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A Queer Resilience: Reviving Indigenous-Pacific Perspectives and Practices

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Abstract

In the face of ongoing discrimination, stigma, ostracism, and violence, Pacific Islanders of Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities, Intersex Expressions, and Sex Characteristics (PIDSOGIESC+) display a marked resilience. And yet, this resilience does not come lightly, nor is it cheap. This research draws on a mixed-methods data set to explore the complicated notion of resilience among PIDSOGIESC+ communities. Through engaging in rich *talanoas*, along with a wide-reaching survey, a nuanced picture emerges of communities that draw on a range of indigenous cultural perspectives across the Tropical Pacific to develop creative strategies for engaging meaningfully with the world around them. Highlighting a strengths-based approach to research and service delivery, we explore the unique skillset of the PIDSOGIESC+ community, the changes they have won, and the vision of a more inclusive society they are fighting for.

Keywords: Queer Resilience, LGBTQIA+, Tropical Pacific, Indigenous Pacific, Talanoa, PIDSOGIESC+

Introduction

*“You know we should not normalize saying “I’ve grown thick skin”.
Nobody else is subjected to that kind of hate. Why
should you grow thick skin? It’s unhealthy.”*

— A Fijian vakasalewalewa

Across the Tropics, the ongoing impacts of colonization continue to be felt, with hopeful postcolonial voices colliding with neo-colonial forces to provide a complex milieu of old and new, ancient and emerging. For many Pacific Islanders, this reality is all too present. With a diverse array of cultures, histories, and peoples, the Pacific is bound by a shared history of colonial rule, a rule that sought to decimate local ways of knowing and doing, being, and becoming. This ongoing legacy has a particular and significant impact on Pacific Islanders of Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (PIDSOGIESC+).

PIDSOGIESC+ people experience high levels of community and systemic violence, familial ostracism, and societal discrimination (Idris, 2021). Concurrently (as reported in the data below), low levels of trust in institutions, culturally embedded ostracism, and an ill-equipped public services sector result in entrenched underreporting of ongoing human rights violations.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has reported that:

Pacific islanders of all ages who are perceived to be LGBTI suffer from human rights violations.... There have been reports in the region of punitive rape of women perceived to be lesbian. Homophobic...bullying in schools denies young people safe access to education and often leads to students dropping out of school. A disproportionate number of LGBTI youth commit suicide due to physical and psychological abuse. These issues often result in LGBTI people not being able to reach their full potentials with reduced access to health care, education and stable employment keeping them from being integrated members of their societies. Many LGBTI associations find it exceedingly hard to be officially recognized. (UNDP, 2016, p. 30).



Despite the above, PIDSOGIESC+ communities across the Pacific exhibit a remarkable resilience. Colorful, creative, connected, and collaborative, these tropical communities continue to defy the odds as they support one another, build one another up, and create spaces of safety.

Naming, celebrating, and drawing on this resilience is vital. As Ravulo (2021, p. 115) contends, there is now a “a resurgence occurring among many Pacific Peoples across Oceania to reclaim and profile the resilience of Pacific sexualities. This is evident in the ways Pacific individuals have started to call out the moral biases and binaries our own Pacific People have internalized from colonization.” As we center and highlight this resilience, we heed Meyers’ (2003, p. 365) call to “move from viewing minority groups as passive victims of prejudice to viewing them as actors who interact effectively within society.”

And yet, it is also imperative that we recognize that resilience does not come easy. The path to resilience is, by definition, treacherous, and the very nature of it denotes hardship. Furthermore, resilience as a framework must be located in the unique contexts in which it is found. As such, this paper attempts to nuance the discussion around how resilience is framed across the Tropical Pacific, while simultaneously highlighting a strengths-based approach to service delivery, policy development, and community participation.

Methods: Capturing Nuance

Commissioned by the Pacific Sexuality and Gender Diversity Network (PSGDN), this research draws on a mixed-methods dataset captured across the Pacific in 2023. Developed collaboratively between PSGDN, and researchers from the University of Sydney (Australia) and the University of the South Pacific (Fiji), the project was driven by the lived realities of people on the ground in the Pacific Islands. As such, the qualitative portion of research used a *talanoa* methodology, contributing to the ongoing work of decolonizing research across the region.

Talanoas

Talanoa is a culturally informed, Pacific methodology which has been developed and utilized to capture experiences, values, and meaning (Vaiolleti, 2013). Talanoas allow in depth discussion, building on the relationship between researchers and participants to provide space for conversation to flow as participants desire.

Discussing the experiences of LGBTQ+ women, 62 individuals took part in 10 talanoa sessions across Tonga, Samoa, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Vanuatu, and the Solomon Islands. The smallest talanoa was with three people and the largest with nine participants. Jioji Ravulo, an experienced facilitator, hosted the discussions and provided space for people to share ideas. Discussions ranged from 75 minutes, through to 169 minutes. Participants were sourced through snowball and purposive sampling to ensure a wide range of experiences were presented.

Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, capturing both verbal and (where appropriate) non-verbal communication. The research team then engaged thematic analysis to identify emerging themes, patterns, and insights. Three researchers with expertise in qualitative research developed and compared codes through an iterative process to ensure rigor, while maintaining an emphasis on capturing the nuance of stories presented by participants.

Survey

Throughout August to November 2023, PIDSOGIESC+ people across the Pacific were invited to take part in a survey adapted from the 2012 survey of LGBT people conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. This survey has formed a “benchmark” for understanding LGBTQIA+ experiences (World Bank Group, 2018). A self-selected, nonprobability sample was deemed appropriate due to a current lack of a sampling frame within the region (the number of PIDSOGIESC+ people within the broader community is unknown).

Given the remote nature of many people in the Pacific, and to counter a lack of access to technology, a team of local, country specific, survey assistants were deployed in October-November 2023. Survey assistants were asked to take part in survey dissemination, translation, and technology support. Completed surveys ($n=466$) were analyzed using Qualtrics Data software’s inbuilt tools to provide a descriptive, multivariate analysis of the data.

Ethics

All research was jointly approved by, and conducted in line with, The University of Sydney’s Human Research Ethics Committee (2023/126) and The University of the



South Pacific's School of Law and Social Sciences Academic Unity Research Committee.

Contours and Context

When reading extant literature, it can sometimes feel as though “the Pacific” is a monolithic region. It most certainly is not. The countries that make up this portion of the Tropics are diverse, vibrant, and multi-layered. Spanning Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, there is a multiplicity of languages, customs, and cultures. That being said, their geographic and tropical oceanic location, along with strong ties to family, collectivist values, spirituality, and recreation, provide shared commonalities.

In reporting on the complex context for PIDSOGIESC+ people across this region, it is also appropriate to explore Pacific colonization and its wide-ranging impacts. Throughout both extant literature, and the talanoas presented here, colonization and decolonization emerged as a key determinant in understanding present realities for resilience.

Colonization and Religiosity

Today it is largely recognized that the cultural milieu of the Tropical Pacific prior to colonization held a fluidity regarding gender and sexuality that has been replaced by the strict binary and patriarchal patterns of European norms (Dvorak, 2014; Ravulo, 2021; Schoeffel, 2014). Colonial expansionism brought with it a stigmatization and criminalization of diverse gender identities, expressions, and sexualities, that can still be felt across the region. Pre-colonial indigenous Pacific expressions varied from the male/female binary, and sexuality was seen as more diverse. The most explicit impact of colonization is, perhaps, the sodomy laws which still exist in at least six countries in the region, while no country has yet passed legislation providing legal gender recognition for transgender or intersex individuals.

Lamenting the loss of traditional cultures which celebrated such diversity, one Fijian vakasalewalewa (assigned male at birth with a female gender expression) said during a talanoa:

There are so many aspects of our (traditional) culture that would help us so much... These are all things that don't require you to identify yourself as a second gender. It surpasses and goes beyond that.... Because

of... for lack of a better way to say it, the Western onslaught, the culture that they brought us up on made us think beyond the clothing and go straight into what's underneath our clothes, our genitalia, which is a huge taboo in our culture because we did not want to know who you were fucking in the bedroom. We're not supposed to talk about it. We were beyond sex in the room. We were beyond what's in between your legs.

Hand in hand with colonization came the work of missionaries who brought Christianity to the area. It is difficult to exaggerate the impact that the Christian religion has had across the Pacific. As Tomlinson and McDougall (2013, p. 3) state, Christianity in the modern Pacific is “the ground and starting point for political action,” meaning that politics and Christianity are “inseparable at any level of analysis.” Presterudestuen (2019, p. 167) explains further that “Christian moralities are often used explicitly to target non-heteronormative individuals both judicially and extra-judicially, and to justify persecution of gender variant individuals.”

One participant spoke about how discrimination took on a religiously derived form during disasters such as tropical hurricanes and world-wide pandemics. Reflecting on the Covid19 pandemic in Fiji, this participant stated:

(Everyone) just automatically assumed that all of us that were in the community were carriers of the virus or caused it, like brought it to Fiji. And then they would use religion to back them. “This is a sign of God,” you know, we are now infected with the virus.... “It's because of the gays.” “We're allowing gay marches. We're allowing the gay organizations to exist. We are allowing our children to wear dresses.... ” That's the hate rhetoric that came out after the march – the people that were commenting – “There is going to be something that happens so wait for the next hurricane consequences.”

This form of discrimination was seen as the norm across talanoa discussions, with comments regularly made in social media, popular culture, political discourse, and community discussions.

Adding more nuance to the discussion, many participants in this research shared that religion continued to play an important role in how they relate both to themselves, and to their community. Many recounted that they maintained an active faith. For example, a

trans woman from the Solomon Islands reflected many participants' experiences, saying:

But for me, I really believe in God. And even though the same God that I wish...other people use the doctrines about the God against me...for me, I still believe in him and I still value my connection with him.

In order to understand this dynamic it is important not to fall into binary thinking in which religion is seen as separate and/or opposing to PIDSOGIESC+ people's lived experience. Indeed, part of the task of listening to rainbow voices is a destabilizing, or a queering, of such binary thinking. The two are deeply entwined right across the region and separating them would do a disservice to those who hold both a religious identity and diverse gender or sexual identities.

Ongoing Systemic Discrimination and Rights Abuses

This research further reiterates that across all domains of society PIDSOGIESC+ people continue to face systemic discrimination and rights abuses. From education through to employment, and family through to politics, experiences of ostracism went hand in hand with having diverse gender expressions and sexualities.

"Most of us are pushed out of school due to stigma and discrimination," said one Papua New Guinean trans woman, reflecting on the pipeline from early experiences to hardship later in life. A gay man in the Solomon Islands reflected that "[people in the Solomon Islands] see LGBT people like, they are not human beings. They see them like they are garbage." When discussing government services, a Ni-Vanuatuan queer woman shared that "given the stance of a lot of public officials about queer people, I don't think that they would be creating safe policies for queer people."

In the survey, participants were asked to report on the frequency of various forms of discrimination. Whilst looking for a job, 73% of intersex respondents reported experiencing discrimination, followed by 62% of transgender respondents, and 59% of sexually diverse individuals. When asked about using public transport, 90% of intersex respondents reported discrimination, followed by 61% of transgender individuals, and 55% of sexuality diverse people. These statistics are alarmingly high. Similarly high statistics were reported for using social media, attending school and university, visiting cafes/restaurants/nightclubs, and while exercising at sports or fitness clubs.

As one Fijian vakasalewalewa appropriately summarized:

I think it's a sad scenario if we continue to compromise our existence, and our access to these human rights, because nothing around us would try and protect us in any violation, or there are people who are in this space who just wouldn't help us at all. So, I think that's a huge challenge that we must talk about.

To explore the contours of discrimination and human rights abuses further, it is important to also name and unpack instances of violence PIDSOGIESC+ people experience across this tropical region. Once again, this research paints an alarming picture. Within the survey participants who answered questions on violence ($n=266$), 60% of individuals reported experiencing physical/sexual assaults or threats of violence in the past five years (53% in the country where they live, 7% abroad). Of these, 89% knew, thought, or believed the assault to be related to their PIDSOGIESC+ identity. This extraordinarily high rate of exposure to violence was almost always perceived as targeted towards their gender identity/expression, intersex status, or sexuality.

When asked about the reporting of physical/sexual assaults ($n=100$), 84% stated they did not report the incident to the police, with the highest reason for not reporting being they “did not think they (police) would do anything” (35%), followed by “fear of offender/fear of reprisal” (29%). High levels of violence, coupled with low levels of reporting, were found to be prolific across the Pacific.

These alarming survey statistics were reiterated within talanoas. For example, in Fiji, one trans individual shared:

I got raped on my way home. I did not know what I did wrong. I was just walking home.... And then I completely pushed it down because my sister...took me to the police station. I had an attempt to report the issue, now still bleeding...the police officers told my sister that that was probably something I brought up on myself. So the moment I heard that, I pushed it down and I realized if this happened to me, how many other people who were just like me have been through this?

In Papua New Guinea a similar image was painted throughout the talanoas, with one trans individual sharing:

And if I go to the police to make a complaint about me being raped, abused and all this.... And so if I actually make a complaint to this particular police officer that is in charge, then in return, he has to take his chances before he can attend to my query...and you know what I mean.... They turn the conversation around and it becomes an issue, and at the end of the day, I am the troublemaker. So I get locked up.

In Tonga, one participant shared that PIDSOGIESC+ people avoided going to the police because when matters were raised with the authorities, it would have other consequences:

We've had some cases that were brought to us. But when we are about to report him to the, the police, they asked to drop it, because once it goes to the authority, it will affect their relationship with their families back at home.

It is evident from both extant literature and this research that PIDSOGIESC+ people continue to face extraordinary challenges, right across the spectrum of society and across the Pacific. These challenges are often faced without opportunities for due recourse and thus compound the complexities faced by marginalization and ostracism. Without significant change within systems of governance, private business, and cultural paradigms, these cycles of violence will likely continue. As such, it is appropriate to now shift attention to where such change is taking place, being led from the margins with PIDSOGIESC+ people themselves demonstrating extraordinary strength.

Centering Resilience

Research amongst diverse SOGIESC+ (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics) communities around the world has shown resilience to be a key area for understanding positive well-being outcomes (Colpitts & Gahagan, 2016; McConnell et al., 2018; Wong, 2015). Moving from a deficit based model of research which frames PIDSOGIESC+ people as perpetual victims, this approach has developed as a way of highlighting the strengths, successes, and ability to move forward within the global SOCIESC community (Colpitts & Gahagan, 2016).

At the same time that resilience has become a key framer amongst global SOCIESC+ communities, increasing climate disasters across the Tropical Pacific region have necessitated a regional emphasis on the concept of resilience, in which "Pacific Islands

have become hubs of innovation, where climate strategies are piloted and refined to inform adaptation efforts globally” (McLeod et al., 2019, p. 1). As such, resilience as a concept is well-placed across the Pacific to be centered as a positive framing for PIDSOGIESC+ experiences.

Similarly to the region’s responses to climate change, it is by necessity that PIDSOGIESC+ people have been forced to adapt and adopt a posture of resilience, leading Ravulo (2021, p. 115) to observe:

...there is a resurgence occurring among many Pacific Peoples across Oceania to reclaim and profile the resilience of Pacific sexualities. This is evident in the way Pacific individuals have started to call out the moral biases and binaries our own Pacific Peoples have internalized from colonization. Pacific Peoples are creating social movements via social media and are using other forms of media including print and radio to call out the negative use of judgmental and divisive labels and stereotypes among our own Pacific Peoples.

Building on this notion of resilience of Pacific sexualities and decolonial practices, talanoas elucidated four areas of resilience that can help shape understandings of paths forward for PIDSOGIESC+ people. Firstly, reclaiming cultural practices through decolonial processes was spoken about across this Tropical region. Secondly, community centered care in which PIDSOGIESC+ people are integral to the design, implementation, and evaluation of the care was paramount. Thirdly, adopting a strengths-based approach to resilience is vital. And fourthly, building upon the unique skillsets within the community was discussed. Each of these will now be further unpacked.

Reclaiming Cultural Practices

The fluidity of sexualities and genders across the Pacific was disrupted and dismantled by the binary notions and enforced Christian moralities that came with colonization (McCubbin & Marcus, 2017). In order to reclaim the diversity of Pacific sexualities prior to colonization, Ravulo (2021) suggests a three-pronged approach to change: Education around Pacific-Indigenous values and sexuality; the challenging of pervasive whiteness; and the sharing of diverse stories that profile resilience and celebrate difference were offered as a pathway towards cultural reclamation. Each of these

entwined approaches was demonstrated throughout the talanoas, with a wide range of diverse stories offered.

Highlighted in each of the conversations was a tangible longing for a revival of traditional cultural mores. Holding concepts such as *solesolevaki* (Fijian, “serving others”) and *vanua* were demonstrably central to many participants’ sense of self and sense of connection. A queer Ni-Vanuatu woman summarized many of the comments that had been shared within a talanoa by saying:

If we go back in history before Christianity became this thing that ruled everywhere, I think if we really looked at indigenous cultures at the base level, the foundation of it is community, right? And what I think the queer community has is community, is the acceptance and that's something that we can provide.

And that's something that we can bring to the table...especially now, where individualism is like a huge thing...cultures and customs are changing now to try and fit into this Western ideology, that individualism is the way to go, whereas, I don't know, the queer community, just we have...and acceptance and understanding, and if I can be like open and honest, I think that that was what the core was, that was what the foundation of indigenous culture was.

Among participants there was a sense of pride in their historical cultural roots, with a strong belief that these roots could pave the way to future hope. Importantly, for some individuals this was not a future prospect, but a present reality amongst PIDSOGIESC+ people, which they felt broader society could, and should, take heed of. One non-binary Fijian individual shared:

(Our community) know who they are, what their roots are. They know what their connections are. When I see these people, for me, they are like the gatekeepers of indigenous culture and the wider society does not see them as that way because they are not the ones that's reproducing. But it's these people who are the keepers of cultural knowledge.... It's trans women who are really good keepers of cultural knowledge, and people tend to overlook them and their contributions without realizing the amount of truth and knowledge that they hold.

Likewise, a Samoan fa'afafine (assigned male at birth, with a female gender expression) reflected on the impact another fa'afafine had had, sharing:

She's very good in the Samoan language or the traditional language. She's very, she speaks very fluent and that she, she is teaching Samoan people of the traditional terms for weather forecast. So she knows those terms that we do not, we have very limited knowledge of it. Like the north, the south, the east, the, the types of winds she knows. So she's teaching Samoan people

To tie these quotes back to Ravulo's three-pronged approach above, it is evident that PIDSOGIES+ people are engaging in educating others about traditional culture, are challenging the assumptions of white superiority that came hand in hand with colonization, and are sharing their stories in ways which celebrate their resilience.

Community Centered Care

One key finding that has emerged from the survey is that the PIDSOGIESC+ movement across the Pacific is remarkably active. Of those surveyed, 77% said they were at least somewhat active in the movement, with 46% being "very active". While this is likely in part due to the selection criteria and sampling of the survey, the high figures point to a deeply engaged movement.

When combined with data from the talanoa discussions, these figures make sense, as participants consistently highlighted the remarkable sense of community that surrounds PIDSOGIESC+ people across this topical region. For example, when asked what broader society can learn from PIDSOGIESC+ communities, a queer identifying Tongan woman shared that:

(Broader society) can learn from our hearts like this: When the LGBT community comes together to do a work or to do something, we do it with all we have, to the best, and to the perfect as it is...we're all there, we all have each other's backs....

"Having each other's backs" was a concept that resonated right across the region. For example, in Tonga, a leiti (assigned male at birth with a female gender expression) shared:

I'm really grateful for being for being introduced into the TLA [Tongan Leiti's Association] because in that way, I got to really discover myself and, you know, I get to learn...like I get to be with these people in this community and when being with them, I get to feel accepted. I get to feel like I fit in, like I actually do fit in in a community. And that made me so happy.

The community is adept at rallying around one another to provide emotional, social, and material support. Highlighting further the concept of *solesolevaki* [reciprocal living], a Fijian vakasalewalewa shared that “we will activate as a community to make sure that you're not disadvantaged in accessing those resources. So I know we will activate to find food for you.”

As stated above, survey results showed a very low level (16%) of reporting of violent crimes to the police. Interestingly, there was a higher rate (23%) of participants who reported incidents to an LGBTI+ organization. While these organizations do not have the scope or remit to respond to violent assaults in the same manner as police, they nevertheless are playing an important role and are utilized across the Pacific as safer spaces. This was highlighted in the talanoas as people shared instances of caring for one another in the aftermath of violent assaults, providing housing, medical care, and financial assistance, all in lieu of public services that would have been available to the broader population.

This community centered care should be highlighted as a key characteristic of resilience for PIDSOGIES+ people across the region.

Strengths Based Approaches

In further developing an understanding of resilience across the region, it is important for service, policymakers, and advocates to recognize and work from a strengths-based approach to PIDSOGIESC+ communities. In research, for example, strengths-based approaches “present an alternative to disparities-focused research, which often uses deficit framing and stigmatizing language (Malo et al., 2023, p. 3). The same is true across public policy and service design. A non-binary Fijian individual captured the overarching messages of strengths-based focus within the talanoas, sharing:

I think I'd like to start by saying that anything that any straight person can do, we can do, and we can also be fucking amazing at it [*sounds of*

approval from the group]. And that's one thing that society hasn't allowed themselves to enjoy about the company of queer people, because we are so resilient.

This quote captures the “can-do” attitude that permeated talanoas. Throughout the conversations there was an overarching sense of empowerment, honoring and celebrating the achievements that had already been made, while also being realistic about the challenges ahead. Highlighting these strengths, one Ni-Vanuatu bisexual woman said:

There's just so much untapped potential and knowledge and learning that they have that, you know, you sit down and speak with queer communities that have helped out with things.... You'll understand a lot of ways to adapt and to, with like, disasters and things like that and, and in, in general...I just think that the queer community have a lot to offer because they are always there first hand and, and helping. I remember a time when something's come up and you need support and it's always like, they always depend on young people and usually when you get the young people, it's always a queer community that comes back.

The observation that the “queer community has a lot to offer” is an invitation for society to learn and be equipped in meaningful ways. It is a bridge-building posture which extends a hand of solidarity.

Among the PIDSOGIESC+ community itself, one mechanism identified as a strong way of exploring, promoting, and capitalizing on strengths was the talanoa format on which the research was based. Each talanoa session consisted of in-depth conversation in which participants were invited to share stories, meaning, and diverse interpretations of events. A trans woman in the Solomon Islands captured the overarching feedback on this, stating:

Just sitting here, you know, having this conversation. I realize how important it is to have spaces where you can actually talk about your experiences and for me the opportunity this evening and really help me to rethink.

As stated above, a core element of resilience for PIDSOGIESC+ people is their ability to rally together and share the burden. Talanoas offer a potential opportunity for further

research as a mechanism to strengthen this focus, while engaging indigenous inspired research practices.

Building on Unique Skillsets

Finally, resilience was framed throughout talanoas with a recognition that the PIDSOGIESC+ community had unique skillsets that they could offer society. When asked what broader society could learn from PIDSOGIESC+ people, there was a sense of pride that emerged in discussions, and people became animated with their answers. In reflecting on her experiences for example, a Papua New Guinean lesbian woman shared:

...they are very...open and very friendly. One of the strongest characters that I learned from them is being friendly, friendly, and very open. You can, you can bring up any topic with them and they can really bring out what's inside, can really tell you what they do....

This individual had experienced much discrimination throughout her life, and the PIDSOGIESC+ community had provided a unique sense of support and connection, with an ability to listen, embrace, and imagine a path forward for her.

On another, deeply practical level, several participants described how it is often those who are sexuality and gender diverse within society who are called upon to provide decorations for major events. For example, a Tongan leiti shared:

I think our people should have respect for the LGBT community because we have so much talent. When it comes to funerals, wedding, or some decorations, who are they going to call? Us leities and LGBT.

Importantly, these unique skills were understood as catalysts for change. A Samoan fa'afafine capture this concept, saying:

I think that helped a lot - doing good. It's doing a good deed. And you know I'm not saying it's just about deeds, but the actual community nowadays, they're very talented people and they're very unique in their own ways.

For many participants in this research, the PIDSOGIESC+ community has a vital role to play across this tropical region. They did not see themselves as relegated to a secondary status, but based on cultural reclamation, as vital members of society – even if society itself had not yet recognized this.

Nuancing and Problematizing Resilience

While resilience is (rightly) developing as a key strengths-affirming approach to understanding PIDSOGIESC+ experiences across the Tropical Pacific, it is important to note that this concept cannot be centered without critique. As such, problematizing the ongoing use of resilience as a framework is important.

On one level this critique is cultural, recognizing that much resilience literature has been developed in European, individualistic contexts. As such, Colpitts and Gahagan (2016, p. 6) conclude that:

the ongoing focus and utility of individual-level, mainstream heteronormative and cis-normative models of resilience in understanding and measuring LGBTQ health is questionable...models of resilience must reflect and incorporate intersectionality. Incorporating an intersectional lens acknowledges the complex intersecting and compounding nature of marginalization, oppression, risk factors and their subsequent impacts of LGBTQ health across the life course.

Throughout the literature, resilience is often formulated as an individually derived asset, drawn upon in the context of personal adversity. This research pushes against this siloed approach, recognizing that resilience in the Pacific is a communal, shared experience. As such, it builds upon the notion that:

As individuals committed to nurturing the *va*¹ between self and others, we are inextricably bound and connected to use our own strengths, resources, and purpose to support the collective. This includes supporting those in need, and ensuring everyone is able to play their broader role. Here is where the concept of *va* shines; everyone has a role to play in the broader collective. Everyone is valued and matters... failure to include others in our own practice and nurturing of *va*

¹ *Va* loosely translates to “space between” and encompasses holistic concepts of relation/connectedness

compromises this sacred bond, and deters the existence of harmony.
(Ravulo, 2021, p. 111)

Further to this, it is important to recognize that resilience is not, in and of itself, necessarily something that the PIDSOGIESC+ community has strived for. While it may be seen as a compliment or strength, this was not how it was universally perceived across the talanoas. Highlighting a key voice from within the talanoas provides a vital framework for understanding the complexity of resilience amongst PIDSOGIESC+ people. As a vakasalewalewa in Fiji, this individual had faced many of the discriminatory experiences outlined above, and has become a leader among the PIDSOGIESC+ community. To the sounds of affirmation from others gathered, she said:

You know we should not normalize saying "I've grown thick skin".
Nobody else is subjected to that kind of hate. Why should you grow
thick skin? It's unhealthy.

The path to resilience was paved with hardship, and the normalization of resilience as a characteristic of PIDSOGIESC+ communities should not remain uncritically assumed. For this individual, "thick skin" (or what others may refer to as resilience) was seen as unhealthy because it necessitated a stepping away from things in life that had been healthy and life-giving.

It is evident that further research into the nature of resilience within settings across the Indigenous Tropics is required to provide more nuanced understandings. This is the process of decolonizing resilience, queering resilience, and understanding resilience in its specific and varied ecological-tropical milieu.

Future Lines of Research

This research has explored the complex nature of resilience among PIDSOGIESC+ people. While a growing body of global research is highlighting the needs of SOGIESC+ communities, a focus on the Pacific as a unique region of the Tropics is still developing and in need of nuance.

For example, a thorough exploration of the contours of discrimination, ostracism, violence, and human rights abuse will provide a more exact understanding of what is taking place on the ground. Future research into such experiences should be mindful of



the strengths of the community while also being rigorous in unearthing the complexities they face.

Furthermore, attentive research into the policy landscape could prove fruitful. As discussed above, there is a lack of trust in public institutions due to a long history of rights abuses and insufficient or inappropriate care. Understanding the interconnectedness of public policy, service providers, and perceptions of care is vitally needed.

Finally, there is an ongoing effort to decolonize ways of knowing, being, and doing right across the Tropics. Locating the Pacific as a vital part of this conversation and exploring local iterations of this process is going to yield rich rewards.

This current research was limited by several significant factors. For example, all research was completed in English, and relied heavily on participant availability. As with all research, time constraints and practicalities made it difficult to capture more nuanced data from each country with sufficient depth. Future research should produce more local, integrated knowledge.

Conclusion

This paper has reported some nuanced findings on the experiences of ostracism, discrimination, violence, and rights abuses that PIDSOGIESC+ people face across the Tropical Pacific. Often framed as victims of their situations, with a deficit focus, the emphasis here has been to highlight the unique forms of resilience that these individuals and communities display. When framed through a lens of resilience, one can clearly see how PIDSOGIESC+ people are reclaiming cultural practices, focusing on collectivist community care, benefiting from a strengths-based approach to services, and having the capacity to continue building on a wide range of unique skillsets that can benefit not only themselves but broader society.

And yet, it is also important to critically engage with the concept of resilience. Unthinkingly adopting the individualistic notion of resilience embraced by much of the global literature fails to account for the deeply collectivist values which PIDSOGIESC+ people continue to draw meaning and hope from. Further, resilience itself was problematized in this research, as by its very nature it entails hardship.



These findings provide rich insights into how services can deepen their engagement, how policy should continue to be shaped, and how individuals navigating these systems can find their place within indigenous queer societies of the Tropical Pacific.

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