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University of Southampton

Faculty of Environmental and Life Sciences

School of Psychology

Exploring the Factors That Influence Speakers' Adoption or Rejection of Gender Inclusive Pronouns.

by

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Thesis for the degree of Doctorate in Educational Psychology

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Abstract

Faculty of environmental and Life Sciences

School of Psychology

Doctor of Educational Psychology

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Martha Mayfield

Society remains dominated by heteronormative ideology, with a wealth of literature attesting to the continued and significant levels of discrimination experienced by individuals with diverse sexual and/or gender identities, as compared to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts. Language is a vital communication tool, used to identify oneself and construct meaning. In this way, gender and language are linked, with language able to empower and represent diverse identities, through gender affirmation and social acceptance, or to marginalise. The aim of this thesis was to prompt individual and systemic reflection, regarding respectful communication, and behaviour change, and elicit constructive ways forward to mitigate the effects of discrimination for LGBTQ+ and gender expansive youth.

Two research studies were conducted. Using a thematic synthesis approach, a systematic literature review was undertaken to explore how LGBTQ+ and gender expansive youth foster their resilience through activism. Prior research has typically emphasised risk rather than resilience in relation to sexuality and gender expansive youth, highlighting that their resilience, and the link between activism and resilience, represented an understudied area of research. Within the review, activism, via everyday acts of resistance, and more overt strategies, emerged as an important means of developing resilience. In recognition of the shift towards a collective social responsibility to challenge and change oppressive systems, there is an onus on schools to identify and provide LGBTQ+ and gender expansive youth with opportunities to resist oppression. An empirical study was also conducted to explore the factors that influence speakers'

adoption or rejection of gender inclusive pronouns. The reason for this focus was because of the known link between gender and language, and that early research highlighted a gap in the literature in terms of any similar UK studies. Implications were developed in response to each study, which included the provision of clear guidance and ongoing reflective practice for staff, to examine the structural entrenchment of heteronormativity and cisgenderism and its effects on the most marginalised in school, the need for more affirming policies, practices and curricula that teach that prejudice and discrimination are unacceptable, and professional development to support staff to foster a more inclusive school environment. The strengths and limitations of each study were also considered.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Martha Mayfield

Title of thesis: **Exploring the Factors That Influence Speakers' Adoption or Rejection of Gender Inclusive Pronouns.**

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
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3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission

Signature: .... Date: ....

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Aims and rationale of the thesis

The overarching theme of this thesis is 'visibility', evidenced firstly by an exploration of linguistic behaviour around gender inclusive language, highlighting the importance of making gender identities outside the binary linguistically visible (Erdocia, 2021). Secondly, this is evidenced by an exploration of the relationship between activism and resilience, highlighting the importance of activism as another means of creating visibility, and its importance in fostering resilience for LGBTQ+ and gender expansive youth (GEY; see Glossary for both terms).

The decision to focus on language came from an abiding interest in language, rooted in my previous academic studies, and language being an essential everyday tool for us to construct and convey meaning, self-identify, and communicate with others (Carr, 2021). Language has the power to uplift or diminish, to represent or marginalise diverse identities, as gender roles and expectations are communicated through language (Carr, 2021). There is a wealth of literature regarding the continued levels of discrimination and concomitant negative educational and health outcomes that LGBTQ+ and gender expansive individuals experience, as compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers (see Glossary; Chan et al., 2022; Johnson et al., 2020; McBride & Neary, 2021; Tordoff et al., 2022). Misgendering, through incorrect pronoun use, represents one example of a disaffirming microaggression that can have negative psychological effects (Sevelius et al., 2020). Conversely, gender affirmation, via correct pronoun use, is an interpersonal, social process, which can foster identity pride, positivity, and a sense of being socially accepted (Fontanari et al., 2020; Sevelius et al., 2020).

The empirical paper and systematic review can be linked, via a contextualised, ecological understanding of resilience, where social contexts, and the reciprocal person-environment interactions that happen within these to optimise development, count more than individual capacity (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ungar, 2012). In this way, it is incumbent on the environment to shift, with a collective social responsibility to challenge and change oppressive systems, rather than place the responsibility on the individual to become more resilient (Asakura, 2016; Asakura, 2019; Bartos &

Langdridge, 2019; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Hart et al., 2016; Meyer, 2015; Robinson & Schmitz, 2021; Zimmerman, 2013). I aimed to conduct research that might prompt individual and systemic reflection and elicit constructive ways forward to mitigate the effects of discrimination. I conducted two research enquiries, a systematic literature review (Chapter 2) and an empirical study (Chapter 3).

Within my systematic literature review, I explored the research question: How do LGBTQ+ and gender expansive youth foster their resilience through activism? The reason for this focus is that research has typically emphasised risk rather than resilience in relation to sexuality and gender expansive youth, highlighting their resilience as an important area for exploration, with the link between activism and resilience identified as an understudied area of research (Asakura, 2019; Frost et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2014). Resilience is no longer framed as an individual attribute, but seen as the individual working within an adaptive, relational, and dynamic process (Bartos & Langdridge, 2019; DiFulvio, 2011; Hillier et al., 2020; Tebbe & Budge, 2022;). With a more ecological understanding of resilience, and a shift towards a collective social responsibility to challenge and change oppressive systems, resistance to such systems can foster resilience, within a cyclical relationship (Scheadler et al., 2022). Activism, in the form of small, everyday acts of resistance, and more overt strategies, emerged as an important means of developing resilience. Schools need to identify and provide LGBTQ+Y and GEY opportunities to take action against oppression (DiFulvio, 2004; Paceley et al., 2021; Saltis et al., 2023). This was an exploratory study as there was little awareness of how resilience related to activism for LGBTQ+Y and GEY. I conducted this review using a thematic synthesis approach (Thomas & Harden, 2008), interpreting data from eight qualitative papers that had been selected via a systematic search of the literature. Implications, relevant to educational settings, were then highlighted.

I conducted my empirical research to explore the factors that influence speakers' adoption or rejection of gender inclusive pronouns. The reason for this focus was that early research highlighted a gap in the literature in terms of any similar UK studies. Considering the known, negative effects of misgendering and the wider social responsibility to become more aware, understanding, and inclusive, it was hoped that this research might highlight where we are at and provide greater understanding of factors that influence people's use of gender inclusive language, and prompt reflection

regarding respectful communication, and behaviour change. Data were collected via an anonymous survey and analysed using binary logistic regression. Implications, relevant to educational settings, were then highlighted.

1.2 Ontology and epistemology

The direction of research, in terms of methodological decision making, is determined by the paradigm adopted by the researcher, which contains certain ontological and epistemological assumptions (Maksimović & Evtimov, 2023; Scotland, 2012). Within the empirical paper, I employed a quantitative methodology, informed by a post-positivist paradigm. Post-positivism values objectivity but recognises that this cannot be completely achieved (Ryan, 2019). From an ontological standpoint, there is an acceptance of one, tangible reality, but that our subjectivity shapes that reality, meaning our understanding of that reality remains incomplete and probabilistic (Maksimović & Evtimov, 2023; Ryan, 2019; Young & Ryan, 2020). From an epistemological standpoint, this then refers to the tentative nature of knowledge and how research can never reach an absolute truth (Kaplan, 2015; Scotland, 2012). By positioning a study in relation to previous work and through systematic hypothesis testing, this may provide the best approximation of a truth, and increase our understanding, at a particular time and in a particular context (Kaplan, 2015; Scotland, 2012; Young & Ryan, 2020). This informed any conclusions I drew from the data, in that it highlighted predominantly exclusive pronoun use within that sample, which may vary with a different sample. Post-positivist research seeks to understand causal relationships and explore attitudes and behaviours (as in the empirical paper), so correlational studies are often used (Scotland, 2012). Research falling under this paradigm is concerned with reducing bias, which was achieved through the study design, using an anonymous survey, and is also concerned with the clear communication of methods to ensure replicability across contexts, which was achieved with the clarity of the methodology section (Young & Ryan, 2020).

Within the systematic review, I employed a qualitative methodology, informed by a critical realist (CR) paradigm. The ontological assumption underpinning this paradigm asserts the existence of an external reality that operates beyond our awareness of it (Zhang, 2022). There is an acceptance that reality is socially constructed (Easton, 2010). This reality has three layers: the empirical which is uppermost and concerned with

subjective experience; the actual, which is concerned with real-world objects and events; then at the real level there are deeper structures and causal mechanisms that produce events at the empirical level (Fletcher, 2017; Stutchbury, 2022). The CR paradigm is highly applicable to the systematic review as it seeks explanations by looking at what individuals can achieve within their social context, so is appropriate for looking at social issues and generating possible solutions (Fletcher, 2017; Stutchbury, 2022). Within critical realism, the epistemological standpoint is one of relativism, asserting that knowledge is fallible, subject to change and can only ever lead to a partial understanding of any social situation (Albert et al., 2020). This fallibility is relevant to my position as a researcher, particularly given the secondary nature of analysis. The primary researchers had to qualify and contextualise the participants' quotes with their interpretations. Whilst these were not coded, they informed my understanding and interpretation of the data, leading to a potential level of abstraction from the original data.

1.3 Reflexivity and axiology

Reflexivity involves engaging in an examination of and critical reflection around one's own assumptions and beliefs and how these might influence the research process (Jamieson et al., 2023). Inextricably linked to this is a consideration of one's axiology: my understanding regarding the role of values and their influence on the knowledge creation process (Biedenbach & Jacobsson, 2016). By highlighting my positionality as a researcher, I will address my axiological position and reflect on how this has influenced the research process.

Positionality refers to how personal values, views and context influence our knowledge and understanding of the world. Firstly, I recognise and acknowledge my 'outsider' position as a heterosexual, cisgender, white woman. This 'outsider' identity, at least in part, determined my choice of this area of research, because gender research represented an area of interest and professional development for me, where I could expand my knowledge and understanding, and apply my values of inclusivity and respect for everyone. These values are deeply rooted, informed by life experience, and result in a commitment within my practice to be respectful and wherever possible try and redress power imbalances and unjust treatment. It is unjust that sexuality and gender expansive youth continue to experience such levels of discrimination and

concomitant poor academic and health outcomes. I believe that society and within that, educational settings, have a collective responsibility to adapt, value and include these individuals. To enact change there needs to be shifts across intra, inter and community levels, to foster acceptance and understanding. Herein lies the value of the knowledge generated within my two studies, while we evidently still have a way to go in terms of inclusivity, there are tangible means by which we can evidence allyship, and I remain hopeful that this can happen.

My outsider identity was not wholly relevant during the data gathering phase of the empirical study because it used an anonymous sample from the general population, so there was no interaction with participants, so my identity and values were not brought to bear. I attempted to reduce bias as much as was possible through planning my analysis and assumption checking prior to running the regression. I also considered my values and assumptions when interpreting the data, given that the results highlighted a predominant use of exclusive language, which runs counter to my personal and professional values of inclusivity and respect. I reflected on this in terms of being compassionate towards individuals who are not yet aware of the psychological benefits of using gender inclusive language, and that social norms take time to develop. Additionally, in line with my values, the methodology was designed to be as inclusive as possible, allowing for free response regarding gender identification and including a diverse range of ethnicities.

I considered my values and assumptions when developing and synthesising my interpretations for the systematic review. I tried to remain as close to the data as possible to privilege participant voices, which extended to a thoughtful process of theme development, as evidenced by a clear thematic map, to highlight the analytical process, from initial codes, to descriptive then analytical themes. There is an acknowledgment that the data were filtered through the primary researchers' lens and then my own. Without the proximity to, and context of, the original data, there is a level of abstraction because of the inferences I make as a researcher, which will necessarily differ to those of another researcher. This highlights that any knowledge produced is a current understanding, linking directly back to the fallibility of knowledge within the CR paradigm.

1.4 Dissemination plan

I have written two research papers with the intention to publish in peer-reviewed journals. I have identified two such potential journals, ‘Gender and Language’ for the empirical paper and the ‘International Journal of Transgender Health’ for the systematic review. ‘Gender and Language’ is currently the only academic journal that specifically addresses the intersection of these two dimensions (journal.equinoxpub.com/GL/about). It is an international peer-reviewed journal that welcomes language-based research on gender and sexuality (journal.equinoxpub.com/GL/about). The ‘International Journal of Transgender Health’ welcomes research in the field of transgender health from a wide range of disciplines. Recent published articles, such as: ‘Nonbinary children’s understanding of their gender’ and ‘Exploring gender diverse young adults’ gender identity development in online LGBTQIA + communities’, highlight how the systematic review would fit within the aim and scope of this journal (www.tandfonline.com//toc/wijt20/current).

Chapter 2 How do LGBTQ+ and Gender Expansive Youth Foster Their Resilience Through Activism?

2.1 Abstract

Research has typically focused on risk rather than resilience in relation to sexuality and gender diverse youth, potentially diminishing their agency and highlighting their resilience as an important area for exploration. Entrenched societal norms mean that stigma pervades, often leading to adverse outcomes for this population. There has been a shift towards a collective social responsibility to change oppressive systems, rather than placing the onus on the individual to become more resilient, with resistance to such systems fostering resilience, within a cyclical relationship (Scheadler et al., 2022). After a systematic search of the literature, thematic synthesis was used to review the selected literature and explored the following question: How do LGBTQ+ and gender expansive youth foster their resilience through activism? The analytical themes that were developed capture how LGBTQ+ and gender expansive youth use activism as a proactive and empowering strategy to navigate and resist societal norms, and to foster change at an individual and societal level, leading to discussion of implications for educational settings.

2.2 https://sotonac.sharepoint.com/teams/ProducingyourthesisinWord/SitePages/Show-the-navigation-pane.aspx?Introduction

There is a complexity at the heart of this study which needs to be acknowledged. The term 'LGBTQ+' conflates sexual and gender identities under one 'umbrella' acronym. During adolescence and onwards LGBTQ+ youth (LGBTQ+ Y) and gender expansive youth (GEY; see Glossary; Abela et al., 2024; Saltis et al., 2023) are attempting to understand, explore, and develop positive sexual and gender identities, however these critical developmental tasks take place in a society shaped by entrenched heteronormative (see Glossary) ideologies, which in turn shape how people view each other and themselves (Frost et al., 2019; Leung, 2021; Van der Toorn et al., 2020).

Individuals with diverse sexual and gender identities will necessarily share common experiences related to societal stigma and discrimination precisely because the norms that they transgress conflate gender and sexuality. However, it is important to recognise that gender and sexuality represent distinct yet interconnected aspects of a person's identity, with the acknowledgement that GEY may not identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (or any other orientation), and individuals with diverse sexual identities may not identify as gender diverse (GD). Adolescents might also identify as LGBTQ+ and GD, simultaneously occupying two socially marginalised groups, with this status intersecting with other aspects of identity, such as age and race/ethnicity, which can position them at greater risk of discrimination and emotional distress as compared to peers who only identify with one stigmatised identity (Eisenberg et al., 2019; Jackson, 2006). In this study, the term *gender expansive* is used due to its inherent inclusivity, as it encompasses a broader range of identities, as compared to GD, which can perhaps still feel somewhat categorical (Abela et al., 2024). As a term, *gender expansive* reflects a more fluid understanding of gender, as it can refer to anyone whose gender expression differs from what is expected and is therefore not consistent with, and can be seen to challenge, socially prescribed gender norms and roles (Abela et al., 2024; Keo-Meier & Ehrensaft, 2018).

Studies often subsume sexual and gender identities under the LGBTQ acronym (Asakura, 2019; Scheadler et al., 2022). This is also true in Robinson & Schmitz' (2021) critical review of 'LGBTQ youth' research. This subsuming might risk oversimplifying the diverse experiences and challenges faced by individuals who are represented by the acronym and obscuring the experiences of those who are not represented (Eliason, 2014). However, considering the myriad of identities and experiences formed within a variety of social contexts which are difficult to uniquely capture, it makes sense to combine and examine them under one acronym, given that this is what informs the social context against which their resilience and activism stands. Congruent with prior research and due to a dearth of relevant literature that considers these groups discretely, in the current review LGBTQ+Y and GEY's experiences of activism and resilience are considered alongside each other, with the data coded as a homogenous group.

It has been claimed that sexual and gender diversity has largely been overlooked within research on resilience (Asakura, 2019; Singh et al., 2014). Research has typically

focused on at-risk framings of LGBTQ+Y and GEY, which can obscure their unique strengths, with little examination of their resilience or engagement in activism and the link between these two (Jones & Hillier, 2013; Mustanski et al., 2011, Schmitz & Tyler, 2019; Zimmerman, 2013). A better understanding of the relationship between activism and resilience would support communities to encourage engagement in activism to promote positive well-being (Scheadler et al., 2022).

With reference to minority stress theory, (MST; Meyer, 2003, 2015) LGBTQ+Y and GEY disproportionately experience poor health, heightened social stress (in terms of high rates of prejudice, discrimination, and victimisation), and adverse developmental and academic outcomes compared to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts (Frost et al., 2019; Norris & Orchowski, 2020; Tebbe & Budge, 2022; Toomey, 2021). Stigma operates at the structural level (via societal norms), the interpersonal level (via received hostility) and at the personal level, where it can shape individuals' cognitive, affective, and behavioural processes (White Hughto et al., 2015). Individuals can experience anticipatory anxiety around hostility and therefore avoid interactions (White Hughto et al., 2015). However, an overemphasis on risk can pathologise and perpetuate discriminatory and disempowering perspectives regarding LGBTQ+Y and GEY, undermining their agency (Hillier et al., 2020; McBride & Neary, 2021).

In a recent reframing of MST, to focus more on the socio-ideological context, 'stress' results from dominant ideologies and societal norms that serve to privilege some, seek to define others and confer minority positions (Riggs & Treharne, 2017; White Hughto et al., 2015). This refers to a more social justice-oriented and ecological understanding of LGBTQ+Y and GEY's resilience, with a focus on intersectionality and influential contextual factors, with a collective social responsibility to change oppressive systems rather than place the responsibility on the individual to become more resilient (Asakura, 2016; Asakura, 2019; Bartos & Langdridge, 2019; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Hart et al., 2016; Meyer, 2015; Robinson & Schmitz, 2021; Ungar, 2012; Zimmerman, 2013). This leads to a deeper understanding of how societal structures and power dynamics impact individual well-being and resilience. Additionally, Robinson and Schmitz (2021) suggest a shift from a resilience to resistance framework, as such a focus would expose and challenge the dominant, oppressive structures that need changing. It is suggested that resilience and resistance may influence one another, in that resistance to oppression may foster resilience (Robinson

& Schmitz, 2021). It has also been suggested that GEY's resistance to oppression is a form of resilience (Paceley et al., 2021).

Resilience remains a difficult term to operationalise, with a lack of clarity or consistency in this regard. Resilience has historically been risk focused, with the notion of individual-level attributes that may, or may not, enable individuals to 'bounce back' from adversity (Bartos & Langridge, 2019; Singh, 2013). Within an ecological framing, resilience refers to the interaction between the individual and their environment for optimal development (Ungar, 2013; Ungar, 2011a). Resilience is when individuals engage in behaviours that bring them closer to the resources (such as groups where they can develop skills or opportunities for activism) necessary to flourish (Ungar, 2013; Ungar, 2011a; Zimmerman, 2013). In this way, resilience is no longer an attribute or accomplishment and more of an adaptive, relational, and dynamic process, with LGBTQ+Y and GEY employing a range of strategies and drawing upon a range of (internal and external) resources as an antidote to risk and ongoing threats (Bartos & Langdridge, 2019; DiFulvio, 2011; Hillier et al., 2020; Tebbe & Budge, 2022). Whilst scholarly understanding might conceptualise resilience from an ecological perspective, perceiving it as a dynamic process, with the onus for change placed on society at large, this is not necessarily true for LGBTQ+Y and GEY's perception of themselves. Resilience is often subjectively understood, seen as an individual's responsibility and capacity to cope with adversity (Schmitz & Tyler, 2019; Zeeman et al., 2017).

Identity, it has been suggested, is both a site of resistance and source of resilience, with self-definition an example of a resistance strategy (Wagaman, 2016). Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) is relevant here, as membership of the in-group, along with the shared beliefs and values that that provides, can fulfil one's fundamental need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In Wagaman's (2016) study, a participant highlighted that drawing upon and reframing life adversity, to become an agent of change, supported their sense of self and gave them purpose. Ultimately, participants wanted recognition for their contributions, not just their identity labels, highlighting how activism can become an important source of identity and belonging (Bartos & Langdridge, 2019; Wagaman, 2016). This is echoed by participants in Saltis et al.'s (2023) study, who assert that their gender identity is "not the most important thing" about them, and that they want to be treated as, "just human".

LGBTQ+Y and GEY's resilience can be seen at individual, interpersonal, and community levels, with overarching structural (policy) level influences (DiFulvio, 2011; Paceley et al., 2021; Szymanski & Gonzalez, 2020). At an individual level, resilience promoting factors might include self-acceptance and/or identity pride, self-definition, and hope (Matsuno & Israel, 2018; Scheadler et al., 2022; Singh, 2013; Singh et al., 2011). With reference to the relational nature of resilience, at a community level, resilience promoting factors might include social/school support, community belonging, participating in activism, and having (and being) positive role models (Matsuno & Israel, 2018; Singh et al., 2011). These factors can be at once protective and problematic, as will be discussed further below (Bartos & Langdridge, 2019).

Participating in activism, as a response to abuse and oppression, represents one potential pathway, among many, to resilience (DiFulvio, 2011; Ginwright, 2010; Job et al., 2023; Jones & Hillier, 2013). Becoming aware of oppression and engaging in activism fosters self-determination by encouraging individuals to claim power and control over their social condition (Ginwright, 2010). Activism is therefore intentional action by an individual (or group) to bring about social or political change (Brenman & Sanchez, 2014). Activism is possibility-focussed and can include individual or group acts, that are either direct or indirect, and can be small acts of everyday activism, or larger in scale, with a personal, social, political, or cultural focus (Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010; Ginwright, 2010; Madsen, 2013;). Activism, as a means to look after oneself and others is, like resilience, a relational experience, which can foster self-confidence and a sense of community, which are both strong protective factors (Hagen et al., 2018). Prior research has identified self-definition, not only as a resilience promoting factor, but as an act of resistance (Singh et al., 2014; Wagaman, 2016). Transgressing gender norms has also been highlighted as a form of activism (McBride & Neary, 2021). Activism might, of course, be more overt, such as: educating others on LGBTQ+ rights, attending protests, or involve students actively challenging institutional heteronormativity to positively effect change within the school environment by, for example, challenging school officials when faced with transphobia, by starting a group, making speeches, or helping with education against discrimination (Berkman, 2016; Jones & Hillier, 2013; McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2017; Paceley et al., 2021).

Prior research has identified adultism as a threat to resilience (Bell, 2003; Singh et al., 2014). This refers to the negative attitudes and beliefs held by adults towards young

people, meaning that youth do not always feel believed or 'heard' and are not afforded adequate respect regarding their own decisions, or their capacity to be powerful agents, thus eroding their resilience and leaving adults in a position of privilege and power (Bell, 2003; Dejong & Love, 2015; Singh et al., 2014; Singh, 2013). Whilst some LGBTQ+Y and GEY may not want to engage in activism, irrespective of such power imbalances, it is possible that this adultism might be internalised and erode any motivation to act. Whilst examples of activism are highlighted, the literature does not appear to reflect on opportunities and facilitators for LGBTQ+Y and GEY, and their allies, to engage in activism. However, one example of every day activism emerging in UK secondary schools is in the implementation of inclusive, near-peer gender and sexuality workshops, in support of the delivery of the Relationships and Sex Education Curriculum (Boyer & Wood, 2023). These establish a safe, relational space for young people to explore how gender, sexuality and power intersect, for themselves and others, and thereby foster hope, understanding and empathy and effect social change (Boyer & Wood, 2023). This is a vital, supportive opportunity to mitigate confusion, in a society where young people are having to navigate the intersection of varied, conflicting, and heavily politicized gender perspectives (Allen et al., 2022).

Prior research has identified that participation in activism, at least for sexuality and gender diverse adults, is positively related to psychological wellbeing, through increased community connection and more adaptive coping in times of stress (Chan & Mak, 2021; Szymanski et al., 2023; Velez & Moradi, 2016). For LGBTQ+Y and GEY, this link remains under researched (Asakura, 2019; Frost et al., 2019). Frost et al. (2019) found that, for LGBTQ+Y and GEY, faced with economic precarity, a life stressor that increases exposure to marginalisation and discrimination, activism was positively associated with greater well-being. Scheadler et al.'s (2022) study explored how grassroots activism impacted resilience among LGBTQ+ adults (aged 18-30). Their findings suggest a cyclical relationship between activism and resilience, such that there are mutual increases. Participants' level of outness was also an interconnected factor, such that living openly and more authentically inspired individuals to advocate for others, which led to increased community connection and self-confidence (Scheadler et al., 2022).

However, research has also highlighted the negative aspects of engagement in activism, citing the potential for emotional fatigue and burnout (Scheadler et al., 2022).

Furthermore, Breslow et al. (2015) suggest that involvement in activism may expose gender expansive individuals to higher levels of discrimination, which might lead to burnout. With reference to the confidence and identity pride that facilitates activism, prior research has highlighted that internalized heterosexism is predictive of less engagement in activism, suggesting a level of concern at publicly identifying oneself (Montagno & Garrett-Walker, 2022).

Young people are inherently marginalised due to their age and other intersecting identities, so they require a means of resisting marginalisation to protect their wellbeing, with activism offering such a means. To better understand this relationship, a systematic literature review was carried out to explore the following question, "*How do LGBTQ+ and gender expansive youth foster their resilience through activism?"* Included studies were then analysed using thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008), eliciting analytical themes for discussion.

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 Selection and search strategy

Following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses (PRISMA) approach (Page et al., 2021; Figure 1.), a systematic search of six online databases (PsychINFO, CINAHL, ERIC, Medline, SCOPUS and PROQUEST dissertations and theses) was conducted using the following search terms: (activism or resistance or "collective action") AND (lgb* or lesbian or gay or homosexual or bisexual or transgender or queer or "sexual minority" or "gender minority" or "gender diverse" or "gender questioning") AND (resilienc* or coping). These databases were chosen due to their scope (the inclusion of any grey literature) and relevance to Psychology and education.

All searches were conducted in January 2024, with no limits applied according to the date of publication. The search yielded 514 articles, with 210 duplicate articles removed. Of the 304 remaining articles, 222 were excluded, during a process of title and abstract screening, whilst adhering to the inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 1). This yielded 82 articles, of which three were unable to be retrieved, so 79 articles were assessed for eligibility via full text screening. Seventy-one articles were excluded,

leaving seven qualitative articles and one quantitative article. One separate qualitative paper was included that had been found via a reference search. With eight qualitative articles and only one quantitative article, it was decided that to support the process of thematic synthesis, the quantitative one would be removed from consideration, leaving eight qualitative articles for synthesis.

Table 1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Journal articles - empirical papers that have a quantitative or qualitative design, and relevant grey literature (theses and dissertations).	Books, essays, reviews, or commentaries.
Activism is the central topic of interest and participants who have participated in some form of activism, either in person or online	Where participants have not participated in some form of activism (individual or group acts, that are either direct or indirect, and can be small acts, or larger in scale, with a personal, social, political, or cultural focus (Madsen, 2013)
Participants must identify as LGBTQ+ and/or gender expansive	Participants do not identify as LGBTQ+ or gender expansive
Article must include discussion about, or some measure of, resilience.	There is no discussion of or measure of resilience.
Exploration of participants' first-hand experiences (i.e., not those of family members or friends)	Perspectives discussed are not first-hand accounts.
Context – within education (secondary and tertiary settings) or within the community.	Context – outside of an educational or community setting and might involve an irrelevant context, e.g. physical activity.
Pertains to youth/young adults (up to 25 years old).	Extends beyond age range of young adults and looks at an aging population.
Articles in English	Articles not in English.

2.3.2 Quality assurance

The selected articles were all quality assessed using the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research checklist (SRQR; O'Brien et al., 2014; Appendix A). This checklist prompts a 'yes' or 'no' decision for each element, with no applied scoring system. Where there was not enough evidence to confidently respond to an element, this was recorded as 'can't tell' (CT). This process supported an appraisal of the methodological rigour of the selected papers, with the information tabulated below (Table 2; Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research, SRQR; O'Brien et al., 2014). The included studies contextualised the problem and had clear research questions and used appropriate methodology and design in relation to these questions, highlighting the rigour of the research.

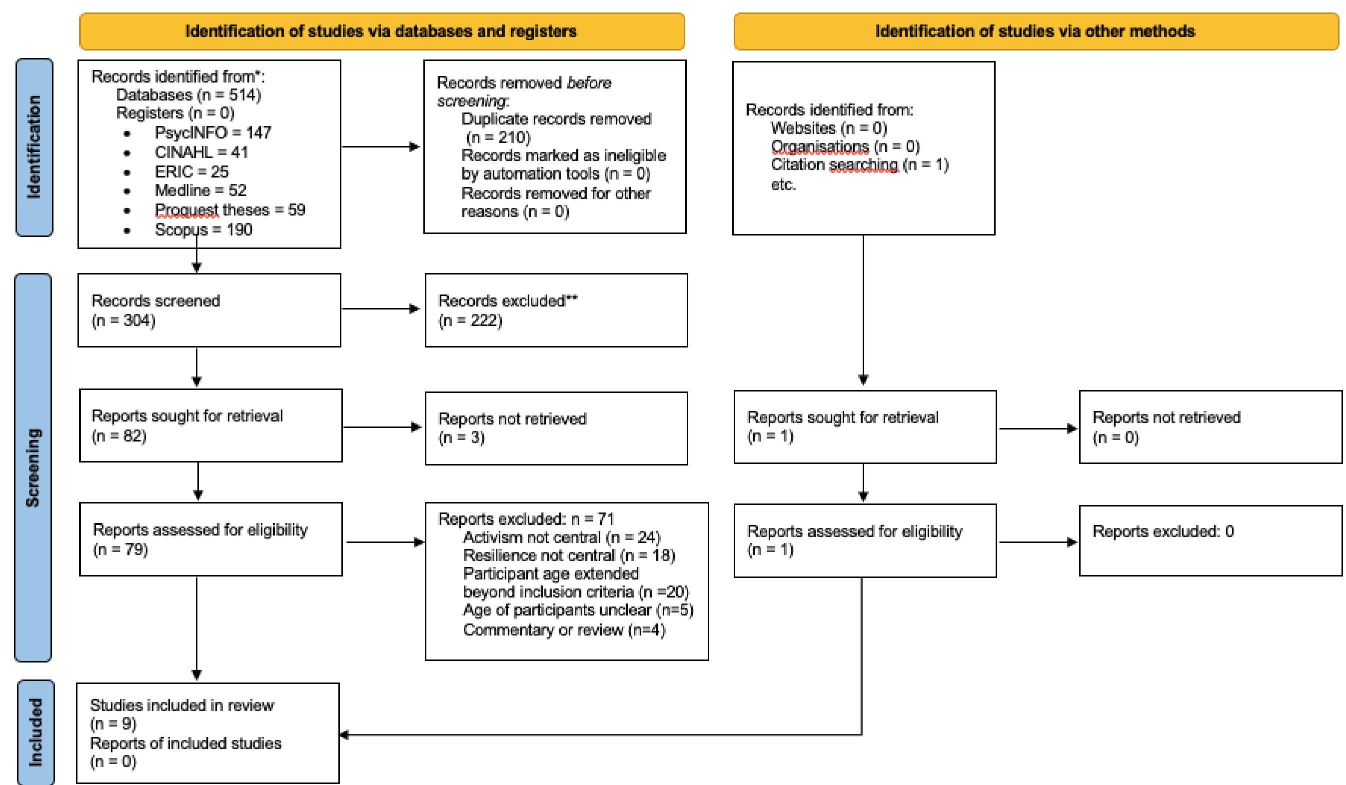


Figure 1 Systematic search strategy using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses (PRISMA) approach (Page et al., 2021).

Table 2 Quality Appraisal of Studies

	Title: Concise description of the nature and topic of the study	Abstract: Summary of key elements of the study	Problem formulation	Purpose or research question	Qualitative approach and research paradigm	Researcher characteristics and reflexivity	Context	Sampling strategy	Ethical issues pertaining to human subjects	Data collection methods	Data collection instruments and technologies	Number & characteristics of participants, documents, or events included	Data processing	Data analysis	Techniques to enhance trustworthiness	Synthesis and interpretation	Links to empirical data	Integration with prior work, implications, transferability & contribution(s)	Limitations
Barringer et al., (2023)	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	CT	Y	Y	CT	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Berkman (2008)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Cisneros (2015)	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
DiFulvio (2004)	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Haffejee & Wiebesiek (2021)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	CT	CT	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Paceley et al., (2021)	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Saltis et al. (2023)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	CT	Y	N	Y	CT	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Sostre et al., (2023)	CT	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	CT	Y	Y	Y	CT	Y	Y	CT	CT	Y	Y

*Y: Yes; N: No; CT: Can't tell (basic or incomplete information provided).

2.3.3 Data synthesis and extraction

The eight appraised papers were analysed using thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008) with data coded using NVivo 14. The current review question seeks to understand the relationship between activism and resilience. An inductive approach towards data analysis was deemed most suitable, given the 'how' of the research question, in order to explore and understand subjective meanings, diverse perspectives, consider contextual factors and generate nuanced interpretations (Britten et al., 2002; Thomas & Harden, 2008;). Thematic synthesis was used as it is an epistemologically flexible approach (McMahon et al., 2022) and aligns with a critical realist epistemology that deems all knowledge to be fallible, as it is time and context-dependent, is based on personal experience, and is socially constructed (Albert et al., 2020; Easton, 2010). Within the critical realist paradigm, exploration, in terms of seeking explanations, is central to generating knowledge, which fits with this review's investigation of LGBTQ+Y and GEY's experiences of activism, with the purpose of knowledge creation to improve conditions (Fletcher, 2017; Stutchbury, 2022). Additionally, any exploration of participant experiences entails interpretation, with understandings created through close interaction with the data, and bringing our own experiences to bear, which is in

line with the understanding that any knowledge created is fallible, as my interpretations would differ to those of the next researcher (Albert et al., 2020; Easton, 2010).

The results or findings sections of each of the eight papers were the focus for the analysis. Only participant quotations were coded. This was to respect and maintain the centrality of the participants' voice, rather than those of the initial researchers. This also supported a focus on only data being coded that could answer the review question. Where there were named participants, for example, that were over the age range (13-25), any attributable data were not included in the analysis.

A thematic synthesis was conducted adhering to Thomas and Harden's (2008) approach, which involved initial 'line-by-line' coding of the data, the development of 'descriptive themes'; and the generation of 'analytical themes' (see Figure 2). Codes were created based on the meaning and content of participant quotes, with some quotes being attributed several codes. New codes were added, and existing ones refined during this process, representing a process of data and code checking which ensured a consistency of interpretation (Thomas & Harden, 2008). This process resulted in 36 initial codes. The second stage of the synthesis included looking for any similarities or differences between the initial codes to determine new groupings. These new groupings had new codes, (descriptive themes) attributed to them to capture the meaning of the code grouping. This stage elicited seven descriptive themes, with the distribution of these themes across the papers shown in Table 3. For the third stage of the analysis, Thomas and Harden (2008) describe 'going beyond' the content of the original papers. This involves using descriptive themes to generate new meaning and interpretation in the development and exploration of overarching analytic themes, to answer the review question (Britten et al., 2002). Within this study, this involved synthesis and interpretation of the descriptive themes, to explore and attempt to explain, how LGBTQ+Y and GEY foster their resilience through activism.

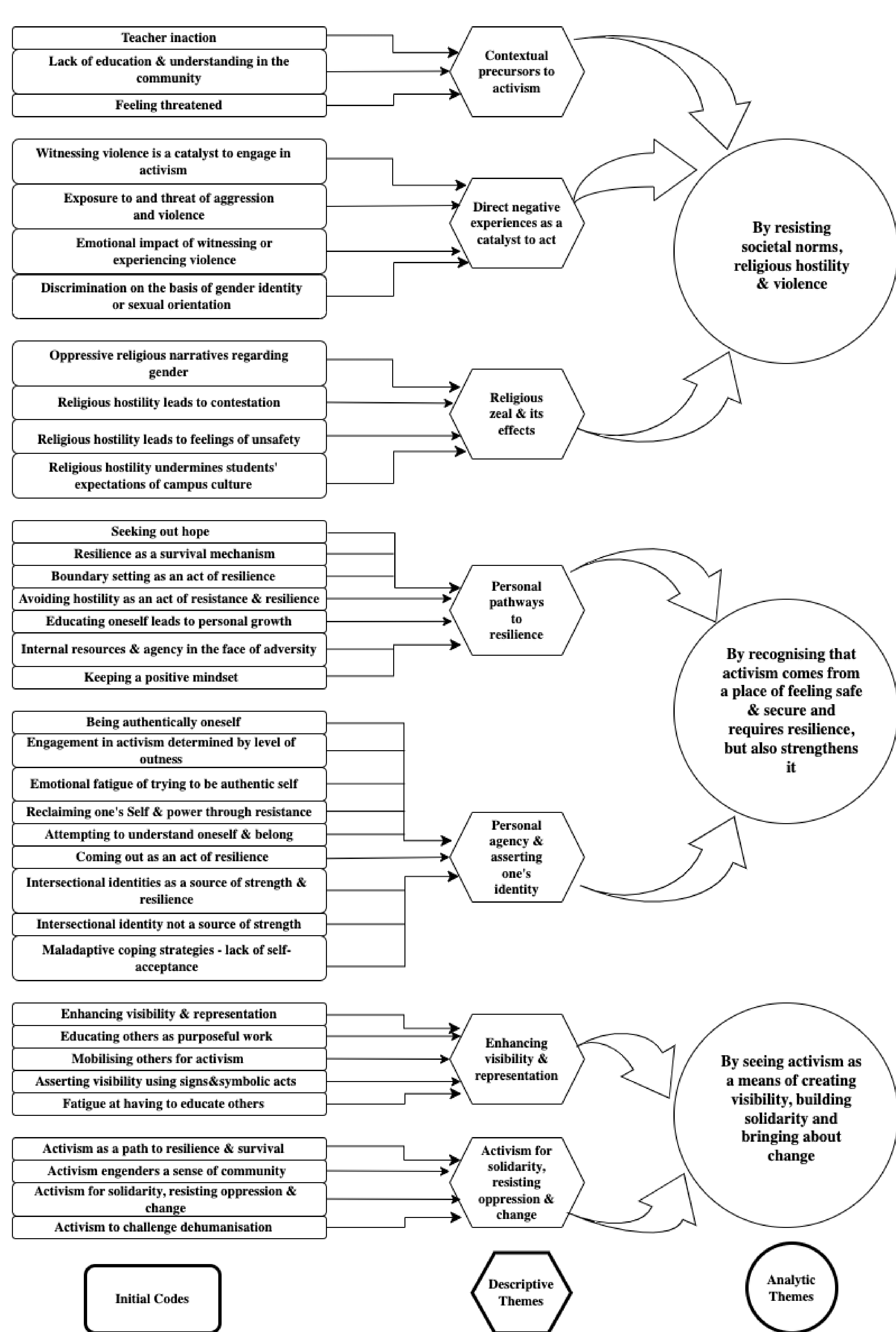

Teacher inaction
Lack of education & understanding in the community
Feeling threatened
Contextual precursors to activism
Witnessing violence is a catalyst to engage in activism
Exposure to and threat of aggression and violence
Emotional impact of witnessing or experiencing violence
Discrimination on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation
Direct negative experiences as a catalyst to act
Oppressive religious narratives regarding gender
Religious hostility leads to contestation
Religious hostility leads to feelings of unsafety
Religious hostility undermines students' expectations of campus culture
Religious zeal & its effects
By resisting societal norms, religious hostility & violence
Seeking out hope
Resilience as a survival mechanism
Boundary setting as an act of resilience
Avoiding hostility as an act of resistance & resilience
Educating oneself leads to personal growth
Internal resources & agency in the face of adversity
Keeping a positive mindset
Personal pathways to resilience
Being authentically oneself
Engagement in activism determined by level of outness
Emotional fatigue of trying to be authentic self
Reclaiming one's Self & power through resistance
Attempting to understand oneself & belong
Coming out as an act of resilience
Intersectional identities as a source of strength & resilience
Intersectional identity not a source of strength
Maladaptive coping strategies - lack of self-acceptance
Personal agency & asserting one's identity
By recognising that activism comes from a place of feeling safe & secure and requires resilience, but also strengthens it
Enhancing visibility & representation
Educating others as purposeful work
Mobilising others for activism
Asserting visibility using signs&symbolic acts
Fatigue at having to educate others
Enhancing visibility & representation
Activism as a path to resilience & survival
Activism engenders a sense of community
Activism for solidarity, resisting oppression & change
Activism to challenge dehumanisation
Activism for solidarity, resisting oppression & change
By seeing activism as a means of creating visibility, building solidarity and bringing about change
Initial Codes
Descriptive Themes
Analytic Themes

Figure 2 Thematic Map highlighting synthesis process (L-R) from stage 1 to 3.

Table 3 Descriptive Themes Within Each Study

Descriptive themes	Barringer et al., (2023)	Berkman (2008)	Cisneros (2015)	DiFulvio (2004)	Haffejee & Wiebesiek (2021)	Paceley et al., (2021)	Saltis et al. (2023)	Sostre et al., (2023)
Contextual Precursors to Activism	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Direct negative experiences as a catalyst to act	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Religious zeal & its effects	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Personal pathways to resilience	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Personal agency and asserting one's identity.	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Enhancing visibility & representation	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Activism for solidarity, resisting oppression & change	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Note. Y= descriptive theme evident in the study, N = descriptive theme not evident in the study.

2.4 Synthesis

2.4.1 Synthesis overview

This synthesis comprised a total of eight papers, published between 2004 and 2023. Four of the papers were qualitative studies, based in the USA, three of the papers were dissertations also based in the USA, and the final paper was a single case study, based in South Africa (see Appendix B for a data extraction table).

Three analytical themes were developed in an interpretative process from the descriptive themes, which had, in turn, been developed inductively from the initial codes (see Figure 2). The three analytical themes represent a stage of interpretation and explanation that went beyond the included studies (Thomas & Harden, 2008), and were ultimately developed in response to the research question, "*How do LGBTQ+ and Gender Expansive Youth Foster Their Resilience Through Activism?"* Collectively, the themes capture how LGBTQ+Y and GEY use activism as a proactive and empowering strategy to navigate and resist societal norms, to foster change at an individual and societal level. The themes were worded to encompass and respond to the 'how' of the research question, and included: 'By resisting societal norms, religious hostility and violence, as an act of resilience', 'By recognising that activism comes from a place of feeling safe and secure, requires resilience, but also strengthens it', and 'By seeing activism as a means of creating visibility, building solidarity and bringing about change'. This first analytical theme incorporates contextual precursors to activism, personal negative experiences, and responses to religious zeal. Whilst these factors provide a response to the research question, it is acknowledged that they also provide a response to the implicit 'why' element of the question. It stands to reason that prior experiences might be used as justification (conscious or otherwise) to act.

2.4.2 Analytical themes

2.4.2.1 'By resisting societal norms, religious hostility and violence'.

Within the reviewed studies, the notion of threat was pervasive, with participants sharing their feelings of anticipatory fear, and occasionally terror, at the prospect of interpersonal violence, in response to their sexual and/or gender identity (Cisneros, 2015; DiFulvio, 2004; Paceley et al., 2021; Sostre et al., 2023), with reference also to the

level of societal non-acceptance of their gender identity (Sostre et al., 2023). Violence was explicitly referred to as a catalyst to act, as highlighted by these words from a 24-year-old, bisexual, Black, genderqueer person from New York, sharing their compulsion to speak up regarding young Black Trans and Gender Diverse (TGD) people being the target of violence:

You have to not keep quiet. You have to talk about it, even if it's through social media. Have to be bold, and you have to be seen as someone who's standing up for those who belong with you. (Sostre et al., 2023).

Similarly, personal pain can be motivating, with this participant, Sean (a 19-year-old, white, gay male), translating their anger at institutionalised violence into action, to resist societal norms:

I think sometimes it comes out in a lot of anger and in a lot of...probably just a lot of anger for me. Like I think that is why I get up on my soapbox a lot and that's why I get so vocal because it just...my anger is not about me being gay, it's about how the world sees it and how people react and why I can't just be myself. And I always have to worry and I'm always a little bit scared. That's what makes me so mad. For me it's always been about fighting...challenging the system, challenging society in that aspect. (DiFulvio, 2004).

In a similar way that instances of verbal violence can have a significant emotional impact on the recipient (DiFulvio, 2004), oppressive religious narratives provide further negative messages that can be internalised, due to the tension or contradiction that exists between such narratives and individuals' sexual and/or gender identities. For one participant, Jack (a 23-year-old, gay, Latino) who was raised in a religious community, he was clear on his feelings of unsafety regarding religion, stating that it was "... never really a safe haven" (Berkman, 2016). However, for Carter, despite the cognitive dissonance and tension created at the intersection of his faith and gender identity, he manages to resist the 'you're going to hell' narrative, by saying, "well, this is me. I don't really believe that God would make me this way if he was gonna hate me", highlighting a level of resistance and resilience to the negativity (Paceley et al., 2021).

Religious rhetoric was further depicted as hurtful, particularly when it encroached on a space that was assumed to previously be safe, i.e., a college campus, as this student alludes to, with the presence of preachers on campus:

The experience was genuinely uncomfortable and made me fearful to even be near the [communal area] . . . It wasn't the first time I was harassed by them. Most of it was just hurtful hate messages that I've been hearing my whole life, but having to hear it somewhere I thought was a safe place made me downtrodden. They use the [communal area] to push a hateful message and I think [the university] would be much safer without that. I know I would've liked to not have to deal with that kind of hate. (Barringer et al., 2023).

This oppressive presence was met with overt contestation from the president of the campus LGBTQ activist group, as he protested the unsafe presence with a sign and said, "we have to defend ourselves on a daily basis — verbally, mentally and physically," (Barringer et al., 2023).

As a counterpoint to these acts of resistance, there is a level of implicit powerlessness in the face of inertia. For one participant, through inaction in response to a complaint, teachers normalised transphobic aggression, despite the participant, "becoming annoying to them when I ask what is happening on the case that happened here at school and nobody is cooperating" (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021). Similarly, another participant, Ethan (a 21-year-old, white, queer male) shared an example of apparent school collusion:

The two of us were sitting there and there was a substitute teacher who was also a priest or a preacher, a pastor?...He was talking and he said, "I would rather have my son be a rapist than a faggot." And I remember me and my friend looked at each other and were like, "What do we do right now? What can we do?" So we went to the principal's office, and they just gave us the runaround, and basically, after a while made it really clear to us that it wasn't worth our while to be troublemakers, and it was never dealt with. (DiFulvio, 2004)

This serves to highlight the difficulties, in terms of power imbalances, that LGBTQ+Y and GEY can face with regard to adultism, with the addition of potentially discriminatory teacher beliefs as another explanatory factor for their inertia (Kurian, 2020). Contextual

factors drive both passive and more active resistance, but these acts remain small in relation to the level of aggression and hostility LGBTQ+Y and GEY receive. These small acts might also be indicative of a lack of perceived opportunity, and support, to engage in larger scale activism.

2.4.2.2 'By recognising that activism comes from a place of feeling safe and secure, requires resilience, but also strengthens it'.

This second analytical theme incorporates personal pathways to resilience, and personal agency and identity negotiation.

Within some studies, resilience was framed as an innate characteristic necessary for survival, determined by the participant's experience of having to navigate the imposed limitations of multiple-marginalised identities (Cisneros, 2015). Josh, a 25- year-old queer Mexican man, alludes to the emotional effects of existing within a rejecting society, but through self-definition resilience persists, despite this, allowing space for hope and change:

I feel like if anything, that is what undocuqueer (see Glossary) *resembles. It is like a psychological battle, a spiritual psychological battle of trying to define a condition, an identity that is marginalized all the time, structurally and everything. Yeah, I am surprised people don't go bananas because it is a lot of pressure. If you think about it, dude this is fucked up. But there is always that resilience and that hope that we are striving to make things a little better.* (Cisneros, 2015).

Resilience was also framed as resulting from engagement in activism (Barringer et al., 2023; Berkman, 2016; Cisneros, 2015; DiFulvio, 2004; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Paceley et al., 2021; Saltis et al., 2023; Sostre et al., 2023) that gave the participant strength, as Paris (a 24-year-old, gay, Mexican male) stated:

I got very active in school and very engaged with theater and very engaged with music, and very engaged politically. None of my energy focused on the fact that I wasn't enough for the men in my family. I think that it really instilled an importance of resilience into who I am as a person that I still live by. It really caused me, it really forced me to be resilient as a person and strong-willed, and to say that, ok, well if that's not gonna work then I have to do something else. Because I knew that my family was— as far as the men

went—they weren't gonna respond to me very well as a person and so I just had to go through it and just like stick it out almost. (Berkman, 2016).

Similarly, for another participant, Jesse, empowerment to embrace their LGBTQ identity came from their activist efforts within the immigrant rights movement. This personal growth is suggestive of a level of resilience:

… before that I was very oblivious because I didn't want to think about it. I didn't want to think about me being undocumented so I pretended not to be, and I was good at that, but the queer was like present… being queer was never going to change. So that is what I had more trouble accepting and figuring out, how to navigate what it meant within the spaces, until I got in the immigrant movement where I was like, wow this plays a big role in my life, and a lot of the identity that I have is because I am undocumented. (Cisneros, 2015).

The potentially transformative effects of engaging in activism are particularly highlighted by two participants. A 25-year-old, queer, Black, nonbinary person from Texas, is explicit in this regard:

And I think that [activism] has added, like lots of value to my life, probably that I can't even measure, you know, it's not a number. It's probably just like a feeling … I think that it has improved my well-being in the sense that it has made me a better person. (Sostre et al., 2023).

That activism can provide a sense of safety, which can be an enabler, or driver for the individual to be their authentic self, is encapsulated in this 19-year-old, queer, bisexual, Black and Native American, two-spirit trans man from California's words:

I have like two very strong core passions that just like push me to be me and like to be out there, which is community, which is of course like the activism and keeping up with friends and family and sharing resources and all that stuff. (Sostre et al., 2023)

Participants shared several strategies they employed, representing personal, or interpersonal acts of resistance that foster resilience, or strategies to maintain resilience for activism. One such strategy was seeking out hope, which, when considered within the context of a society that consistently negates one's identity or its validity, can be seen as an act of resistance (Paceley et al., 2021; Sostre et al., 2023).

This hope seeking, which is linked to maintaining a positive mindset and acts as a coping strategy, came in the form of youth following positive gender diverse role models on social media, or in real life. This is highlighted by Blake, when reflecting on how several transgender figures in his community, state and nationally, were elected to public office, saying, "(This) makes me really excited because times are changing, maybe I'll be able to do something like that someday. It makes me hopeful" (Paceley et al., 2021).

Participants shared that they actively avoided negativity within the media, to maintain their mental health (Sostre et al., 2023). This personal boundary setting also extended to maintaining resilience, given the amount of work and stamina needed to engage in activism, by saying "no", as explained by a 25-year-old, queer, Black, nonbinary person from Texas:

This year I had to learn kind of like the art of saying no, even when I really care about stuff. Lately, I've been exercising my need to say no. Because I was doing ... just like a lot of free labor. A lot of stuff that needs to be done, right, like building momentum for movements ... but it's honestly like, I still need to survive as well. (Sostre et al., 2023)

In another example of an act of resistance and resilience, participants also actively avoided interpersonal hostility regarding their identity and/or wider LGBTQ issues, in this way resisting being subjected to others' prejudice, as Benton explains:

It doesn't help like progress anything I guess, but it helps me get through it. So I'm not bettering the community, but I'm trying to survive it. (Paceley et al., 2021).

Relatedly, another personal pathway to resilience was the maintenance of a positive mindset, with one participant deciding, "to accept who I am and face my life head on" (Dee; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021) and other participants resisting any hostile messages with positive self-talk and affirmations (Paceley et al., 2021; Berkman, 2016). For example, Noel, who tells themself, "I am good . . . I am good, because even if someone says I'm bad, I am good. I know that I'm good" (Paceley et al., 2021).

This second analytical theme also incorporated notions of personal agency and identity negotiation, all of which are inextricably linked to one's capacity to engage in activism. A core process of resilience, as suggested by DiFulvio (2004) is the reclaiming of the Self, which is achieved partly through connection with others, but also through resistance,

thus connoting agency and power. This reclamation thread was in evidence in several of the papers, as participants resisted hostile societal norms and strived to live as their authentic selves (Berkman, 2016; Cisneros, 2015; DiFulvio, 2004; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Paceley et al., 2021). This resistance is particularly evidenced by Norah's pride-filled explanation of his gender expression:

My mom kind of equates it to being Clark Kent. I have to wake up every day and . . . I'm awesome and great, and the body I picture in my head is not the one that everyone else is seeing. So, I work as hard as I can and be as brave as I can to just say, "This is who I am" and try to put it out there every day . . . I think the defining moment was going out and being like "I'm wearing boy's underwear now. That's for me, I don't care what any people think. I'm wearing boy's underwear cause I'm a boy. Y'all can suck it!" (Paceley et al., 2021).

The importance of living authentically is reflected in Dee's declaration (below) and is reflected in the emotional cost of *not* living in this way, as alluded to by Dee when she stated that, "it was like I had died during that time.... during that time I was pretending, I was not doing well." (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021):

So I was like ok, you know what, what they are saying I don't care, I am getting out of this life and I am living my life, living my true self...I started coming back again and being me ... So I am willing to sacrifice everything to just live my life and be happy. (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021).

For Dee, this sense of empowerment and agency led to action, approaching the school to try and change the system for her:

I started to dress and do my hair the way that I feel comfortable. I went to the Learner Support Agent at my school, and the Life Orientation Teacher and Principal and asked them if I could wear the slacks that are part of the girls' uniform instead of the trousers that are part of the boys' uniform. (Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021).

Relatedly, Theresa, a queer Mexican American female, secure in her queer and intersectional identity, highlights her emerging interest and engagement in social justice issues, for the benefit of herself and others:

I'm not envious of same-sex couples, but in the freedom that they have. But at the same time, it has also brought me more in terms of feminism and equality for others, and equality for everyone—and it's really brought to light problems of other minorities, like racial minorities. It's really made me want to learn more about discrimination and equality and bringing that forward. It's even made me interested in politics… but it's very important to me that I know that I'm helping someone. I guess that's both a strength and a weakness because I find that if I feel that I'm not helping someone, I feel very useless, but at the same time, I think I gain purpose and energy from helping—you know? I wonder if that's a strength. . . . I don't know if maybe someone out there is afraid as well. Maybe—I don't know— maybe this will help them too. (Berkman, 2016)

Coming out has been framed as an act of resistance and resilience; resistance to oppressive power structures that enforce invisibility and marginalisation, and resilience in terms of reclaiming one's power in the face of such oppression (Cisneros, 2015; DiFulvio, 2004). Related to the strand of living authentically, 'coming out' represents a liberation from the stress of identity concealment, as expressed by Elias, a 23-year-old genderqueer immigrant:

I wasn't happy with what I was doing. I was trying to be someone I wasn't and I was always trying to act super straight. I was hanging out with people and was basically trying to act like a bad ass, but it wasn't working for me. I was getting really depressed. I didn't want to do anything. It just didn't feel right, so I decided to come out. (Cisneros, 2015).

Identity negotiation is a vital consideration regarding engagement in activism. Confidence and one's level of outness can determine one's level of engagement (Scheadler et al., 2022). Berkman (2016) highlighted that for participants who were not 'out' to their parents and only out to a select few, activism efforts were more reserved and affected by their need to conceal their LGBTQ identity. Some youth do feel safe and confident enough to actively confront hostility, as Kyle states, "I'll say something about it, because I'm not afraid to stand up for who I am, and I'm not going to have people say things like that." (Paceley et al., 2021). However, other participants only felt able to correct people who they were familiar with, or if confrontation did happen, it could only be done from behind the relative safety of the computer screen (Craig et al., 2015; Paceley et al., 2021).

Juxtaposed with the earlier narratives of empowerment and pride, which all connote resilience and are associated with opportunities for activism, are the more avoidant and maladaptive coping strategies evidenced in a lack of self-acceptance or dissemblance for some participants. This came in the form of evasive references to sexuality (Berkman, 2016), perceiving themself as other, or a 'reject' because of their sexuality (DiFulvio, 2004) and, to not be a target, rendering their sexual orientation as "undetectable" (Cisneros, 2015). Identity concealment might perpetuate distress as individuals reduce their opportunities for activism (and belonging) that may foster resilience (Smith et al., 2022; Wells et al., 1995).

2.4.2.3 'By seeing activism as a means of creating visibility, building solidarity and bringing about change'.

This third and final analytical theme encompasses how activism enhances visibility and representation for LGBTQ+Y and GEY, whilst also fostering solidarity and effecting change.

Witnessing the visibility and impact of positive LGBTQ+ role models emboldened some participants to be more visible themselves and be the representation they want(ed) to see, for others (Berkman, 2016; Paceley et al., 2021; Saltis et al., 2023). This is highlighted by Benton as he describes his plans for public speaking:

I'm planning on going back to [the GSA; see Glossary*] as a speaker in the spring after my voice actually drops . . . I remember when we had a speaker back in GSA my senior year, and it was a trans guy, and being very disappointed in it, because his family situation was a lot better, and I was really disappointed by that, because I didn't connect to it.* (Paceley et al., 2021).

Asserting one's visibility could be achieved through the myriad small, daily acts of resistance previously discussed. It can also be achieved through overt and grander acts of activism, as highlighted by Barringer et al. (2023), where college students gathered en masse, and engaged in demonstrations and protest by bearing rainbow flags and signs with messages to counter the anti-gay rhetoric attempting to be spread by the campus preachers. Activism engenders a sense of community and fosters solidarity, as one student commented:

The goal. . .is to encourage students to come together as one campus community... Rather than congregate around these hateful individuals, we can instead come together in support of one another. We want our students to know that they are both accepted and valued on our campus. [This] is an opportunity for us to show our campus and our community what we stand for. (Barringer et al., 2023)

In acknowledging the positive consequences of engaging in activism, it is also important to acknowledge the emotional toll it can take (Saltis et al., 2023). For some participants engaging in activist efforts either felt like an “obligation”, was “dysphoria triggering” and/or lead to exhaustion (Saltis et al., 2023).

Educating others was another means of enhancing visibility and was framed as purposeful resistance work (Berkman, 2016; DiFulvio, 2004; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021; Paceley et al., 2021; Saltis et al., 2023). As with prior efforts to assert visibility, education might come in the form of small, in-the-moment acts, such as correcting language use, or reframing in an effort to elucidate, given that, “discrimination comes from... people who do not understand...so if they do have knowledge they will start by understanding” (Dee; Haffejee & Wiebesiek, 2021) or it might be larger acts. The importance of education as a resistance strategy, is highlighted by Blake:

I feel like people would be more accepting if they were more educated . . . I feel like more people would feel safer to come out. (Paceley et al., 2021).

Activism on a larger scale involved education at community level, through the delivery of insightful presentations from trans students, as Candy reflects on:

I was very proud in that space. We gave a very good and deep overview of trans issues. Good general knowledge but also very good specific knowledge that you could really only get if you were talking about trans issues with a trans person. (Paceley et al., 2021).

These would serve to raise awareness and support others, and foster resilience in both the student educators, and potentially the attendees.

Related to a sense of community, is the notion of solidarity which refers to mutual support and empathy in the face of injustice and is suggestive of a more altruistic outlook; activism for the greater good, and “working to make the world a better place” (Lynn; Saltis et al., 2023; DiFulvio, 2004). Wanting to effect change was an important

driver to act, with one participant stating, "politics is very important to me…(because) I want equal rights" (Saltis et al., 2023). For another participant, witnessing injustice spurred them into activism, citing that, "this community needs to be treated better" (Sostre et al., 2023). Activism was perceived by one participant as a right, remaining undeterred in their efforts to confront school officials, thereby increasing their visibility as an activist, showing solidarity with peers and potentially effecting change within their school environment:

People get really uncomfortable when trans people are loud in spaces like that, especially white cis males like our Vice-President [or] Principals at the school. They get really uncomfortable when trans people are saying, 'You did something wrong. Can you please fix it?' That's just something people generally get uncomfortable with . . . But, yeah, definitely expect resistance if you're gonna . . . do something mean then they have the right to stand up and say, 'Mm-mm, no thank you.' (Paceley et al., 2021).

2.5 Discussion

The aim of the current review was to answer the question, "*How do LGBTQ+ and gender expansive youth foster their resilience through activism?"* This is an understudied area of research, exemplified by a dearth of applicable studies, with the selected ones almost exclusively originating from the USA. This was an exploratory study, in that while there was prior understandings of resilience and activism, there was little awareness of how resilience related to activism, and equally how any findings might then be applied to the context of youth in UK schools. Given that UK secondary schools continue to reinforce cisnormativity the intention was to provide further insight into how LGBTQ+Y and GEY might be better supported in school (Johnson & Mughal, 2024). There were a variety of contexts within the included papers, leading to variation in the reasons for, and means of, getting involved in activism. There is a universal quality to the analytical themes that could be seen to transcend context and unify LGBTQ+Y and GEY's experiences. The analytical themes tell a story about individuals either hiding or fighting and enhancing visibility, with another (unexplored) option being to succumb to oppression, as not all individuals are resilient, however, there is no discussion of who is most likely to be resilient.

Within this review LGBTQ+Y and GEY were able to engage in activism in the form of resistance as an intentional strategy to foster resilience and as a means of coping, consistent with prior research with adults (Bockting et al., 2013; Paceley et al., 2021; Saltis et al., 2023; Singh et al., 2011; Sostre et al., 2021). However, whilst the included studies gave examples of activism, opportunities for activism and potential facilitators and barriers were not discussed. This leaves a gap in our understanding, particularly because of the lack of UK pupil voice within this review, which raises the question as to whether (UK) pupils are given adequate opportunity to engage in resilience-building acts of resistance. Prior research has highlighted the need for schools to support LGBTQ+Y and GEY with activist opportunities (Jones & Hillier, 2013). With reference to activism coming from a place of feeling safe and secure, opportunity and motivation is then likely determined by context, with some environments limiting, rather than encouraging and supporting the practice of resilience (Zalman & McHenry-Sorber, 2023).

2.5.1 Implications

Prior research has identified that teachers generally want to support LGBTQ+Y and GEY, yet currently lack the confidence to do so and are hampered by concerns over community resistance, implicit views, and a lack of appropriate guidance (Markland, 2021). Other UK research has highlighted that some teachers, rather than defending pupil rights, are enabling discrimination, through ignorance, indifference, reluctance, and prejudice (Kurian, 2020). This highlights that schools can be microcosms of the wider, heteronormative and gender-essentialist society and this can dictate an often-hostile school climate (Newbury, 2013). Teachers are in a position of power and can be important role models with the capacity to meet pupils with compassion or dismissal. Within this review, individuals spoke of facing daily hostility, prompting one implication: for staff to engage in reflective practice to examine the structural entrenchment of heteronormativity and cisgenderism and its effects on the most marginalised in school (Johnson & Mughal, 2024) and access training to reduce bias, increase knowledge and awareness, and foster professional confidence. Relatedly, prior research has highlighted a willingness among students to engage in reflective discussion around sexuality and gender, which staff could harness to facilitate mutual learning opportunities (Markland, 2021). This implication underscores the notion that the onus should be on environmental and systemic shift, rather than on the individual.

Another related implication involves the responsibility to educate and inform others not falling solely on individuals' shoulders. Whilst some individuals saw educating others as purposeful resistance work, for others there was an emotional toll involved. This extends the notion of 'enhancing visibility' discussed within the synthesis, by applying it within the school context in terms of representation and inclusion. This starts at policy level, involves a welcoming and validating school ethos and the delivery of inclusive curricula content to foster acceptance. Given that adolescence is a time of fluid identity development, fostering an inclusive environment where LGBTQ+Y and GEY feel safe enough to not conceal their identity and live authentically is vital.

Above all, this synthesis has highlighted the importance of engaging in resistance strategies for developing resilience. In this way, schools need to identify and provide LGBTQ+Y and GEY opportunities to engage with peers, to consciously and critically explore, and take action against their oppression, to reduce isolation and foster resiliency and connectedness (DiFulvio, 2004; Paceley et al., 2021; Saltis et al., 2023). Whilst the synthesis studies did not discuss barriers to activism, it is possible that, linked to notions of adultism and power hierarchies, that schools may not wholly welcome the idea of pupil resistance. Relatedly, some pupils might not feel confident or able to engage in overt resistance or other visibility-enhancing strategies, particularly because these can involve an unwanted identity disclosure (Jones et al., 2016). Schools could provide training for pupils on impersonal activism techniques, such as online activism (Jones et al., 2016).

2.5.2 Strengths and limitations

Using thematic synthesis in this review enabled the combined examination of LGBTQ+ and GEY's experiences, facilitating consideration of how educational practices might be adjusted to enhance their well-being. Despite the paucity of papers, there is some diversity of context which has provided insightful data. However, the limited number of studies means that there is an inherent geographical limitation, as the studies predominantly originated in the USA, which means that broader contexts remain unrepresented, particularly the UK. Additionally, one of the papers was 20 years old (DiFulvio, 2004), so it is acknowledged that the socio-cultural context has changed significantly since then, evidenced at least in part by some rather outdated language. However, the themes within remain applicable today.

There are acknowledged limitations to this review. Participant voices were selected by the initial researchers, then by this researcher, meaning that other voices will have gone unrepresented. Included participant voices may represent the more resilient among the population studied. This limitation is echoed by DiFulvio's (2004) acknowledgement that the participants' narratives she captured may differ from those of youth who are questioning their identity or are not yet comfortable with their identity. So, level of outness is a consideration, which was highlighted within the review as affecting engagement in activism.

Another limitation is that LGBTQ+ and GEY's experiences have been examined as if they constitute a homogenous group, at least in part due to a lack of papers that examined discrete groupings. This can be seen to perpetuate marginalisation through a lack of representation. Whilst the reason for this was explained, future research should further address the gap in the literature, accounting for this issue.

This review did not broach online activism, due to a lack of discussion in this regard within the included studies. This represents an important future area for research, given that the online sphere is a key ecological context that can foster social connectedness and offer vital opportunities for activism (Craig et al., 2015; Erlick, 2018). Additionally, whilst intersectionality was an important element within the included studies and was discussed within the review, future research examining LGBTQ+ and GEY's experiences could adopt a more intersectional lens, to better capture the complex processes involved for individuals with multiple marginalizing identities, and the effects of these on resilience and resistance strategies (Robinson & Schmitz, 2021).

2.5.3 Conclusion

This review has elucidated the link between activism and resilience for LGBTQ+ and GEY and provided insight into the experiences of this population, highlighting the complex nature of the psychological and contextual processes at play, but above all the transformative potential of engaging in activism for LGBTQ+ and GEY's wellbeing. In this way, the current review might prompt reflection from settings and educators alike, regarding school policy, ethos, and pedagogic practices, in terms of the constructive steps that might be taken to better support LGBTQ+ and GEY and facilitate change.

Chapter 3 Exploring the Factors That Influence Speakers' Adoption or Rejection of Gender Inclusive Pronouns.

3.1 Abstract

Heteronormative ideology pervades society, leading to the assumption of gender-sex congruence and an underestimation of gender diversity, such that individuals who transgress the dominant norms continue to experience significant levels of discrimination (Van der Toorn et al., 2020). Gender and language are inextricably linked, with language having the power to both marginalise or represent diverse identities, and therefore perpetuate or challenge pervasive beliefs. This study sought to explore participants' inclusive or exclusive pronoun use, and other strategies used to refer to an individual of unknown gender, and the impact of gender beliefs as well as other previously identified predictor variables, on linguistic behaviour. It is hoped that this will provide greater understanding of factors that influence people's use of gender inclusive language, and prompt reflection regarding respectful communication, and behaviour change. Participants were recruited via 'X', emails to further education colleges and Prolific, with a final sample of 211 respondents. Data were collected via an anonymous survey and analysed using binary logistic regression. Participants were prompted to answer several scale questions to explore possible predictor variables. Participants were also asked to complete a production task that prompted pronoun usage, without alerting them to this aim. Results indicated, that of nine predictor variables, only scores on the gender beliefs scale were statistically significant. The results highlight that we are still guided by entrenched heteronormative beliefs, leading to the predominant use of exclusive language when referring to individuals of unknown/nonbinary gender. Implications for educational professionals and limitations of the study are discussed.

3.2 Introduction

Gender has traditionally been viewed as binary and static, reinforced by essentialist thinking: the belief that there are innate and immutable differences between men and women, associated with their sex assigned at birth (Conrod, 2019; Tebbe & Budge,

2022). This binary categorisation has been challenged by researchers and social activists, who argue that it fundamentally misrepresents human biological and psychological states and processes, as it fails to capture the complex, multidimensional, and dynamic nature of gender (Hyde et al., 2019). Their view is that gender is socially constructed, a position which acknowledges the fluidity and diversity of gender (Johnson, 2015; McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2018). In this way, views, policies, and practices are changing, due to the increased visibility of, and support for, gender expansive individuals, which is reflected in these individuals feeling able to come out at a younger age than their predecessors (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2021; Paechter, 2021; Russell & Fish, 2019; Wyrick, 2021). In a challenge to traditional ideologies regarding sex and gender, younger generations are reportedly using self-generated identity labels that are not gender-dependent (Watson et al., 2020). In this study, the term *gender expansive* is used to refer to individuals to encompass the myriad of identities that are somewhere between or outside of the gender binary, regardless of sex assigned at birth (Abela et al., 2024; Dubois & Shattuck-Heidorn, 2021; Keo-Meier & Ehrensaft, 2018; Saltis et al., 2023).

Increased debate about gender issues within public discourse, and greater efforts to use inclusive language, have inevitably led to divided opinions and ongoing hostility towards gender expansive individuals. Inclusivity in terms of gender diversity thwarts cisnormativity, a pervasive societal hierarchising, based on gender anatomy-identity congruence (Keo-Meier & Ehrensaft, 2018; McBride, 2021). Cisnormativity serves to reinforce stigma and inequality as implicit and explicit boundaries are drawn regarding the acceptability and limits of gender identity and expression (Dubois & Shattuck-Heidorn, 2021; Morgenroth & Ryan, 2021). As a result, greater inclusivity faces resistance (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2021; Morgenroth et al., 2021; Saguy & Williams, 2022). Despite longstanding legal protection under the Equality Act (2010) and the UK moving towards altering gender recognition laws (Paechter, 2021), there remains a lack of societal understanding or compassion around gender diversity, with individuals who are perceived to violate gender norms continuing to face high levels of negativity (Bower-Brown et al., 2021; Horton, 2022; Morgenroth & Ryan, 2021).

Gender expansive individuals can be simultaneously erased or made more visible by the binarized system, as they resist categorisation (Shuster & Lamont, 2020). Experiences of stigmatization, marginalization, bullying and misgendering, where a pronoun is used

that does not match the gender identity of the referent, can all present as psychological stressors (Goldberg et al., 2019; Konnelly & Cowper, 2020; McLemore, 2014;). Nonbinary individuals are particularly likely to be misgendered, due to a lack of awareness and understanding (Goldberg et al., 2019; McCarty, 2024). Such experiences affect an individual's need for belonging, coherence, and validation (Bosson et al., 2012; McLemore, 2014). Conversely, receiving affirmation regarding one's gender can result in subjective well-being, known as gender euphoria (Sevelius et al., 2020; Tebbe & Budge, 2022). Adolescence is an age at which young people are particularly vulnerable to the policing of gender boundaries. The gender intensification hypothesis (Hill & Lynch, 1983) posits that during adolescence, a critical time of identity exploration, individuals face increased pressure to conform to binarized gender roles (Priess et al., 2009; Watson et al., 2020;). Research has highlighted that gender expansive adolescents suffer disproportionately, compared to their cisgender peers (see Glossary), in terms of their mental health, experiencing significant psychological distress, and for some suicidal ideation, and concomitant poor educational outcomes (Johnson et al., 2020; McBride & Neary, 2021; Tordoff et al., 2022).

One way gender is socially constructed is through language and interaction with others, in response to available gender labels and roles (Johnson, 2015; Levitt, 2019; Zimman, 2017). Language and gender are inextricably linked as gender is a constantly negotiated and updated social behaviour (Conrod, 2019). Information about an individual's gender, which to some extent can be inferred through a person's name, does not always reflect a person's gender experience and preferred pronoun (Breccia, 2021). Language is one mechanism that can perpetuate gender asymmetries, with a traditional bias towards male perspectives, experiences, and identities, often at the expense of inclusivity and gender equality (Bailey & LaFrance, 2017; Szecny et al., 2016). Pronoun usage highlights the way language treats gender, in terms of the values that are communicated through language (Hekanaho, 2020; Yakut et al., 2021). Gender inclusive language options have been introduced to attempt to reduce such inequalities (Bailey & LaFrance, 2017; Tavits & Pérez, 2019). Gender inclusive language is language that avoids the use of certain expressions or words that might be considered to exclude individuals or groups, recognises that there are more than two genders, and therefore acknowledges diversity, and promotes equity and respect for all (Likis, 202; Zimman, 2017). This is exemplified by the broadened use of 'they', as a nonbinary pronoun of reference, which

has coincided with the increased visibility of, and support for, gender expansive individuals (Konnelly & Cowper, 2020). By contrast, exclusive language categorises individuals. Language can marginalise or represent diverse identities, however a binarized view of gender can make it more difficult to shift both our thinking and our language (McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Wyrick, 2021).

The linguistic relativity hypothesis (Whorf, 1956) suggests that the language we use determines our cognitions and the way we perceive the world, within a reciprocal relationship, as our thoughts influence our linguistic choices (Ratanaphithayaporn & Rodrigo, 2020; Samuel et al., 2019). Recent research has highlighted that language can influence cognition, with gender-neutral pronouns having a positive impact on attitudes and beliefs regarding gender expansive individuals, by reducing the 'male as standard' mental bias and increasing the salience and inclusion of other gender identities (Tavits & Pérez, 2019). Using words in a different way provides an alternative interpretation of reality, so using inclusive language can challenge hegemonic (essentialist) beliefs, which can benefit individuals' wellbeing and contribute to social change by making gender identities outside the binary linguistically visible (Erdocia, 2021; Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2021; Renstrom et al., 2021).

Whilst inclusive language can challenge essentialist beliefs, the gender/sex binary can also be perpetuated through language. In line with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), in upholding the linguistic (essentialist) status quo, people can fulfil social and psychological needs, by retaining their distinct group identity, their sense of belonging and certainty (Patev et al., 2019; Vergoossen et al., 2020). The use of 'they' in the nonbinary/specific-reference context (referring to an individual rather than a group) represents a binary-disrupting 'de-gendering' strategy, by replacing gender cues, such as 'he or she', with 'they', thereby drawing attention to a social responsibility to respect self-assigned identities (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2021; Saguy & Williams, 2022). This disruption can pose a threat to both individual and group identities, and it has been suggested that highly identified women and men (individuals who identify strongly with, and are identified as their gender, such that there is alignment with their biological sex and the way they act), may be particularly opposed to de-gendering as this directly threatens group boundaries (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2021; Morgenroth et al., 2021). This notion of group threat is relevant in relation to the social rejection and suboptimal

mental health outcomes that gender expansive individuals experience (Tordoff et al., 2022).

In English, there is currently no universally accepted linguistic convention that can be applied to gender expansive individuals or those who choose not to divulge their gender (Hyde et al., 2019). The use of the pronoun 'they' in a generic-reference context has been widely researched and is well established and accepted in English (Bradley, 2020; Bradley et al., 2019; Breccia, 2021; Sheydaei, 2021). However, 'they' used to refer to a specific individual of unknown or nonbinary gender is currently less acceptable, considered less grammatical, is not widely in use, and will depend on the speaker's gender role attitudes, such that resistance to its usage might indicate a certain level of prejudice (Bradley, 2020; Bradley et al., 2019; Renstrom et al., 2021). Additionally, the belief that the use of singular 'they' displays poor grammar, has been suggested as a barrier to its wider usage (Saguy & Williams, 2022).

Gustafsson Sendén et al. (2015) explored how the introduction of the gender-neutral pronoun 'hen' in Swedish had been met with resistance, but attitudes became positive towards it, with these shifting faster than behaviour change. This study is referenced because 'hen' is linguistically similar to the singular use of 'they'. In 2012, most participants (from a sample of 184 participants) reported highly negative attitudes towards 'hen' (56.5%), but by 2013, the majority reported positive attitudes (*n*=160; 40.4%), and by 2015, there was minimal hostility towards it (*n*= 190; 9.6%). The authors suggest that increased usage in the media supported the cognitive saliency and adoption of 'hen' (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015). Individuals with more negative attitudes more strongly adhere to the notion that gender inclusive language is difficult to use (Patev et al., 2019). Prior research has identified that gender inclusive language use arises from both deliberate and habitual processes (Sczesny et al., 2016). In line with the increased exposure of 'hen' leading to wider usage, prior research has highlighted that drawing individuals' attention to gender inclusive language increased its usage, suggesting that there are deliberate processes involved (Koeser et al., 2015). The use of gender inclusive language is cognitively challenging because (for many) it is not yet automatic and requires conscious effort to think about what to say and how to say it (Waldendorf, 2024). Gender inclusive language can be incrementally introduced, to mitigate the cognitive challenge, with its usage expanded once people become

habituated to it (Waldendorf, 2024). However, language and social norms do not necessarily evolve quickly (Stormbom, 2019).

More recent research, from the USA and Finland, has explored the use of singular 'they' (Bradley, 2020; Bradley et al., 2019; Conrod, 2019; Hekanaho, 2020; Sheydaei, 2021;). Bradley et al. (2019) found, in their preliminary study, by prompting participants to judge the grammaticality of sentences, that the use of 'they' to refer to specific individuals of unknown or nonbinary gender is considered less grammatical than the generic usage, with its acceptability dependent on the participant's gender role attitudes. Respondents' difficulty in using 'they' to refer to a specific (rather than hypothetical) individual is attributed to an increased expectation that the person has a (binary) gender which should be 'explained' within the sentence (Bradley et al., 2019). Bradley (2020) then explored whether resistance to the use of singular 'they', again tested by a sentence acceptability task, was driven by gender attitudes or adherence to grammar, finding that both (benevolent) sexism, indicating a heteronormative conceptualisation of gender (see Glossary), and linguistic conservatism contribute to grammatical judgments.

Conrod (2019) also explored the singular use of 'they' via a sentence acceptability task with US adults, finding an effect of speaker age on production and perception of the specific use of singular 'they'. Older respondents used 'they' less, finding it less acceptable than younger participants, with the under 25- to 45-year-olds rating its acceptability most highly, and the over 70 age range rating it least acceptable. In line with prior research, Hekanaho's (2020) study explored the singular use of 'they' via a cloze procedure sentence acceptability task, finding that, among other variables, age, gender, and attitudes towards (non)sexist language use predicted pronoun acceptability. In similar findings to Conrod's (2019) study, older participants rejected singular 'they' more than younger participants. Participants were less accepting of 'they' if they held dismissive attitudes (believing that using gender-inclusive language is unimportant or unnecessary) towards sexist language (Hekanaho, 2020). Sheydaei's (2021) study explored the use of 'they' via a production task. The results highlight that, despite increasing acceptability of singular 'they', participants still used a high percentage of gendered pronouns to refer to an unknown individual, with a strong association evident between participants' self-identified gender and the gendered pronoun used, meaning men used 'he' and women, 'she' (Sheydaei, 2021). Additionally,

there was a higher acceptability rate of singular 'they' at a conscious level, tested via the selection of pronouns for referents of unspecified gender, rather than at a subconscious level, tested via the production task, highlighting perhaps the social desirability of claiming to use, or being seen to choose inclusive language (Sheydaei, 2021).

Other factors that research suggests perpetuate essentialist norms and might influence inclusive pronoun use are political ideology (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015; Hekanaho, 2020; Renstrom et al., 2021) as prior research has highlighted that a more right-leaning political affiliation is associated with more negative attitudes and with lower use of a gender-neutral pronoun (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015; Norton & Herek, 2013; Patev et al., 2019; Renstrom et al., 2021). Relatedly the conservatism associated with religious ideologies is seen to perpetuate heteronormativity (Van der Toorn et al., 2020). A need for closure has also been associated in prior research with gender essentialism, prejudice, and opposition to gender-inclusive language (Morgenroth et al., 2021). Gender identification (Morgenroth et al., 2021) or gender identity strength, has also been highlighted within the literature, as this is associated with ideologies that reinforce the binary, with prior research finding that the more strongly participants identify with their gender, the more negative views they held, leading to a reduced usage of gender inclusive language (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015; Lindqvist et al., 2021; Morgenroth et al., 2021; Sheydaei, 2021). Findings were mixed, however, as Renstrom et al. (2021) did not find that gender identity strength predicted attitudes towards 'hen'. Another potential influencing factor is transprejudice (Bradley, 2020; Patev et al., 2019; Perez-Arche & Miller, 2021; Russell, 2021). Perhaps most notably, gender essentialist beliefs have consistently been associated with reduced usage of gender inclusive language (Bradley, 2020; Bradley et al., 2019; Conrod, 2019; Gustafsson Senden et al. 2015; Hekanaho, 2020; Morgenroth et al., 2021; Renstrom et al., 2021).

This study extends the work of a recent US study that examined gender inclusive pronoun choices in a specific-reference context (Sheydaei, 2021). Sheydaei's (2021) study used data from 2017 with a sample of university students (*n*=198), who were predominantly female-identifying (*n*=121) and aged 21-29 (*n*=130), however the age range for the whole sample was 18-60+. Using a large sample from the general population, the current study will explore participants' inclusive or exclusive pronoun use, and other strategies they use, to refer to an individual of unknown gender in a

specific-reference context, and the impact of gender beliefs as well as other previously identified predictor variables on linguistic behaviour. It is hoped that this will provide greater understanding of factors that influence people's inclusive versus exclusive language use, such that it might prompt reflection, from those that work with gender expansive individuals, to better consider how they might refer to them, and ensure that these individuals' need for belonging, coherence, and validation are met (Bosson et al., 2012; McLemore, 2014).

The first two research questions are taken from Sheydaei's (2021) study, with the addition of a third question that explores predictors of linguistic behaviour.

Q1: What strategies do participants use to refer to a hypothetical individual whose gender or pronouns they do not know?

Q2: When a pronoun is used as the reference strategy, what pronoun do participants use to refer to the unknown hypothetical individual?

Q3: What predicts the inclusive versus exclusive pronouns participants use to refer to a hypothetical individual whose gender or pronouns they do not know?

3.2.1 Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Prior research indicates variability in the acceptance and use of nonbinary third person pronouns like 'they' in specific-reference contexts (Bjorkman, 2017; Conrod, 2019; Curzan, 2003). It is hypothesised that the majority of participants will use pronouns as a reference strategy, consistent with previous findings (Sheydaei, 2021). Some participants might choose to avoid using pronouns and do this by either repeating the hypothetical individual's name or using a generic noun (eg. *this person*) (Sheydaei, 2021).

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Building on Sheydaei's (2021) unconfirmed prediction that the majority of participants who use a pronoun would use gendered ones, it is expected that due to increased societal awareness and support for gender issues, a larger percentage (>20%) of participants in this study will use 'they' as a pronoun to address the ambiguity of an individual's gender.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): It is hypothesised, in line with existing research, that gender role beliefs (Bradley, 2020; Bradley et al., 2019; Conrod, 2019; Gustafsson Senden et al.

2015; Hekanaho, 2020; Morgenroth et al., 2021; Renstrom et al., 2021), age (Conrod, 2019; Hekanaho, 2020), gender identification (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015; Lindqvist et al., 2021; Morgenroth et al., 2021; Sheydaei, 2021), and political preference (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015; Norton & Herek, 2013; Patev et al., 2019; Renstrom et al., 2021) will be significant predictors influencing the use of inclusive versus exclusive pronouns among participants (Sheydaei, 2021).

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Participants

Participants were recruited via three channels. Recruitment began with the study advert initially being posted on the official University of Southampton's Educational Psychology X account, in October 2023. The advert was retweeted on several occasions, due to low recruitment numbers. To try and capture a more representative sample, reflective of the desired population sample age range (16+), the advert was also sent, with an accompanying email (Appendix C) to all UK further education colleges to facilitate snowball sampling in November 2023 (271; see Appendix D for a list of contacted colleges). As participant numbers and the quality of responses remained low (many were incomplete), a paid participant pool (Prolific) was used (January 2024). One hundred and ninety participants were recruited this way, with the request that the sample have a 50% male/female split, to keep the sample as representative as possible.

As an indication of sample size (N>50+8m; Green, 1991), with nine predictor variables: age, self-identified gender*, gender essentialism, prejudice (as measured by the ATTIS; see 'measures' section below), religious fundamentalism, need for closure, discomfort with violations of gender heteronormativity, gender identity strength and political ideology, the sample size needed would be *n*=122. The final sample (*n*=211) was well above the target sample size deemed necessary to sufficiently power the study (Green, 1991). Participants ranged from 16-77 years old (M=36.76). Within the sample the majority identified as female (*n*=128), some identified as male (*n*=78), several as nonbinary (*n*=3) and only two participants preferred not to say (*n*=2). Ethnicity data are highlighted in a table (Appendix E).

*Whilst some gender category choices were provided, there was also the option of a free text response box to self-identify, although this option was not chosen by any participants.

3.3.2 Procedure

Ethical approval for this study was granted by The University of Southampton Ethics Committee. Data collection began in October 2023 and finished in February 2024. A pilot study was not carried out, but the self-report measures were collated and tested to give an approximation of the length of survey completion, which was twenty minutes. Following an anonymous Qualtrics survey link posted on X (formerly Twitter), respondents first read a participant information sheet (Appendix F). It was vital that participants' attention was not drawn (initially) to the purpose of the study, so a certain level of deception was involved. For this reason, the participant information sheet included a different study title to the actual study title, which read, '*Exploring the person factors that influence participants' prioritisation and subsequent sharing of information'*.

Participants were prompted to consent to participate by indicating that they had read and understood the information on the participant information sheet, that they were over 16, and by confirming their ability in English (by selecting that they considered themselves confident readers and writers of English). At this point participants were also given the option to leave the survey. Progression through the survey was dependent on this consent having been established. Participants were then prompted to provide demographic information, regarding their age, self-identified gender, and ethnicity and asked to do a short production task. The purpose of this production task was to explore participants' ways of referring to a named, hypothetical individual whose gender was unknown, as it was hoped it would prompt participants' pronoun use versus other strategies. Previous research has highlighted that names activate the interpretation of a specific person to a larger extent than do role nouns, so three ambiguous/genderless names were used to refer to the person in the description (Conrod, 2019).

Participants were given a brief, bullet-pointed description of the individual. Gender neutral and culturally diverse names were researched, with options then input into the following web service: https://genderize.io/. This tool predicts the gender of a given

name based on statistical data, thus estimating whether a name is typically associated with a male or female gender. If the probability generated was around 50% (0.5), then the name was taken to be acceptably neutral. It must be noted that the accuracy of this tool was not investigated. Three culturally diverse and gender-neutral names (Avery, Taylor and Nour) were randomly assigned to the production task's descriptive vignette (Appendix G). Showing overlap, 'Taylor' had also been used in the production task in Sheydaei's (2021) study. Participants were then asked, by writing a short narrative, to describe this named hypothetical individual as if to another of their friends, as the hypothetical individual would supposedly be joining them on a trip. This prompt was chosen as Sheydaei (2021) highlighted that as participants within that study were selecting a roommate, this didn't represent a neutral prompt, as it may have primed participants to use a particular type of pronoun due to the interaction of one's own gender identity and the conceptual gender of the hypothetical roommate, and presumably because there may well be a conscious or unconscious gender preference when selecting who you live with. The stakes are lower when describing a hypothetical individual to another person.

The rest of the survey was comprised of seven self-report measures to capture predictor variable data. Following completion of these, participants read a debriefing form (Appendix H) where they were provided with an explanation of the true nature and purpose of the study, and the necessity for the initial deception, with the anonymity of the data collected being reiterated. The debriefing form also signposted participants to supportive organisations. Participants were then given the option of withdrawing from the study or to leave their email address (via a separate survey link, unaffiliated to survey data to ensure confidentiality), should they want a summary of the research findings. Participants recruited via X (formerly Twitter) and Further Education colleges were not remunerated, however participants recruited via Prolific were (£9.00/hour). The study was set up in Prolific such that no unique participant codes were collected by Prolific, so participant anonymity was maintained. The average survey completion time was 18 minutes.

3.3.3 Measures

The following measures were used in the survey but were re-named within it for brevity and/or clarity.

Attitudes Towards Transgendered Individuals (ATTIS; Walch et al., 2012). This scale was used to measure participants' level of prejudice, as one of the independent, predictor variables. This is a 20-item scale designed to measure respondents' feelings about, working with, or associating with transgender individuals, by selecting a response along a 5-point Likert scale from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5). Higher scores on this scale reflect greater tolerance for transgender individuals. Items 1, 5, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16 and 17 were reverse coded. The scale reportedly has high internal consistency (α = .96). In this sample the scale also had high internal consistency (α=0.93), highlighting its reliability as a measure. This was named 'Beliefs about transgender individuals' in the survey.

Discomfort with Violations of Gender Heteronormativity Indices (DVGHI; Adams et al., 2016). This scale was used to measure participants' level of discomfort with behavioural violations of gender role norms, gender identity norms, and sexual orientation norms, as one of the independent, predictor variables. This is a 38-item scale, prompting respondents to indicate their likely emotional reaction to the presented situations on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 'furious' (-3) to 'ecstatic' (3). Lower scores on this scale reflect increased levels of discomfort. The three discomfort indices have reportedly high internal consistencies: violations of gender role norms (12 items, α=0.78), gender identity norms (13 items, α=0.94), and sexual orientation norms (13 items, α=0.91), highlighting their reliability as a measure. In this sample the scale had high internal consistency (α=0.96). This was named 'Attitudes to gender diversity' in the survey.

Gender beliefs scale (Tee & Hegarty, 2006). This scale was used to measure participants' beliefs or attitudes related to gender, focusing on roles, stereotypes, and expectations, e.g. 'There are only two genders, man and woman'. Higher scores on this scale indicate stronger adherence to traditional gender beliefs. This scale reportedly has acceptable internal consistency (α=0.78; Tee & Hegarty, 2006). In this sample, the scale had a high level of internal consistency (α=0.85). This scale was chosen because of its use in previous research (Renstrom et al., 2021) and because of its brevity; a consideration for the length of the online survey. This was named 'Beliefs about gender' in the survey.

Gender identity strength (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015; Lindqvist et al., 2021; Renstrom et al., 2021). This was named 'Gender identity strength' in the survey. Previous research has stated the importance of capturing factors that could motivate or hinder inclusive pronoun use (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2021). Such factors might include political ideology, and gender identity strength (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015; Renstrom et al., 2021) so these were included in this study. Following previous research (Gustafsson Sendén et al. 2015; Lindqvist et al., 2020; Renstrom et al., 2021), a version of Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) Collective Self-Esteem Scale (CSES) was used but adapted to gender, as a measure of participants' identification with their gender. This adaptation is reportedly a better predictor of attitudes towards gender-fair language than participants' self-defined gender identity (Gustafsson Sendén, Bäck, & Lindqvist, 2015; Lindqvist, Gustafsson Sendén & Bäck, 2016 as cited in Lindqvist et al., 2020). It was not possible to access the original paper to explore the measure further, though the abstract states that "evidence for reliability and validity of the scale was provided by three studies, suggesting that the scale can be a useful research tool" (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). The 4-item scale was requested from a researcher who had previously used the measure (Marie Gustafsson Sendén). The measure reportedly had acceptable internal consistency (α=0.75; Renstrom et al., 2021). In this sample the scale had a high level of internal consistency (α=0.80). Participants were prompted to rate the statements below on a 5-point Likert scale from 'do not agree' (1) to 'completely agree' (5).

- *My gender identity has very little to do with how I feel about myself.*
- *My gender identity is an important part of my self-image.*
- *My gender identity is an important reflection of who I am.*
- *My gender identity has no importance to my sense of what kind of a person I am.*

Political ideology (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015; Renstrom et al., 2021). Participants' political preference was measured using one item, 'Please indicate on the scale below, from left to right, what your political preference is'. Participants were prompted to respond using a 7-point Likert scale from 'strongly left' (1) to 'strongly right' (7). This was named 'Political preference' in the survey.

Need for Closure (Need for Closure Scale (NFCS); Webster & Kruglanski, 1994; revised by Roets & Van Hiel, 2007; Roets & Van Hiel, 2011). This is a 15-item, short version of the NFCS scale and was used to measure participants' preference for certainty or avoidance of ambiguity. It is associated with resistance to change (Kruglanski et al.,

2006 as cited in Morgenroth et al., 2021). Participants were prompted to respond using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ (1) to ‘strongly agree’ (6). The measure previously showed good internal consistency (α = 0.88), which was the same value in this sample. This scale was chosen because of its effective use in previous research (Morgenroth et al., 2021), and because of its brevity, which was a consideration for the overall length of the online survey. This was named ‘Preference for certainty’ in the survey.

Religious Fundamentalism (Revised Religious Fundamentalism Scale; RRFS; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004). This is a 12-item revised scale and was used to measure participants’ attitudes about their religious beliefs. Respondents were prompted to indicate their likely reaction to the presented statements on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from ‘very strongly disagree’ (-4) to ‘very strongly agree’ (+4). The measure reportedly has strong internal consistency (α = 0.91). In this sample the measure again showed strong internal consistency (α = 0.95). Items 2, 4, 7, 9, 10, and 12 were reverse coded. This was named ‘Religious beliefs’ in the survey.

3.4 Results

3.4.1 Preliminary analyses

The survey was closed in February 2024, to export the data for analysis. Statistical analyses were run on IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 29.0. Overall, a total of 317 participants responded to the survey, however, after initial checking of the exported data, only 219 responses were deemed of good enough quality to include in the analysis. Participants (cases) were removed if there was either no production task completed, or there was a production task completed, but participants only completed half, or none of the scales. Where there were any incidental scale answer omissions, these were resolved through imputation of the data, using an average from other participant responses on that scale. On closer inspection of the data, three participants had asked for their data to be withdrawn, so were removed from the analysis, one respondent completed an over simplistic production task, so their data was also removed, leaving 215 cases. Analysis of box plots highlighted that there was a significant outlier, so their data was removed. Using Cook’s distances (Cook, 1977) to additionally test the last assumption (7), there were two overly influential respondents,

so their data was also removed. Lastly, one more outlier was removed after casewise diagnostics highlighted a standardised residual value (ZResid) greater than 2.5. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations for each measure, and correlations, are presented in Table 4.

	Descriptives			Correlations						
	N	M	SD	Age	GBS	GIS	ATTIS	NFC	DVGHI	RF
				1	.145*	.061	.147*	-.107	-.236**	-.071
Age	211	36.76	12.12		.035	.374	.032	.120	<.001	.303
				211	211	211	211	211	211	211
				.145*	1	-.017	.807**	.148*	-.630**	.565**
GBS	211	2.47	.90	.035		.808	<.001	.031	<.001	<.001
				211	211	211	211	211	211	211
				.061	-.017	1	-.059	.171*	-.062	.022
GIS	211	4.41	.86	.374	.808		.390	.013	.367	.745
				211	211	211	211	211	211	211
				.147*	.807**	-.059	1	.061	-.681**	.585**
ATTIS	211	2.01	.69	.032	<.001	.390		.376	<.001	<.001
				211	211	211	211	211	211	211
				-.107	.148*	.171*	.061	1	-.156*	-.022
NFC	211	3.92	.72	.120	.031	.013	.376		.023	.752
				211	211	211	211	211	211	211
				-.236**	-.630**	-.062	-.681**	-.156*	1	-.407**
DVGHI	211	3.81	.43	<.001	<.001	.367	<.001	.023		<.001
				211	211	211	211	211	211	211
				-.071	.565**	.022	.585**	-.022	-.407**	1
RF	211	2.85	1.85	.303	<.001	.745	<.001	.752	<.001	
				211	211	211	211	211	211	211

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics and Pearson's Correlations Among Predictors

Note. ATTIS= Attitudes Towards Transgendered Individuals Scale, GBS= Gender Beliefs, GIS= Gender Identity Strength, DVGHI= Discomfort with Violations of Gender Heteronormativity Indices, NFC= Need for Closure Scale, RF=Religious Fundamentalism, RF= Revised Religious Fundamentalism Scale (RRFS) $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$

Statistical assumptions for a binary logistic regression were met (Laerd Statistics, 2017).

Analysis of the data highlighted seven different strategies respondents used to refer to the unknown individual within the production task. The data were coded according to the use of 'inclusive' language (1), which would encompass any form of non-misgendering language, or 'exclusive' (0) which categorised the individual (Table 5).

Table 5 Frequency of Inclusive or Exclusive Pronoun Use by Gender

	Inclusive					Exclusive			
	F (n=128)	M (n=78)	NB (n=3)	Prefer not to say (n=2)		F (n=128)	M (n=78)	NB (n=3)	Prefer not to say (n=2)
They/them/their	45	17	1		He/him/his	15	26	1	1
No pronoun or first name	11	9	1	1	She/her/hers	55	18		
"person"	2	6			"He/she"		1		
"human"		1							
Total	94				117				

Note. F=Female, M=Male, NB=Nonbinary.

3.4.2 Binary logistic regression

A binary logistic regression was run to explore which of the variables (age, gender, ATTIS, DVGHI, GBS, GIS, NFC, RF and PL) contribute to predicting participants' inclusive or exclusive pronoun use, when referring to an individual of unknown gender. Ethnicity was not included in the model as a predictor variable, but demographic information was

collected to provide context and ascertain the diversity of the sample, to aid with potential generalisation of the findings.

The logistic regression model was not statistically significant, χ^2 (9) = 21.678, $p < .0005$. The model explained 13.1% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in inclusive and exclusive pronoun use and correctly classified 65.2% of cases. Sensitivity was 74.4%, specificity was 53.8%. Of the nine predictor variables only one was statistically significant ($p < .05$): gender beliefs ($p < .010$), as measured with the Gender Beliefs Scale (GBS; Tee & Hegarty, 2006), as shown in Table 6. The statistically significant positive coefficient for the gender beliefs scale suggests that individuals with more traditional views on gender are more likely to use language that is exclusive, rather than inclusive. An Exp(B) value greater than 1 indicates a positive association between the predictor and the outcome. So, for each unit increase of GBS, the odds of using exclusive pronouns are 2.3 times the odds of using inclusive pronouns. Other control variables (age, gender, ATTIS, DVGHI, GIS, NFC, RF and PL) were included in the regression model, based on previous research identifying them as having a possible effect. They accounted for potential confounding factors and helped to ensure that the association between gender beliefs and language was not due to other variables. All the other predictor variables were non-significant ($p > .05$).

Table 6 Regression Analysis

							95% C.I for Exp(B)	
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	Lower	Upper
Age	-.019	.013	2.109	1	.146	.981	.956	1.007
Gender	-.239	.269	.786	1	.375	.788	.465	1.335
GBS	.837	.324	6.696	1	.010	2.310	1.225	4.355
GIS	-.172	.184	.881	1	.348	.842	.587	1.206
ATTIS	-.543	.438	1.533	1	.216	.581	.246	1.372
NFC	.236	.219	1.170	1	.279	1.267	.825	1.944

DVGHI	-.377	.493	.585	1	.444	.686	.261	1.801
RF	-.055	.107	.264	1	.608	.947	.768	1.167
PL	.124	.145	.738	1	.390	1.132	.853	1.504
Constant	1.378	2.895	.227	1	.634	3.968		

Note. ATTIS= Attitudes Towards Transgendered Individuals Scale, GBS= Gender Beliefs, GIS= Gender Identity Strength, DVGHI= Discomfort with Violations of Gender Heteronormativity Indices, NFC= Need for Closure Scale, RF=Religious Fundamentalism, PL= Political Leaning, RF= Revised Religious Fundamentalism Scale (RRFS).

3.5 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to extend existing research, by exploring which (previously identified) factors from the literature, are the most influential in predicting people's implicit use of inclusive or exclusive pronouns. This study had a good sample size (*n*=211), with respondents ranging from 16-77 years old. It was hypothesised that most participants would use pronouns as a reference strategy, with some participants avoiding pronoun usage by either repeating the hypothetical individual's name or using a generic noun (H1). It was expected that due to increased societal awareness and support for gender issues, a larger percentage (>20%) of participants in this study would use 'they' as a pronoun to address the ambiguity of an individual's gender (H2). Informed by prior research, it was also hypothesised that gender role beliefs, age, gender identification and political preference would be the most influential predictors of inclusive versus exclusive pronoun use (H3). In terms of H1, this was confirmed as 85.3% of participants (*n*=180) used pronouns to refer to the hypothetical individual, with 14.7% of participants (*n*=31) avoiding pronoun usage (Table 5). In terms of H2, this was also confirmed, as 29.9% of participants (*n*=63) used 'they' to refer to the hypothetical individual, with 44.5% of participants (*n*=94) using inclusive pronouns or other inclusive strategies, rather than exclusive pronouns. Regarding H3, in this sample, only scores on the gender beliefs scale were statistically significant. This finding was in the expected direction, in that higher scores on this scale indicate more traditional/essentialist beliefs and therefore predict an increased likelihood of exclusive pronoun use. Contrary to prior research, political preference was not a significant predictor in this model. The ATTIS was strongly correlated with the GBS, which is understandable given that they measure closely related constructs. The ATTIS and DVGHI were not significant

predictors in the model, with their predictive power subsumed by the GBS as a more influential predictor. The current study's findings are in line with prior research that found that binary gender beliefs were the strongest predictor of inclusive language use (Bradley, 2020; Bradley et al., 2019; Renstrom et al., 2021).

The three randomized names within the vignette appeared to perform well in terms of their ambiguity, as there was minimal variation across the names, in terms of attributed pronoun usage. For example, when female participants used *'they'*, to refer to Taylor (*n*=14), Avery (*n*=15) and Nour (*n*=16), there was a balanced usage. There were not enough participants within each gender category to run an analysis with gender as a predictor. However, analysis of frequency data highlighted that male participants primarily chose *he/him/his* (*n*=26) to refer to the unknown individual, then *she/her/hers* (*n*=18), then *they* (*n*=17). Female participants primarily used *she/her/hers* (*n*=55), then *they* (*n*=45), then *he/him his* (*n*=15). These findings are in line with previous research that found a strong association between participants' self-identified gender and the gendered pronoun they used (Sheydaei, 2021). Recent research highlights that women tend to use gender inclusive language, especially nonbinary forms, more than men (Waldendorf, 2024). Given that the males in this study used 'they' as their least popular reference strategy, this might uphold the notion that, invested in their gender group, men seek to delineate between male and female, as compared to women (Bosson & Michniewicz, 2013). The current study's findings might suggest that conceptual gender, the gender that is inferred and expressed by an individual when referring to another, could have been evoked, based on the participants' previous experience of individuals by those names (Ackerman, 2019; Conrod, 2019; Sheydaei, 2021). This is in line with Bradley et al.'s (2019) hypothesis, that cognitive dissonance arises for some speakers when using 'they' for a named individual where gender is then assumed, as compared to the easier task of referring to a vaguer mental representation of a generic 'person'. The nonbinary participants in the current study mainly used inclusive pronouns, but they are in such small numbers that this barely warrants reporting. However, this is consistent with Conrod's (2019) finding that there is an explicit association between an individual's gender diverse identity and increased use of specific singular 'they', attributable perhaps to a level of understanding and empathy.

Prior research has explored pronoun choice/use by assessing participants' conscious decisions regarding the grammaticality of sentences (Bradley, 2020; Bradley et al.,

2019; Conrod, 2019; Hekanaho, 2020; Renstrom et al., 2021). In the current study, however, participants were acting intuitively, as deception was used, and the vignette was constructed so that pronoun choice/use was not made cognitively salient, therefore accessing implicit attitudes (Axt et al., 2021). This at once makes direct comparisons with prior research problematic, but also highlights the unique contribution of this study. The individuals within the vignette were nonbinary, but not explained as such, so could not invoke any preconceived negative stereotypes (Axt et al., 2021). Language, individual differences, and prior experience inform our mental representations of individuals and any automatically activated associations that can reveal engrained thought patterns (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2007; Greenwald & Banaji, 2017; Kurdi et al., 2019; Patev et al., 2019; Zimman, 2019). Linguistic choices are influenced by implicit attitudes, with speakers who display more implicit prejudicial attitudes more likely to misgender a referent (Conrod, 2018).

Gender identity strength was also proposed as a potential predictor (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015; Lindqvist et al., 2021; Morgenroth et al., 2021; Sheydaei, 2021), however, this was a weak predictor in this model. It is possible that the sample is relatively homogeneous in terms of gender identity strength, meaning that there is not enough variability to detect a strong effect. Age was also cited as a potential predictor, with prior research having highlighted that older participants rejected the singular use of ‘they’ (Conrod, 2019; Hekanaho, 2020). However, this was not confirmed in this sample, with gender inclusive language used by participants across the age range. It is possible that this is due to singular ‘they’ receiving increased attention within the public discourse (Conrod, 2019), and because the current study’s sample is constituted of mainly women, who are more prone to using gender inclusive language (Waldendorf, 2024).

The Need for Closure was not significantly correlated with the GBS and was a weak predictor in the model. This suggests that contrary to prior research findings where NFC was associated with binary gender views (Morgenroth et al., 2021), in the current study it did not appear to play a role in participants’ decision-making regarding their pronoun choice. It is possible that the context of the anonymous online survey played a role in how relevant NFC was, as respondents were referring to an imagined individual, so ambiguity and cognitive dissonance are perhaps reduced, as compared to meeting, and having to refer to someone in person. However, recent research has highlighted the

differential treatment, via email, of people who use ‘they/them’ pronouns (McCarty, 2024). Emails from students to authors requesting an article, who used ‘they/them’ as a sign off, were less likely to be responded to than students who identified as ‘he’ or ‘she’, with this effect only seen when the author/respondent was male (McCarty, 2024). This appears to be in line with the current study’s findings that ‘they/them’ was the last pronoun of choice from the male participants. This highlights that even when made more linguistically visible, nonbinary individuals are still discriminated against (Erdocia, 2021).

3.6 Implications

This study highlights that within the general population, we are seemingly still guided by entrenched heteronormative beliefs, leading to the predominant use of exclusive language when referring to individuals of unknown/nonbinary gender. This raises awareness about reflecting on one’s own implicit bias, the opportunity for behaviour change, and the importance of inclusive language use and respectful communication. This is highly relevant given that prior research has found that identity invalidation (misgendering) represents a unique form of minority stress for nonbinary adolescents (Goldberg et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2020). Personal pronoun choice is an act of linguistic self-determination, so using a person’s correct pronouns shows support for their right to self-identify and acceptance of their nonbinary (or gender expansive) identity (Hekanaho, 2020; Konnelly & Cowper, 2020).

Nationwide there is high variability when considering school contexts and the communities they serve, with respect to diversity of religious and cultural perspectives. These will necessarily inform within-school practices. In this way, staff need to work in collaboration with their wider communities, to support respectful, inclusive practices, given the potential, clash between the protected characteristics of religious beliefs and sexual/gender identity (Equality Act, 2010; Glazzard & Stones, 2021). It has been suggested that human rights frameworks might help justify why teachers, irrespective of religious belief, are obligated to protect pupils facing discrimination (Kurian, 2020). This is particularly relevant with the current absence of any firm governmental guidance for schools on how to support pupils on issues regarding gender identity. At the time of writing, the draft statutory guidance regarding the Relationships and Sex and Health Education (RSHE) curriculum is now open to consultation, after revisions that state that

schools in England should not teach about gender identity. This raises significant concerns regarding inclusion, and the provision of safe and reliable sources of information.

There is a clear need for guidance and ongoing reflective practice for school staff, a need for more affirming policies, practices and curricula that teach that prejudice and discrimination are unacceptable, and professional development to support staff to foster a more inclusive school environment (Chan et al. 2022; Markland, 2021). Discriminatory language is reportedly used in common parlance, with reported teacher inaction in the face of this and in many cases only tokenistic teaching on LGBTQ+ (see Glossary) issues, all of which add to conditions of vulnerability (Bower-Brown et al., 2021; McBride & Neary, 2021). Supporting GEY to feel they are validated and belong, during a critical time of development, within a setting where they can feel highly scrutinised, is vital for their wellbeing and educational outcomes (Russell & Fish, 2019). Practicing and role-modelling inclusive behaviour is a vital step towards inclusion, with correct pronoun use an example of inclusive behaviour, which can support gender minorities (Burns et al., 2022; Chan et al., 2022; Markland, 2021; Petronelli & Ferguson, 2022; Saguy & Williams, 2021). However, prior research has also found that for individuals who have a fluid gender identity, pronoun naming can feel restrictive, so should be optional, self-assigned and shared as the individual deems appropriate (McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2018). Staff and senior leadership are in a pivotal position to potentially improve the school experience of gender expansive youth (GEY; see Glossary), so need to be trained in appropriate, supportive behaviour and language (Bower-Brown et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2016). Educational psychologists, with reference to their standards of practice, are in a unique position to work across individual, group and systemic levels within schools and with communities. They can support schools to engage in reflective practice, impart knowledge, challenge bias and power imbalances and foster inclusive practices, all of which can be communicated and perpetuated through language.

3.7 Strengths and limitations

The survey design, the use of deception and ensuring that pronoun use was not made cognitively salient, all represent study strengths. The use of an anonymous survey removed the need to control for social desirability. This study used a good-sized sample

taken from the (UK) general population, which was diverse in age. Ethnicity data were captured, highlighting some variation, but with a predominance of British, English and Any other white background participants. Explicit consideration was not given to any differences across racial and ethnic groups, which highlights an area for future research, to better understand the implications of using nonbinary personal pronouns by diverse racial and ethnic groups (Saguy & Williams, 2021).

The current study's sample represents a strength, as previous research recruited from an American university, which is not representative of the general population within the USA, and affects its wider generalisability (Sheydaei, 2021). However, despite the good sample size, due to time limitations and initially low participant numbers, a paid participant pool (Prolific) was used, which brings some limitations into focus. These participants can browse studies and choose them according to whether it is a topic of interest, and/or for the monetary reward, and this can affect the quality of responses, in that respondents might want to finish as quickly as possible, giving less thought to their answers (Prolific.com). Another limitation is that whilst some demographic information was collected, information regarding respondents' educational levels, socio-economic status and geographical location was not, which affects commentary on the true diversity of the sample and the generalisability of the findings. Generalisability is also affected by the cross-sectional nature of the data and potential bias in the use of self-reported scales.

Another limitation of this study is the high correlation between the ATTIS and the GBS. Whilst these were chosen as discrete predictors, they are necessarily going to be related as they are scales that explore similar concepts, and therefore correlate highly. This can make it difficult to determine the individual impact of each predictor on the outcome variable. Additionally, in part due to concerns over survey length, contact with gender expansive individuals was not controlled for, which represents a significant limitation of this study. Prior research has highlighted that familiarity with someone who identifies as gender expansive can influence attitudes towards them (Hekanaho, 2020; Norton & Herek, 2013). This refers to the individual histories that are brought to bear in response to a social stimulus (Greenwald & Banaji, 2017).

Future research could replicate this study, considering and rectifying the acknowledged limitations, so that there is a diverse sample, and prior contact with gender expansive

individuals is included and measured as a continuous variable (Russell, 2021). It might be of interest to conduct a longitudinal study, to gain valuable insight into how pronoun usage changes over time, exploring any behaviour change and the factors influencing these changes.

3.8 Conclusion

This study extends current literature regarding the use of ‘they’ in the specific reference context, by exploring respondents’ implicit attitudes and subsequent use of predominantly exclusive pronouns. Congruent with prior research, gender role beliefs persist as the dominant predictor of linguistic behaviour. As a result of entrenched essentialist beliefs, we still have some way to go in terms of the acceptance and usage of ‘they’ as a nonbinary pronoun of reference. Additionally, its usage requires conscious effort, as we must stop and think about the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of our linguistic choices, requiring repeated adaptation of what is normally an automatic process (Waldendorf, 2024). It is possible that there is an unconscious non-prioritisation regarding the need to use it, where people lack understanding and knowledge around gender issues, and because language is largely policed by non-marginalised groups. Whilst the use of ‘they’ cannot be mandated, public attention can be drawn towards the psychological benefits of using gender inclusive language to increase its usage and give us all the opportunity to make a positive difference with our words (Koeser et al., 2015; Likis, 2021). With reference to Fishbein & Ajzen’s (2011) theory of behavioural prediction, if there is a shift in social norms and therefore people’s perceived norms, i.e., their perception of social pressure/approval to use gender inclusive language, and they perceive themselves as ultimately able (via their own self-efficacy beliefs and the environment) to use it, then behaviour might change.

Appendix A Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR; O'Brien et al., 2014)

No. Topic	Item	Y/N
Title and abstract		
S1 Title	Concise description of the nature and topic of the study identifying the study as qualitative or indicating the approach (e.g., ethnography, grounded theory) or data collection methods (e.g., interview, focus group) is recommended	
S2 Abstract	Summary of key elements of the study using the abstract format of the intended publication; typically includes objective, methods, results, and conclusions	
Introduction		
S3 Problem formulation	Description and significance of the problem/phenomenon studied; review of relevant theory and empirical work; problem statement	
S4 Purpose or research question	Purpose of the study and specific objectives or questions	
Methods		

S5 Qualitative approach and research paradigm	Qualitative approach (e.g., ethnography, grounded theory, case study, phenomenology, narrative research) and guiding theory if appropriate; identifying the research paradigm (e.g., positivist, constructivist/interpretivist) is also recommended	
S6 Researcher characteristics and reflexivity	Researchers' characteristics that may influence the research, including personal attributes, qualifications/experience, relationship with participants, assumptions, or presuppositions; potential or actual interaction between researchers' characteristics and the research questions, approach, methods, results, or transferability	
S7 Context	Setting/site and salient contextual factors; rationale[a]	
S8 Sampling strategy	How and why research participants, documents, or events were selected; criteria for deciding when no further sampling was necessary (e.g., sampling saturation); rationale[a]	
S9 Ethical issues pertaining to human subjects	Documentation of approval by an appropriate ethics review board and participant consent, or explanation for lack thereof; other confidentiality and data security issues	
S10 Data collection methods	Types of data collected; details of data collection procedures including (as appropriate) start and stop dates of data collection and analysis, iterative process, triangulation of sources/methods, and modification of procedures in response to evolving study findings; rationale[a]	
S11 Data collection instruments and technologies	Description of instruments (e.g., interview guides, questionnaires) and devices (e.g., audio recorders) used for data collection; if/how the instrument(s) changed over the course of the study	
S12 Units of study	Number and relevant characteristics of participants, documents, or events included in the study; level of participation (could be reported in results)	
S13 Data processing	Methods for processing data prior to and during analysis, including transcription, data entry, data management and security, verification of data integrity, data coding, and anonymization/deidentification of excerpts	

S14 Data analysis	Process by which inferences, themes, etc., were identified and developed, including researchers involved in data analysis; usually references a specific paradigm or approach; rationale[a]	
S15 Techniques to enhance trustworthiness	Techniques to enhance trustworthiness and credibility of data analysis (e.g., member checking, audit trail, triangulation); rationale[a]	
Results/Findings		
S16 Synthesis and interpretation	Main findings (e.g., interpretations, inferences, and themes); might include development of a theory or model, or integration with prior research or theory	
S17 Links to empirical data	Evidence (e.g., quotes, field notes, text excerpts, photographs) to substantiate analytic findings	
Discussion		
S18 Integration with prior work, implications, transferability, and contribution(s) to the field	Short summary of main findings; explanation of how findings and conclusions connect to, support, elaborate on, or challenge conclusions of earlier scholarship; discussion of scope of application/generalizability; identification of unique contribution(s) to scholarship in a discipline or field	
S19 Limitations	Trustworthiness and limitations of findings	
Other		
S20 Conflicts of interest	Potential sources of influence or perceived influence on study conduct and conclusions; how these were managed	

S21 Funding	Sources of funding and other support; role of funders in data collection, interpretation, and reporting	

Appendix B Data Extraction Table

Author & date	Country	Study aims	Sampling/recruitment approach	Participant details & study context	Data collection methods	Methodology/Analysis approach	Findings
Barringer et al., (2023)	USA	This study aimed to explore the ways LGBTQ students and their allies engage in activism to challenge anti-LGBTQ messages from campus preachers at	Accessing student-run newspapers of public universities in the USA. Of 837 such universities, 410 had online student newspapers with publicly available searchable databases.	LGBTQ students and their allies. Context: College campus (via analysis of student-run newspaper reports)	The dataset (59 articles) for this study was comprised of articles published between 2010 and 2020 by student-run newspapers from 43 public universities.	This study employed a framework suggested by Taylor et al.'s (2009) framework that consists of three parts: contestation, intentionality, and collective identity. Data was analysed using an inductive coding process.	Themes: Contestation: Religious hostility seen as an affront to the inclusive campus context. Activism creating a sense of community and solidarity and building students' resilience.

		their universities.					Religious hostility makes students feel fearful and unsafe. Intentional use of signs and symbols to enhance visibility and counteract hostile messages.
Berkman (2016)	USA	This study explores the factors or strategies that LGBQ Latino/a youth (18 to 24) identify as fostering their resilience in	Participants were recruited via a study advert on websites of local LGBQ and Latino/a community and university organizations and also on Facebook. A flyer was distributed advertising the study to local LGBQ community	Participants were 10 young adults ranging from 18 to 24 years of age, *n*=10 Context: various, described as a safe, private location for interviews.	In-depth interviews using a semi-structured protocol.	This study used a phenomenological methodology and a constructivist paradigm. The methodology was also informed by the framework of intersectionality.	Themes: Maladaptive coping through avoidance of their identity. Internal resource building, by educating oneself and engaging in positive self-talk. Keeping a positive mindset

		the face of adversity.	organizations and college campuses. Additionally, the researcher used a snowballing technique, with participants asked to refer other participants to the study.				Activism for solidarity, resisting oppression and change. Level of outness affects engagement in activism Intersectional identity as a source of strength and resilience. Religious hostility makes participants feel unsafe and afraid. Threats to self by having to justify your existence on a daily basis.

							Educating and helping others as purposeful work.
Cisneros (2015)	USA	The aim of this study is to understand, how undocuqueer activists exist and operate within excluding social systems.	Convenience and snowball sampling	Participants were self-identified undocuqueer activists who were also members of LGBTQ immigrant organizations, *n*=31 (*NB. Some of the participants' ages extended beyond the inclusion age range for this SLR, n=10, so only data from participants up to the age of 25 were considered*) Context: not stated	This study draws from narrative enquiry and uses a constructivist perspective and used in-depth semi-strucutred interviews (either in person or over Skype and ranging from 45 minutes to 3.5 hours). Data	Narrative analysis, employing language and constructs from Queer Intersectionality which was used as an analytical tool to support the naming of codes.	Themes: Resisting heteronormativity, which is seen as hurtful & oppressive Resilience as a necessary survival mechanism with regard to intersecting identities, where marginalisation creates vulnerability and fear for personal safety. Intersecting identity as a source of

					was collected in 2014.		strength despite impossible conditions. Identity concealment to avoid hostility Undocuqueer identity allows for the creation of their own space and resilience. Coming out as an act of resistance and resilience in the face of silencing marginalisation, after reaching self-acceptance, with activism as an empowering precursor to this identity acceptance.

							Educating others (in Spanish) as purposeful work to challenge cultural traditions
DiFulvio (2004)	USA	The aim of this study was to explore sexuality and gender diverse youths' experiences of violence, the consequences of these experiences and to develop a	The study was advertised via a campus newsletter, and a large undergraduate class, via flyers distributed at a LGBT pride rally and via the researcher networking with leaders of LGBT youth community organizations, GSAs, and LGBT organizations on college campuses	Youth who self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender and were aged 14-22 years old, were recruited for this study (*n*=15). Context: LGBT youth organisation	Data were collected via two focus groups with 12 youth and 15 in-depth individual interviews.Data was collected between March and August 2003.	Situated within a critical research paradigm, this study used a social-ecological approach to shift the focus away from an individual deficit perspective and accounts for the environmental factors that affect youths' lives. Data analysis was conducted using grounded theory	Themes: Resilience as a dynamic, evolving process. Resilience shown in participants' ability to reclaim agency, power and pride, by reclaiming the Self through connectedness and activism. Pervasive everyday threat & violence

		model of resilience.	within Massachusetts. Snowball sampling also supported recruitment.			methodologies (Charmaz, 2000,2002; Neumann, 1991; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).	within (non-inclusive) educational settings because of participants' perceived difference/otherness Regaining power through fighting back against harassment. Otherness and identity development and negotiation and lack of self-acceptance. Coming out as an act of resistance and resilience. Connection through gender affirmation

							leads to self-acceptance. Allies not necessarily safe either. Feelings of hypervigilance and unsafety. Discrimination and lack of understanding or support from staff, bordering on collusion. Some settings supportive. Interpersonal resistance to try and shift others' perceptions.

							Youth need opportunities to forge connections with other sexuality and gender diverse youth, to reduce isolation and empower them. Acts of resistance, such as forming a GSA, public speaking, attending marches, to find community and regain power over their identities and their lives.
Haffejee & Wiebesiek (2021)	South Africa	Using a single case study, this article aims to explore the	Self-selection.	Dee, a 19-year-old transgender youth *(n*=1) Context: A rural community in the Central	Single descriptive case study.	Participatory methodology, drawing on a socio-ecological framework of resilience. Data was	Themes: Struggling to understand one's identity and gain a

		adaptive strategies used by transgender youth when facing adversity.		Drakensberg region of SA.	Two in-depth interviews, one with the primary participant in person, which also involved a participatory visual activity in the form of a timeline. The other interview was conducted over the phone with a close friend of the participant, using a semi-structured interview guide.	analysed using thematic analysis	sense of belonging within a hostile, heteronormative context. Experiences of violence. Threats and aggression normalised by staff. Emotional toll of trying to live authentically and advocate for oneself. Proactivity needed to educate herself and others, within a context that does not understand, which is seen as purposeful work.

							Hostile religious narratives, that Dee tried to fit into. Reframing of hostile religious narratives and reaching self-acceptance.
Paceley et al., (2021)	USA	To explore the ways in which transgender and gender diverse (TGD) youth employ resistance to oppression as a means of fostering resilience.	Recruitment was achieved via email, word-of-mouth, social media adverts and fliers shared with organizations serving Transgender and Gender Diverse (TGD) Youth.	Transgender and gender diverse (TGD) youth (13-24), from Midwestern USA, *n*=19, aged 15-22 Participants self-identified their gender as: • Transgender man/boy/masculine (*n* = 8) • Non-binary/gender fluid (*n* = 8)	19 in-depth, semi-structured interviews (either online or in person)	Study informed by critical consciousness theory, with data anlaysed using thematic analysis.	Themes: Activism at intrapersonal, interpersonal, and community levels. Resistance to oppression as a form of resilience. Positive self-talk as a resistance (to hostility) strategy.

				• Transgender woman/girl/feminine (*n* = 3). Context: Various, e.g., participants' homes or libraries.			Resisting oppressive religious narratives. Hope seeking as a resistance strategy. Being authentic selves in resisting hostility, discrimination and oppression, which can be joy and pride-filled but is not necessarily always easy. Avoidance of hostility as a resistance strategy. Educating others, to resist and mitigate hostility, seen as a source of pride and

							purposeful in that it could 'spread the word' and encourage others to act. Activism to challenge discrimination and oppression – including everyday corrections, setting boundaries, more overt resistance e.g., confronting school officials, or mobilising those in power to support. A level of confidence needed to engage in activism, sometimes easier to do via the internet.

							The need to improve representation and visibility of TGD youth, via activism, to mitigate the effects of stigma for themselves and others.
Saltis et al., (2023)	USA	This study aimed to explore how participants navigate, cope with, and make sense of their experiences of oppression.	Purposeful and snowball sampling	Transgender and/or gender expansive youth (TGEY) participants aged between 13-17, *n*=9. Context: Not stated.	Two (60-90 minute) semi-structured interviews, with data collected between August and November 2020 (via Zoom).	Data analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).	Themes: Personal activism based on beliefs, e.g., following activists on social media, signing petitions, and attending protests. Educating others e.g., by correcting pronouns, which is a source of pride.

							Larger-scale activism via protests or implementing changes at school, e.g., setting up a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). Resilience shown by awareness of one's oppression and resisting dehumanisation and taking action, and wanting to be treated as whole, unique humans, not reduced to one identity. Wider (not reductionist) framing

							and acceptance of identity. Desire to see change (equal rights) as a catalyst to act. Education and activism for personal growth Emotional toll of engaging in activism.
Sostre et al., (2023)	USA	The current study was part of a larger study exploring the experiences of young Black TGD activists and it	Recruitment was achieved via flyers shared on Facebook and in public online Black and LGBQT clubs and organizations. Snowball sampling aided recruitment.	A community sample of Black TGD young adults, *n*=15, aged between 18 and 25 years old. Participants identified as activists who were involved in at least one form of activism during the pandemic.	15 semi structured interviews, conducted online between August 31, 2021, and October 29, 2021.	Study informed by intersectionality theory, with data analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013).	Themes: Witnessing violence as a catalyst to become an activist Emotional impact of knowing about levels of violence – sadness & anger.

		aimed to explore and understand young Black TGD activists' experiences with regard to anti-Black racism and cissexism during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how these experiences have affected their well-being.		Context: Not stated.			Experiencing religious hostility and discrimination. Fear of violence leads to hypervigilance. Activism as a coping strategy and path to resilience. Keeping a positive mindset. Activism and connection support levels of resilience. Avoiding hostility and maintaining boundaries to support wellbeing.

Appendix C Study advert and email

Email to colleges

Hi,

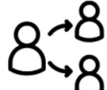
My name is Martha, and I am a third-year Doctoral student on the Educational Psychology course at the University of Southampton.

I am conducting a piece of fully funded research looking at the qualities and characteristics that predict or determine what information people are more likely to share about another person.

There is no work involved, other than a request for you to share the attached recruitment poster with your colleagues, and with the young people who attend your education provision. The study involves completing an anonymous questionnaire which should take approximately 20 minutes and can be completed on a mobile phone.

Many thanks for your support with this.

Kind regards.



Study exploring what influences the information we prioritise and share about others.

What are we doing?

We are carrying out a study to explore what influences the information we choose to prioritise and then share about others.

Who can take part?

If you're aged 16 or above.

What is involved?

Completing an anonymous online survey (20 minutes).

The survey will close at the end of February 2024

How do I take part?

Follow the link below or scan the QR code

https://southampton.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_7QBflVpRrdP7JVY

Study approved by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee at the University of Southampton. Ergo number 82280.

Appendix D List of colleges

Source: Education and Skills Funding Agency, and Association of Colleges

Northern Ireland	Belfast Metropolitan College
	North West Regional College
	Northern Regional College
	Southern Regional College
	South West College
	South Eastern Regional College
Wales	Bridgend College
	Cardiff and Vale College
	Coleg Cambria
	Coleg Gwent
	Coleg Sir Gâr
	Coleg Y Cymoedd

	Gower College Swansea
	Grŵp Llandrillo Menai
	Merthyr Tydfil College
	NPTC Group
	Pembrokeshire College
	St David's Catholic Sixth Form College
	Adult Learning Wales (Addysg Oedolion Cymru)
Scotland	Argyll College UHI
	Ayrshire College
	Borders College
	City of Glasgow College
	Dumfries & Galloway College
	Dundee and Angus College
	Edinburgh College

	Fife College
	Forth Valley College
	Glasgow Clyde College
	Glasgow Kelvin College
	Inverness College UHI
	Lews Castle College UHI
	Moray College UHI
	New College Lanarkshire
	Newbattle Abbey College
	North East Scotland College
	North Highland College UHI
	Orkney College UHI
	Perth College UHI
	Sabhal Mòr Ostaig UHI
	Shetland College UHI

	South Lanarkshire College
	West College Scotland
	West Highland College UHI
	West Lothian College

England:

Abingdon and Witney College
Activate Learning
Ada, National College for Digital Skills
Aquinas College
Askham Bryan College
Barking and Dagenham College
Barnet and Southgate College
Barnsley College
Barton Peveril College
Basingstoke College of Technology
Bath College
Bexhill College

Birmingham Metropolitan College
Bishop Auckland College
Bishop Burton College
Blackburn College
Blackpool and The Fylde College
Blackpool Sixth Form College
Bolton College
Bolton Sixth Form College
Boston College
Bournemouth & Poole College
Bradford College
Bridgwater and Taunton College
Brighton, Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College
Brockenhurst College
Brooklands College
Buckinghamshire College Group
Burnley College
Burton and South Derbyshire College

Bury College
Calderdale College
Cambridge Regional College
Capel Manor College
Capital City College Group (CCCG)
Cardinal Newman College
Carmel College
Chelmsford College
Cheshire College South and West
Chesterfield College
Chichester College Group
Christ the King Sixth Form College
Cirencester College
City College Norwich
City College Plymouth
City Literary Institute (The)
City of Bristol College

City of Portmouth College
City of Wolverhampton College
Colchester Institute
Coventry College
Craven College
Croydon College
Darlington College
DCG
Derwentside College
DN Colleges Group
Dudley College
Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College
East Coast College
East Durham College
East Sussex College Group
Eastleigh College
EKC Group
Exeter College

Fareham College
Farnborough College of Technology
Fircroft College of Adult Education
Franklin College
Furness College
Gateshead College
Gloucestershire College
Grantham College
Greenhead College
Halesowen College
Harlow College
Harrow Richmond Uxbridge Colleges (HRUC)
Hartlepool College of Further Education
Hartpury College
Havant and South Downs College
Heart of Worcestershire College
Heart of Yorkshire Education Group
Hereford College of Arts

Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire College
Hereward College of Further Education
Hertford Regional College
Hills Road Sixth Form College
Holy Cross College
Hopwood Hall College
Huddersfield New College
Hugh Baird College
Hull College
Inspire Education Group
Itchen College
John Leggott Sixth Form College
Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College
Kendal College
Kingston Maurward College
Kirklees College
Lakes College, West Cumbria
Lancaster and Morecambe College

Leeds College of Building
Leicester College

Leyton Sixth Form College
Lincoln College
London South East Colleges (LSEC)
Long Road Sixth Form College
Loreto College
Loughborough College
LTE Group
Luminate Education Group
Luton Sixth Form College
Macclesfield College
Marine Society College of the Sea
Mary Ward Centre
Middlesbrough College
Mid-Kent College
Milton Keynes College

Morley College London
Moulton College F.E.C
Myerscough College
NCG (Newcastle College)
Nelson and Colne College
New City College
New College, Durham
New College, Swindon
Newbury College
Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group (NSCG)
Newham College of Further Education
Newham Sixth Form College
North East Surrey College of Technology
North Hertfordshire College
North Kent College
North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College
Northampton College

Northern College for Residential Adult Education
Notre Dame Catholic Sixth Form College
Nottingham College
Oaklands College
Orbital South Colleges
Peter Symonds' College
Petroc
Plumpton College
Preston College
Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College
Reaseheath College
Richmond and Hillcroft Adult and Community College
Riverside College
RNN Group
Runshaw College
Ruskin College
Salford City College

Sandwell College
Scarborough Sixth Form College
Shipley College
Shrewsbury Colleges Group
Sir George Monoux College
SK Group
SMB Group

Solihull College and University Centre
South and City College Birmingham
South Bank Colleges (Lambeth College)
South Devon College
South Essex College of Further and Higher Education
South Gloucestershire and Stroud College
South Staffordshire College
Southampton City College
Southport College
Sparsholt College, Hampshire

St Brendan's Sixth Form College
St Charles Catholic Sixth Form College
St Dominic's Sixth Form College
St Francis Xavier Sixth Form College
St John Rigby College
Stanmore College
Stoke-on-Trent College
Strode College
Suffolk New College
Sunderland College Group (Education Partnership North
Tameside College
TEC Partnership
Telford College
The Bedford College Group
The City of Liverpool College
The College of Richard Collyer in Horsham
The College of West Anglia

The Cornwall College Group
The Education Training Collective
The Henley College
The Isle of Wight College
The National College for Advanced Transport and Infrastr
The Northern School of Art
The Oldham College
The Sheffield College
The Sixth Form College Brooke House
The Sixth Form College, Colchester
The South Thames College Group
The West Herts College Group
The Windsor Forest Colleges Group
Trafford College Group
Truro and Penwith College
Tyne Coast College
Unified Seevic Palmer's College (USP)

United Colleges Group
Varndean College
Vision West Nottinghamshire College
Walsall College
Waltham Forest College
Warrington and Vale Royal College
Warwickshire College Group
West Suffolk College
West Thames College
Weston College
Weymouth College
Wigan and Leigh College
Wilberforce College
Wiltshire College and University Centre
Winstanley College
Wirral Metropolitan College
Workers' Educational Association
Working Men's College

WQE and Regent Colleges Group
Wyke Sixth Form College
Xaverian College
Yeovil College
York College

Appendix E Ethnicity data

Ethnicity Data

Ethnicity	Frequency
African	4
Any other Asian background	1
Any other Black African Caribbean background	1
Any other ethnic group	1
Any other mixed	2
Any other White background	12
Asian and White	5
Asian British	2
Bangladeshi	2
Black African and White	1
Black British	1

Black Caribbean and White	2
British	52
Chinese	3
English	86
Indian	5
Irish	1
Northern Irish	1
Other	2
Pakistani	7
Scottish	16
Welsh	4
Total	211

Appendix F Participant Information Sheet

Combined Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form for Anonymous Online Surveys for Adult Participants

Study Title: *Exploring the person factors that influence participants' prioritisation and subsequent sharing of information.*

Researcher: Martha Mayfield

What is the research about?

My name is Martha Mayfield, and I am a third-year Doctoral student on the Educational Psychology course at the University of Southampton, in the United Kingdom. I am inviting you to participate in a study exploring the person factors that predict or determine what information people are more likely to share about another person. This study aims to explore both the person factors that predict information sharing and what personal attributes are shared most.

We have a preference to connect with people who are similar to us, known as homophily (McPherson et al. 2001). This study will look at what aspects of a person participants prioritise. How does what the participant knows about someone influence the terms they then use to describe them? It is known that the information we consider relevant about a person depends on how close we are to that person (Guerreiro & Goncalves, 2013).

This study was approved by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) at the University of Southampton (Ethics/ERGO Number: 82280).

What will happen to me if I take part?

This study involves completing an anonymous questionnaire which should take approximately 20 minutes of your time. If you are happy to complete this survey, you will need to tick (check) the box below to give your consent and indicate your language proficiency. As this survey is anonymous, the researcher will not be able to know whether you have participated, or what answers you provided.

Why have I been asked to participate?

You have been asked to take part because you are a UK citizen (aged 16+). Participants are being recruited from the UK and need to be competent English users. We are aiming to recruit at least 100 participants for this study.

What information will be collected?

The questions in this survey ask for information in relation to your views on certain social factors, as measured by a number of rating scales. The survey will also include the collection of demographic information regarding your age, ethnicity and self-identified gender. Some of the survey questions contain text boxes where you will be asked to type in your own answers. Please note that in order for this survey to be anonymous, you should not include in your answers any information from which you, or other people, could be identified.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will not receive any direct benefits; however, your participation will contribute to knowledge in this area of research.

Are there any risks involved?

It is expected that taking part in this study will not cause you any psychological discomfort or distress. However, should you feel uncomfortable you can leave the survey at any time or contact the following resources for support:

- https://www.samaritans.org
- https://www.mind.org

What will happen to the information collected?

All information collected for this study will be stored securely on a password protected computer and backed up on a secure server. Some brief qualitative data, generated from a short narrative task, will be collected as part of the study, but no personal data is required, so responses will remain fully anonymous. The anonymous data will be uploaded to the University’s institutional repository, for other researchers to use.

The information collected will be analysed and written up as part of the researchers's doctoral thesis and for future publication.

Data Protection Privacy Notice

The University of Southampton conducts research to the highest standards of ethics and research integrity. In accordance with our Research Data Management Policy, data will be held for 10 years after the study has finished when it will be securely destroyed.

As a publicly-funded organisation, the University has to ensure that it is in the public interest when we use personally-identifiable information about people who have

agreed to take part in research. This means that when you agree to take part in a research study, we will use information about you in the ways needed, and for the purposes specified, to conduct and complete the research project. Under data protection law, 'Personal data' means any information that relates to and is capable of identifying a living individual. The University's data protection policy governing the use of personal data by the University can be found on its website (https://www.southampton.ac.uk/legalservices/what-we-do/data-protection-and-foi.page).

What happens if I change my mind?

You are free to end this survey at any time (just exit the website). Should you wish to withdraw your data, you will be given an option to do so at the end of the survey.

What happens if there is a problem?

If you are unhappy about any aspect of this study and would like to make a formal complaint, you can contact the Head of Research Integrity and Governance, University of Southampton, on the following contact details: Email: rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk, phone: + 44 2380 595058.

Please quote the Ethics/ERGO number above. Please note that by making a complaint you might be no longer anonymous.

More information on your rights as a study participant is available via this link:

https://www.southampton.ac.uk/about/governance/participant-information.page

Thank you for reading this information sheet and considering taking part in this research.

Contact details:

Martha Mayfield: mrm1n20@soton.ac.uk

Supervised by:

Dr Sarah Wright: s.f.wright@soton.ac.uk

Dr Cora Sargeant: c.c.sargeant@soton.ac.uk

Appendix G Survey Production Task

Please read this bullet-pointed description of Taylor, who will be joining you and your friends on a trip. To introduce Taylor to your friends, please write in your own words, a short description of Taylor in the text box below, including a summary sentence at the end.

- Taylor is a positive person, with a kind and compassionate nature.
- Taylor is always willing to lend a helping hand.
- Dependable and loyal, Taylor is a friend you can count on in any situation.
- With an infectious sense of humour, Taylor can lighten any situation and puts others at ease.
- Sometimes Taylor can be reserved and prefer time alone, or with a small group of friends.
- Taylor enjoys listening to a variety of musical genres and also loves to read and cook with friends.

Appendix H Debriefing Form[1]

Debriefing Form

Study Title: *Exploring the factors that influence speakers' adoption or rejection of gender-inclusive pronouns.*

Ethics/ERGO number: 82280

Researcher(s): Martha Mayfield

University email: mrm1n20@soton.ac.uk

Thank you for taking part in our research project. Your contribution is very valuable and greatly appreciated.

Purpose of the study

The aim of this research was to understand what predicts people's behaviour and decisions around inclusive pronoun use. We had to recruit deception so that your attention was not drawn to the true purpose of the study. Your data will help our understanding of what factors influence people's use of language and the strategies they use when referring to individuals whose gender is unknown.

[1] Future researchers should be mindful of the level of language used within the included debriefing form to explain to participants that deception was involved and how it was carried out. This is an issue which should be attended to should this research be replicated.

Use of deception

Because of the study design, there was some information about this research that could not be shared with you prior to the study, as doing so probably would have impacted your actions and responses.

We hope that this form clarifies the purpose of the research, and the reason why we could not tell you all the study details prior to your participation. We hope that you understand the reason for the use of deception.

Please do not discuss this study, or show this debriefing form, to anyone until the study is complete, as this could affect the study results.

If you would like to withdraw your data, please select the option to below.

Confidentiality

Results of this study will not include your name or any other identifying characteristics.

Study results

If you would like to receive a copy of the summary of the research findings, please enter your email address in the text box below. It is up to you whether you would like to receive study results. Please note that by providing your contact details, the fact that you have participated in the study will no longer be anonymous, but the associated data will remain anonymous.

Further support

If taking part in this study has caused you discomfort or distress, you can contact the following organisations for support:

- https://www.samaritans.org
- https://www.mind.org

Further reading

If you would like to learn more about this area of research, you can refer to the following resource, of which a copy can be requested from the library as an interlibrary loan:

- Sheydaei, I. (2021). Gender Identity and Nonbinary Pronoun Use. *Gender and Language*. https://doi.org/10.1558/genl.18871

Further information

If you have any concerns or questions about this study, please contact Martha Mayfield at mrm1n20@soton.ac.uk who will do her best to help.

If you remain unhappy you can contact Dr Cora Sargeant (c.c.sargeant@soton.ac.uk). If you would like to make a formal complaint, please contact the Head of Research Integrity and Governance, University of Southampton, by emailing: rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk, or calling: + 44 2380 595058. Please quote the Ethics/ERGO number which can be found at the top of this form. Please note that if you participated in an anonymous survey, by making a complaint, you might no longer be anonymous.

Thank you again for your participation in this research.

Glossary of Terms

Heteronormative .... The belief or assumption that heterosexuality, based on a binarized view of the sexes and traditional roles, is the ‘norm’.

Cisgender .... Describes an individual whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth.

Gender expansive............ A term that is inclusive and acknowledges diversity and may be used to describe a range of gender identities, such as genderqueer, nonbinary, gender nonconforming, agender, bigender.

GSA..................................Genders & Sexualities Alliances are student-run organisations that provide a safe and uniting space for LGBTQ+ youth and their allies, to foster community and support action around issues that impact them, leading to social change.

LGBTQ+ .... An ‘umbrella’ acronym that encompasses Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, while also representing other orientations and identities, such as nonbinary, asexual, intersex, pansexual or two-spirit.

Undocuqueer .... A self-defined, political identity from the USA, that brings together individuals’ gender identity and expression, sexuality, and immigration status, highlighting their existence within two marginalised populations.

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