research questions worth asking, and who will benefit from the research (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). Literature searches from the very inception of this work have demonstrated significant gaps in our understanding of the lives of LGBTQ+ youth beyond their adverse experiences and the buzzwords of resilience and resistance. There are questions which arise from these gaps which are worth exploring, not least because LGBTQ+ youth have a right to tell their stories and have their voices heard. This research has the potential to benefit LGBTQ+ young people broadly, as it would join the body of work endeavouring to put a spotlight on the full spectrum of LGBTQ+ youth’s experiences. More specifically and directly however, this study could benefit the young people involved.

Gaining informed consent is crucial for research with any age group but can present additional challenges when researching with children and young people. As established previously, the researcher would meet with the youth group to provide a summary of the study, followed by a drop-in session to present more information and answer any questions. After which, any interested young people would be provided an information pack. This would detail the aims of the study, roles and responsibilities of all involved, how the data will be recorded and stored, confidentiality and anonymity, how the findings will be used, and a declaration of the study’s funding. It will be emphasised in the initial meeting and within the pack that anyone who participates in the study will have the right to withdraw at any point without adverse consequences. The front pages of this information pack, which provide answers to the most significant questions, have been provided in appendix 3. Whilst this contains the text from the standard Open University information sheet for under 18s, it has been reformatted to make it more approachable and accessible.

For informed consent to be given, it is also important for the young people to not just understand the roles and responsibilities of the researcher, but of themselves. Beyond attendance and participation in the interviews and focus group, there will be opportunities to learn and use different data analysis skills and to determine how the data will be used.
Furthermore, they will need to understand and agree to the responsibilities involved in the focus group. The information pack will include a page about the focus group and the expectation for the young people to be respectful of one another, to avoid talking over other people, and to keep confidentiality of anything shared in the group. This approach to gaining informed consent was developed alongside the checklist provided by the National Children’s Bureau’s guidance for research with children and young people (National Children's Bureau, 2011).

Parental consent will be another important issue to navigate, although consent of a parent or guardian does not replace gaining consent from the young people themselves. The parents do not grant consent on behalf of their child (National Children’s Bureau, 2011), and so the young person’s own informed consent is still crucial. For young people over 16, parental consent to take part in research is usually not considered necessary as they are assumed to be Gillick competent (National Children’s Bureau, 2011). However, every young person interested in participating whether under or over 16 should take the information pack home to peruse with their parents. The information pack would also contain the consent form to be completed by the young people and their parents or guardians, and this can be seen in appendix 4.

It will be encouraged for all participating individuals, regardless of age, to be open with their parents or guardians about their participation in the study provided it is safe for them to do so. This clarification is especially important as the researcher could encounter a challenging situation with a young person who has not yet ‘come out’ to their family. Considering their attendance at an LGBTQ+ group this is less likely, however being prepared for this possibility is still important. If seeking parental consent would breach a child’s right to confidentiality, and potentially safety, the need for parental consent could be waived (National Children’s Bureau, 2011). During the initial presentation about the study however, it will be emphasised that young people who are not out to family or whose family have not accepted their identity could be risking further complications in their home life by participating. This would not exclude them, but informed consent could hinge on awareness of this from any young people it applies to.

To protect the young people involved in the study, all data will be anonymised before analysis takes place. This would include removing or aggregating identifiable information from the transcripts such as names, references to places or school names. To prevent interfering with the integrity of the narratives, identifiable information will be switched to codewords, initials or nicknames. The young people will be able to choose their own
pseudonym to have their narrative attached to, to ensure anonymity as the results are prepared for dissemination. The information packs the young people receive will also detail the relevant processes for ensuring confidentiality, anonymity and data protection.

5.4 Analysis and dissemination

After the one-to-one interviews and focus group have taken place, the research group would meet to begin compiling the transcripts. The young people would be given the option to transcribe their one-to-one interview alone, with the researcher, or with the entire group. The focus group transcription would be worked on as a group. This ensures that nuance is less likely to be missed through transcription, and that the young people get final approval of the transcripts. Once the transcripts are completed, narrative analysis can begin. Again, the option to engage with analysis of their individual interviews separate from the group will allow for comfort and confidentiality.

Narrative analysis is different from many other qualitative analysis techniques which tend to break up transcripts into individual quotes, which risks losing the overarching narrative. In narrative analysis however, the transcripts are broken down into narrative blocks which are then compared to develop core narratives. In traditional narrative analysis, there is a dual layer of interpretation. Firstly, the participants interpret their own lives through narrative, secondly the researcher interprets the construction of these and forms core narratives which represent the entire findings, the ‘big picture’. Within the Participatory Narrative Inquiry (PNI) approach however, the young people will be taking on the role of co-researchers and are therefore central in both stages of interpretation. This ensures that the power of interpretation remains with the storytellers themselves.

After the interviews and focus group transcripts have been analysed, and core narratives have been formulated and agreed upon by the entire research group, the final stage is dissemination of the findings. As mentioned previously, information about where and how the data will be used would have been provided to gain informed consent. In addition, however, upon completing the core narratives, the research group will meet to have a dissemination session. During this session they will generate ideas about possible ways to present the findings, and to whom this could be presented. Some of the potential options include the young people collaborating with the researcher to write the formal report for publication, putting together a creative presentation or poster, or developing a short film based on the narratives. These are just some ideas however, and this session would be open and unstructured to allow group negotiation of a dissemination plan.
As this study is intended to be a pilot program, another important element of this final stage would be to create a guide for future iterations of the study. This would be worked on collaboratively between the researcher and young people, and could take the form of a visual presentation, physical handbook, or any other form they so choose. The goal of this would be to reflect on what worked well, what should be improved, and provide instruction for the study to be carried out again with a new cohort of co-researchers. This would allow increasingly participatory iterations of this study to be conducted to explore how LGBTQ+ youth across different contexts employ counternarratives.
Post-script - Narrative critical reflection

In 2020, I was finishing my sociology degree as part of the first cohort of students to graduate into a COVID-world. Finishing my dissertation in those circumstances, I felt very unsure of what my future held academically and professionally. I felt disconnected from academia in the face of this new, terrifying battle in which we found ourselves. I present this brief vignette to contrast the situation of just a few years ago with the present day. As I reflect on my postgraduate experience, I have an incredible sense of satisfaction and continued interest I have in academia, specifically research with children and young people, and a new sense of confidence in my research abilities. What follows here is a few key examples which demonstrate this progress, drawing on feedback I have received and detailing how I have engaged with this using critical self-reflection. For further evidence of reflection, please see appendix 6.

One of the earliest goals I set for myself during postgraduate study was from towards the end of my first OU module, E808. Reflecting on those first few TMAs, I identified the importance of developing a diligent and effective process for searching for literature. Although I have noticed significant improvement in this area, going into the dissertation year I knew it would be especially important for dealing with such a large amount of literature. I have been keeping a log of each search, and I have established a good routine for saving articles to be easily navigated, and for reading and taking notes. This was very effective during the literature review, making it easier to identify patterns emerging from the literature. For this goal, it was useful to have identified and worked on this earlier in my studies, developing habits that benefited me during my dissertation.

One of the main pieces of academic feedback I received throughout my postgraduate studies was related to how well I apply theory and module themes in my writing. This feedback came from my first year, so this is another area I have been working on for about two years. For my dissertation, it was necessary to bring together multiple strands of theory from several intersecting fields whilst also relating these elements back to the themes from the modules we have studied. Since identifying this as an area to work on, I have begun work on each assignment by connecting it to key module themes, going back to my relevant notes to identify any theories or literature to revisit. This also connects to the research process discussed above. Similarly, as I had already made progress in this area, I found writing the conceptual framework in chapter 3 less intimidating.
Finally, the most significant piece of feedback I received that was specifically related to my dissertation was in response to my original research question. After TMA 01 of this module, I reflected on the feedback I had received for research question I had proposed. I understood the reasoning, the ethical considerations as well as it not fully aligning with the research title. To act on this feedback, I spent some time brainstorming ideas, as well as revisiting some key literature. This allowed me to formulate a new research question which better described the study and limits the ethical concerns.

Total word count: 12,262
Bibliography


Johns, M.M. et al. (2019) ‘Strengthening Our Schools to Promote Resilience and Health Among LGBTQ Youth: Emerging Evidence and Research Priorities from The State of


Appendices

Appendix 1 - Gender and sexual identity spectrums

A diagram which demonstrates the spectrums of gender and sexual identity – an individual can occupy any point across all four aspects of identity.

**Biological sex**

Male

Intersex

Female

Woman

**Gender identity**

Man

Non-binary

Gender fluid

**Gender presentation**

Masculine

Androgynous

Feminine

**Sexual orientation/attraction**

Attracted to men.

Attracted to women.

Bisexual

Pansexual

Asexual
Appendix 2 - Research instruments: interview questions

Primary question:

- What does resilience mean to you?

Secondary questions:

- Can you think of examples of resilience from your life?
- What challenges have you overcome?
- How do you think others perceive LGBTQ+ people around your age?
- What do you wish adults knew about your experiences?
- How do you think your experiences compare to how LGBTQ+ issues are represented in the media?
- What role do you think community plays in your sense of resilience?
Appendix 3 - Participants’ information pack (front sheets)

The front sheets of the information pack that would be provided to all participating young people - text taken from standard OU information sheet for under 18s.

What is the aim of the research?
The aim of this research is to gain your views of agency and resilience.

Who is conducting the research and who is it for?
The interview and focus group are part of my studies on a masters-level course at The Open University in which I am carrying out a small-scale investigation. I am using a range of ways of collecting information to answer the following question: In what ways do LGBTQ+ youth demonstrate agency through their production of counternarratives? This is aimed to help me better understand resilience and agency for LGBTQ+ young people here and to share my findings with others for whom the findings will be relevant to changing practice.

Why am I being invited to participate in this research?
You have been chosen because your views would be valuable in answering the question set for the study and I hoped you might be prepared to talk to me about your experiences and opinions.

What would be involved if I take part?
The study has two parts, individual interviews followed by a focus group. The interviews will last no more than one hour. The focus group could last up to two hours with breaks as needed. Permission has been given from the leader of your youth group for me to invite you to this interview. I would like to ask your consent to make an audio recording of our discussion so that I can refer back to what was said more accurately than would be possible just from my notes. If you do not wish to be audio recorded, I will accept your wish, and rely only on my written notes. Only I will have access to the audio recording. I do not need to share this with those at the University or in this practice setting. In any part of the interview which will be shared with my tutor or form part of the final dissertation report you and anyone else you name during our discussion will be referred to by a false name (pseudonym) and you will be asked if you would like to suggest what name I use.

What will we be talking about?
In the interview I will ask you questions about what you think about:

- What does resilience mean to you?
- When do you feel powerful?
- How do you think others perceive LGBTQ+ young people?

I can share the full interview questions with you in advance, if you would like to see them.
**Will what I say be kept private?**

Your participation will be treated in strict confidence in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018). No personal information about you, such as contained in your consent forms, will be shared more widely. In the case of the audio recording and my notes of the interview, these will be kept private and typed up as soon as possible. However, if you let me know anything during your interview which I consider means that you might be unsafe or have been involved in a criminal act, because this is a safeguarding concern, I will need to pass this information immediately to the organisation’s Designated Safeguarding Officer. When I make anonymised records of the interview, as outlined above, these will be stored securely on password protected devices and the original notes and recording will then be destroyed. I can confirm that neither you as an individual nor the youth group will be identifiable in my submissions to the University or any presentations I make of my findings to interested audiences.

**What happens now?**

There is further information in this pack, which you can read over with your parent/carer. After this, please read and complete the consent form at the back of the information pack. This means that you and your parent/carer sign your and their names and the date to say you are all happy for me to set up a time and place for the interview. The focus group would then take place one week after the interviews are complete.

Whether you agree to be involved or not is entirely up to you and your parent/carer, as the invitation is for you to take part voluntarily. You can change your mind later and withdraw from the study by letting me know and I will destroy the information (consent forms and interview files) I have created. This will be possible up until the time that the findings are

**More questions?**

Some of your questions may be answered in this information pack, but I am happy to answer any further questions you or your parent/carer may have.

Please contact me at TheResearcher@email.com

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The ethics protocols and documentation to support the E822 Multi-disciplinary Dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth have been developed with advice from the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee and have been confirmed by the Chair as fully compliant with The Open University's Ethics Principles for Research with Human Participants.

Appendix 4 - Consent form

*An example of the consent form which would be provided all participants if this research were to be carried out.*

**ECYS/WELS**

**E822 DOCUMENTS PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND ASSENT FORM**

(To be completed by all participants and, if the participant is a child/young person under age 18, with and by their parent/carer/guardian)

If this request relates to a child/young person under the age of 18 please would a parent, carer or guardian read these questions with them and, if necessary, complete the replies for them.

Please indicate YES or NO for each of the questions below and return the completed form by [date] to Rowan Bratchell – TheResearcher@email.com

Have you read (or had read to you) the information about the documents to be collected?  
YES  NO

Has someone explained the reason for collecting the documents to you?  
YES  NO

Do you understand which documents will be collected?  
YES  NO

Have you asked all the questions you want?  
YES  NO

Have you had your questions answered in a way you understand?  
YES  NO

Do you understand it is OK to withdraw your permission to use the documents?  
YES  NO

Are you happy with how your data will be stored?  
YES  NO

Do you understand that your name and any other real names as well as any information that would identify you will be removed from the documents?  
YES  NO

Are you happy for documents relating to you to be used as explained?  
YES  NO

If any answers are ‘no’ feel free to ask for further information. However, if you don’t want to allow your documents to be used, please just let me know and don’t sign your name.
If you do give consent, please write your name and today’s date. You can change your mind later, by letting me know.

Your name  _________________________________________________________________

Date  _________________________________________________________________

If the documents were created by a child or young person under 18 and you are happy for the child or young person you are responsible for (as their parent, carer or guardian) to share them, please could you also sign and date below.

Print name  _________________________________________________________________

Sign  _________________________________________________________________

Date  _________________________________________________________________

Return form to Rowan Bratchell – TheResearcher@email.com

Thank you for your help.

The ethics protocols and documentation to support the E822 Multi-disciplinary Dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth have been developed with advice from the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee and have been confirmed by the Chair as fully compliant with The Open University’s Ethics Principles for Research with Human Participants.

Appendix 5 - Gatekeeper letter

An example of the letter which would be provided to the gatekeeper of the setting, if this research were to be carried out.

Faculty of Wellbeing, Education, Language and Sport

Study related to master’s module ‘E822 Multidisciplinary dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth’

Letter to Setting Gatekeepers: E822 Dissertation

Dear [gatekeeper name]

I am currently studying on the master’s module ‘E822: The Multidisciplinary master’s Dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth’ at the Open University in the Faculty of Wellbeing, Education, Language and Sport. My studies are being supervised by my Open University personal tutor, supported by the module team WELS-ECYS-Masters@open.ac.uk and follow research protocols reviewed and supported by the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee. As part of my studies, I would like to request whether I could develop a Small-Scale Investigation (or SSI form of the dissertation), which would involve data collection in your setting (using interviews, observation, collection of documents and/or questionnaires). I will be able to provide and discuss further details about which methods I would like to use as my studies develop during the module.

Information collected from all participants will be kept confidential, de-identified to remove identifying features of individuals and the setting and stored securely on password protected devices. Original notes and digital files will then be destroyed. I confirm that no information leading to the identification of your setting, or the individual participants, will be included in my submissions to the University or in any related publications. If there is a disclosure of a safeguarding nature during data collection, then, as will have been explained to the participants in advance of data collection, this will be immediately passed to the setting Designated Safeguarding Officer. Please could you confirm how best to contact them.

Your setting’s and participants’ involvements are voluntary. To help you in making a decision, the University have provided Guidance for Setting Gatekeepers, which I attach. You can withdraw permission for the study to take place as outlined in this
Guidance. Your colleagues and children/young people in the setting who are invited to provide data as participants can also withdraw their consent and request destruction of data collected up to two weeks after each form of data collection has taken place. I will respect these wishes. In this situation, for any interview or observation assuming there is time, I would like your support in contacting alternative participants to collect sufficient data for my research. I do have the option of carrying out an Extended literature review and research Proposal (or EP form of the dissertation) which would not require any data collection during my studies, and I am happy to discuss this with you, if you would like to explore that I chose this option.

If I am carrying out the SSI form of the dissertation, I am required by my University to complete a jointly signed Dissertation Ethical Agreement Form by my first tutor marked assessment submission date in November. If you are happy for me to develop a dissertation on the basis outlined above, I would like to discuss this with you to further explain my plans. This would allow me to explain more about my studies and these requests, including the timeline and processes and protocols for ethical research in this setting. Please suggest a suitable date and time or guide me to the most appropriate person to consider these requests.

Yours sincerely,

Rowan Bratchell

The ethical guidance and documentation to support the E822 dissertation have been developed with advice from the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee and have been confirmed by the Chair as fully compliant with The Open University’s Ethics Principles for Research with Human Participants. Link: http://www.open.ac.uk/research/sites/www.open.ac.uk.research/files/files/Documents/Ethics-Principles-for-Research-with-Human-Participants.pdf
### Appendix 6 - Reflection grid

**Screenshots of relevant entries from a reflection log from the last few years of study.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As Item</th>
<th>Date(s)</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Relevance to dissertation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Application of theory</td>
<td>April 2021</td>
<td>Tutor</td>
<td>&quot;Consider use of examples to support examples and to apply theory in a degree of depth to support assumptions, strengths and weaknesses&quot; (from tutor’s feedback for E800 TMA 03)</td>
<td>Achieved</td>
<td>&quot;You made very good use of additional reading to further elaborate the points identified into clear and effective arguments. This was an extensively referenced assignment, with a good range of additional reading to complement some of the arguments put forward in the module booklet.&quot; (This quote from my feedback for E809 TMA 02 is one example of my improved application of theory.)</td>
<td>My application of theory has been improving with each assignment I have completed. For my dissertation, it was necessary to bring together multiple strands of theory from several intersecting fields. This, whilst still intimidating, was a lot more achievable due to the past few years of working on this skill. I found that when it came to writing Chapter 3 it was fairly straightforward to see how different theories could be applied, thanks to my improvement in this area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application of module themes</td>
<td>April 2021</td>
<td>Tutor</td>
<td>&quot;Ensure module ideas are applied explicitly&quot; (from tutor’s feedback for E800 TMA 03)</td>
<td>Achieved</td>
<td>I feel that my ability to link literature I am reading and the assignments I am producing to the module themes has grown significantly. I found it harder in the first module (E808) to bring together disparate ideas. However, throughout E809 I was able to see how these topics connect, in part due to an ongoing routine of self-reflection and regularly reviewing each week’s topic.</td>
<td>Due to my improved skill in this area, I found it quite straightforward to identify and reference the relevant module themes, and connect my dissertation topic back to readings from previous modules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical evaluation of literature</td>
<td>April 2021</td>
<td>Tutor</td>
<td>&quot;Demonstrate further critical engagement with the ideas used&quot; (from tutor’s feedback for E808 TMA 03)</td>
<td>Achieved</td>
<td>This has been one of the biggest areas I had identified personally. In addition to being highlighted by my tutor, I feel my high grades throughout demonstrate an increased critical engagement in the literature. In particular, I was very proud of getting 92 in both my EMA’s to date, as these were predominantly research based and those grades reflect increased critical analysis.</td>
<td>Whilst I have made progress with this skill, it is something I know requires ongoing dedication. For developing my dissertation I ensured that critical interrogation was a central part of my process of finding and reading articles. Similarly, in taking notes I tried to remember to go beyond just describing the article, engaging critical thinking. Demonstrating this critical evaluation within a limited word count has been an ongoing challenge, one I am still working on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diligent and effective search process</td>
<td>May 2021</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>EMA</td>
<td>Achieved</td>
<td>I have been working on developing a diligent and effective search process, and I have learnt to use databases. I have also been getting into a more consistent routine of keeping a log of references and summaries. Having clearly labelled and easy to navigate bookmarks and lists of literature will serve me well in my studies.” (from self-reflection in E809’s EMA)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical awareness of my position</td>
<td>September 2022</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>EMA</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>“I will engage in ongoing critical reflection, and awareness of my positioning and privilege when working with marginalised groups to avoid stereotyping or essentialising. I need to become comfortable with discomfort and open to learning, acknowledging that a group of children and young people know more about their experience than I ever could.” (from self-reflection in E809’s EMA)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The trap of good intentions</td>
<td>September 2022</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>EMA</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>“Before starting this module, I strongly believed that I would never be the kind of researcher to not truly listen to children and young people. Whilst I stand by this value, I can now acknowledge that good intentions are not sufficient. I realise now that attributing to children and young people’s voices requires an ongoing, proactive, and critically reflective approach across every stage of the research.” (from self-reflection in E809’s EMA)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation research title appropriateness</td>
<td>November 2022</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>EMA</td>
<td>Achieved</td>
<td>“...your research question doesn’t quite match up (as yet) with the title - it should facilitate writing a small scale ethnically considered research proposal.” (from tutor’s feedback for E822 TMA 01)</td>
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<td>I identified this goal early on in my studies, as my disorganised tendencies would be a hindrance. I have kept up a rigorous process for searching for, saving, and referencing materials. I feel I have developed a solid secondary research process which allows me to look back at what I have read easily. My grades and feedback over the last three years have reflected this effective approach to research.</td>
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<td>I have been using a mostly unainted approach to research since I set myself this goal. I keep a log of my searches, and have established a good routine for finding and saving articles so that they can be accessed easily. I also developed an effective approach to reading and taking notes from articles. All of these processes become invaluable when I began my dissertation. I have been able to find my sources and related notes easily, and this also made it easier to spot patterns emerging from the literature.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I drew on these reflections and this goal when considering my role and positionality as a researcher. I remained critically aware that despite my own experiences as a young person, and my LGBTQ+ identity, my lived experiences cannot and should not speak for another. Whilst my insider status, and being able to relate to their experiences, is beneficial in research I must continue to engage in critical reflexivity to ensure it does not cloud my research through bias or assumptions.</td>
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<td>As I was not carrying out the planned small-scale study, this goal remained theoretical. However, prioritising young people’s participation and agency has been central in every decision made for the proposal. It was important to find ways to unify the theories I had learned during my Masters, with the values of participation and agency. I feel I have achieved this, in theory, although I am aware in practice things do not always go according to plan.</td>
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</table>
### Section 1: Project details

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Student name</td>
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<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>PI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>Project title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>Supervisor/tutor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>Qualification</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f.</td>
<td>MA pathway (where applicable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g.</td>
<td>Intended start date for fieldwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h.</td>
<td>Intended end date for fieldwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>Country fieldwork will be conducted in</td>
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## Section 2: Ethics Assessment

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<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Does your proposed research need initial clearance from a ‘gatekeeper’ (e.g. local Authority, head teacher, college head, nursery/playgroup manager)?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Have you checked whether the organisation requires you to undertake a ‘police check’ or appropriate level of ‘disclosure’ before carrying out your research?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Have you indicated how informed consent will be obtained from your participants (including children less than 16 years old, school pupils and immediate family members)? Your consent letters/forms must inform participants that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Will your proposed research design mean that it will be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge/consent at the time (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places)? If so, have you specified appropriate debriefing procedures?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Does your proposed design involve repetitive observation of participants, (i.e. more than twice over a period of more than 2-3 weeks)? Is this necessary? If it is, have you made appropriate provision for participants to renew consent or withdraw from the study half-way through?</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Are you proposing to collect video and/or audio data? If so, have you indicated how you will protect participants’ anonymity and confidentiality and how you will store the data?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Does your proposal indicate how you will give your participants the opportunity to access the outcomes of your research (including audio/visual materials) after they have provided data?</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Have you built in time for a pilot study to make sure that any task materials you propose to use are age appropriate and that they are unlikely to cause offence to any of your participants?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Is your research likely to involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. adult/child relationships, peer relationships, discussions about personal teaching styles, ability levels of individual children and/or adults)? What safeguards have you put in place to protect participants’ confidentiality?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Does your proposed research raise any issues of personal safety for yourself, or other persons involved in the project? Do you need to carry out a ‘risk analysis’ and/or discuss this with teachers, parents and other adults involved in the research?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS or the use of NHS data?</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tbody>
</table>