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To cite this article: Charlotte Harding, Daniel Pratt, Jade Wilkinson & James Lea (2025) The experiences of minority stressors endured by people who identify as Lesbian and Gay and a member of the Global Majority within the United Kingdom: A systematic thematic synthesis, *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, 29:3, 302-344, DOI: [10.1080/19359705.2024.2421546](https://doi.org/10.1080/19359705.2024.2421546)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19359705.2024.2421546>



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# The experiences of minority stressors endured by people who identify as Lesbian and Gay and a member of the Global Majority within the United Kingdom: A systematic thematic synthesis

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Lesbian and Gay People (LGP) and people of the Global Majority (GM) experience minority stressors. Identifying as a Lesbian and Gay Person of the Global Majority (LGP-GM) creates complex minority stressors.

**Method:** A thematic synthesis of 16 qualitative studies exploring LGP-GM experiences of minority stressors using the lens of Minority Stress Theory was conducted.

**Results:** Four analytical themes emerged: Intersectionality: Navigating the queer scene as an LGP-GM, Intersectionality: Navigating GM spaces as an LGP-GM, Internal intersectional identity conflict and Lack of connection to culture, religion, and others.

**Conclusion:** Unique minority stressors are identified for LGP-GM, clinical implications and future research are discussed.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 1 May 2024

Revised 28 August 2024

Accepted 21 October 2024



## KEYWORDS


Lesbian; gay; global majority; intersectionality; minority stress

## Introduction

### *Experiences of Lesbian and Gay people: Homophobia and minority stress theory*

The difficulties faced by Lesbian and Gay People (LGP) within the United Kingdom (UK) are multifaceted (Dunlop & Lea, 2023a). In comparison to heterosexual peers, LGP experience higher rates of psychological distress

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 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed online at <https://doi.org/10.1080/19359705.2024.2421546>. All appropriate ethical and regulatory permissions had been granted for the study.

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(King et al., 2008), poorer mental health (Semlyen et al., 2016; Woodhead et al., 2016), anxiety (Jones et al., 2017) and substance difficulties (Woodhead et al., 2016). This can be understood using Minority Stress Theory (MST; Meyer, 1995, 2003, 2010), which has been developed to understand and explain the unique external and internal stressors experienced by sexuality diverse people (Meyer, 2003); gender diverse people (Meyer, 2015); and *Lesbian and Gay People of the Global Majority*<sup>1</sup> (LGP-GM) (Meyer, 2010); thus providing a framework to research and investigate these experiences (Gosling et al., 2022).

### **Minority stress theory**

MST (Meyer, 1995, 2003, 2015) is a key framework, advanced from Brooks (1981) theory of sexual minority stress. MST states that due to the increased experiences of minority stressors, e.g., homophobia and heterosexism<sup>2</sup>, sexual minorities experience higher levels of mental health difficulties. Minority stressors based on homophobia and heterosexism include external (distal) and internal (proximal) psychosocial processes that contribute to negative health outcomes. Distal factors include experiences of external prejudice events concentrated toward an individual e.g., discrimination, anti-gay violence, victimization and microaggressions (Douglass & Conlin, 2022). Whereas proximal processes include, (i) expectations of rejection, (ii) concealment of sexuality and (iii) internalized homophobia (Meyer, 2003), which are created by the internalization of external homophobia and heterosexism, leading to negative sense of self and the world and possible shame.

Different types of minority stressors are being experienced at an alarming rate by LGP within the UK, for example, 21% of lesbians and 19% of gay people had experienced a hate crime due to sexual orientation, and over half of gay men did not feel comfortable holding hands with their partner in public due to fear of harassment, physical assault, and unwanted attention (Stonewall, 2017). Furthermore, crimes against sexual minorities had risen by 25% in comparison to 2017–2018 (UK Home Office, 2019) with up to two thirds of LGBTQ+ respondents reporting they had experienced anti-LGBTQ+ violence or abuse, at least monthly (Hubbard, 2021). LGP are also being discriminated against within workplaces, education, and health care (Aksoy et al., 2019; Carr & Pezzella, 2017; Kurian, 2020). In line with MST, Pitman et al. (2021) found that experiences of homophobia, discrimination, bullying, and othering were linked to the development of psychological distress and mental health difficulties. Internalized homophobia and heterosexism are proximal stressors and are linked to self-harm behaviors in lesbian women (Spooner, 2022); fear of rejection and judgment in the workplace (Fric, 2019; Stones & Glazzard, 2019; Schaub et al., 2024); and impacts on social support and psychological distress in gay men (Joyce et al., 2024). The research base demonstrates

that LGP experience more difficulties than their heterosexual peers as a result of belonging to a sexuality minoritized group.

MST has been shown to be a useful tool for psychologically understanding and formulating the distress experiences by LGP to develop interventions. It has been suggested that this can be especially helpful when coupled with intersectional and systemic lenses, e.g., the Intersectional, Social and Systems-based (InSoS) framework (Dunlop & Lea, 2023a).

### ***Experiences of global majority people: Whiteness and racism***

According to the 2021 UK Consensus, 81.7% of England and Wales identified themselves as ‘White’ (Office for National Statistics, 2022). 18.3% of the minority ethnicities included 9.3% of Asian heritage, 4% black, 2.9% multiple ethnic groups and 2.1% defined as ‘other ethnic group’ (Office for National Statistics, 2022). People of the GM living in the UK face multiple difficulties with mental health, access to services, physical health, and social issues (Ali et al., 2021; Bansal et al., 2022; Patel et al., 2017; Prajapati & Liebling, 2022; Public Health England, 2020; Nazroo et al., 2020; NHS Digital, 2016; Office for National Statistics, 2022; Siddiq et al., 2023). In 2022, 70% of hate crimes within the UK were racially motivated, an increase of 19% from 2021 (UK Home Office, 2022). Racism has been linked to poor physical and mental health (Hackett et al., 2020; Wallace et al., 2016), which may be better explained by the Weathering Hypothesis (Geronimus, 1992).

The ‘Weathering Hypothesis’ was proposed by Geronimus (1992) to explain the deterioration in health of African American women, in stark contrast to non-Hispanic white women. The hypothesis suggests this is due to a consequence of repeated cumulative socioeconomic disadvantage and political ostracism relating to whiteness, racism, and discrimination. The weathering hypothesis has been supported within recent research on birth and non-birth health outcomes, within different people of the GM (Forde et al., 2019; Simons et al., 2021; Wakeel & Njoku, 2021) and high rates of mortality for Covid-19 in people of the GM (Public Health England, 2020). White privilege<sup>3</sup> is described by Eddo-Lodge (2018) as the lack of adverse effects of racism including a void of race-based violence, structural discrimination, marginalization, prejudice, discrimination, and othering. White privilege comes hand in hand with ‘Whiteness’. Whiteness is a multifaceted social and cultural concept that refers to a collection of practices that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced that place white in the dominant position to maintain privilege (Diangelo, 2006; Leek, 2013). Unfortunately, the UK continues to contribute to social, economic, and political oppression for people of the GM, in turn contributing to deterioration of health, with the continued expectation

for individuals of the GM to adopt Whiteness (Clarke, 2023). The weathering hypothesis was proposed to aid explanation of racial inequalities and has been used in numerous studies as a descriptive framework to aid this investigation (Forde et al., 2019). Considering the above, the Weathering Hypothesis is fundamental to include within the current review.

### ***Experiences of LGP of the GM: Intersectionality***

Intersectionality is a framework that describes how an individual's overlapping and interconnecting minoritised identities ultimately lead to multiple forms of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989), which create a complex and unique experience of difficulties and discriminations in life. The current review focuses on the intersection of sexuality and ethnicity. Identifying as an LGP-GM may bring unique forms of minority stress and racial weathering from different parts of an individual's minoritised identity. For example, a cisgender Indian man may experience external racialized oppression, which becomes internalized racism. The same man identifies as gay, so also experiences external homophobia and heterosexism, which becomes internalized. The intersectional oppression of racism and homophobia is complex, meaning they may experience specific homophobia from his racial identity group, and racism from his sexuality identity group.

### ***LGP-GM experiences of intersectional minority stress***

The earlier mentioned Stonewall report (2017), found that a third of LGBT people of the GM had experienced a hate crime or confrontation based on their sexual identity, compared to one in five white LGBT people. The report also found that 25% of white LGBT people faced discrimination whilst attending faith services but this doubled for people of the GM. In comparison to lesbian and gay white peers, LGP-GM face more discrimination at work (Aksoy et al., 2019), rejection from others (Jaspal et al., 2021), ethnic victimization (Jaspal et al., 2021), higher mental health rates (Arlee et al., 2019), higher rates of violence (Arlee et al., 2019) and perceived stigma (McConnell et al., 2018). Moradi et al. (2010) describe two hypotheses describing LGP-GM experiences of stress and resilience. Firstly, the 'risk' hypothesis states that LGP-GM are at greater risk to stress due to experiences of homophobia, racism, and rejection from mainstream LGP and ethnic communities which concludes in reduced support. This is supported by McConnell et al. (2018) paper which finds racial stigma in LGBT+ spaces and participant's ethnic community was associated with greater stress for GM sexual minority men in comparison to white sexual minority men. However, the second hypothesis: 'resilience' states that due to experiences of racism LGP-GM have built resilience which protects against homophobic related stress and have a better capacity to cope in

comparison to white LGP. Moradi et al. (2010) results were consistent with resilience hypothesis in that LGP-GM had similar levels of internalized homophobia, comfort in disclosure and perceived heterosexist stigma in comparison to white LGP. The authors notes that LGP-GM were less vulnerable to risks of perceived stigma and may have resources to safeguard against the impact of homophobia (Moradi et al., 2010). However, Meyer (2010) noted that these two hypotheses cannot work simultaneously, and more research is needed to investigate the complex relationship between resilience, mental health, and stress within LGP-GM.

### ***Rationale and aims for the current review***

LGP-GM have an intersectional experience of oppression associated with elevated health difficulties and lower wellbeing compared to their heterosexual and white peers, due to homophobia, heterosexism, and systemic racism. MST is an important theory to understand and research an exploration of health and wellbeing (Patterson et al., 2020; Dunlop et al., 2023b), especially in an intersectional identity of ethnicity and sexuality (Meyer, 2010) where people experience racism and homophobia. This MST framework can provide sense making of this complex and unique intersectional identity experience, focussing on external and internal social and psychological factors.

A limited literature exists focussing on quantitative data investigating mental health outcomes and occurrence of minority stressors for LGP-GM. A recent influx of qualitative literature exploring LGP-GM's experiences within the UK has developed that focusses on homophobia and racism as minority stressors. Therefore, it would be beneficial to examine the qualitative literature and consolidate the results regarding the unique experiences specific to LGP-GMs.

In this review, the authors utilize MST, Intersectionality theory and the Racial Weathering Hypothesis to examine minority stressors experienced by LGP-GM, within the UK. Through the combined lens of these approaches, the research aims to highlight the unique and complex differences and possible similarities faced by people with this intersectional identity.

To the author's knowledge this is the first systematic qualitative syntheses investigating the qualitative literature exploring the experience of LGP-GM using the lenses of MST, racial weathering, and intersectionality in the UK.

The current review intends to explore the following questions:

- What is the experience of living as a LGP-GM in the UK?
- What are the unique minority stressors experienced by LGP-GM within the UK?
- Does the experience of minority stressors differ across sexuality and racial groups?

## Method

The review was pre-registered on the International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews (PROSPERO) (CRD42023335342).

### *Systematic literature search*

#### *Eligibility criteria*

The review aimed to include studies that specifically focused on LGP-GM's experiences of minority stressors within the UK. Inclusion and exclusion criteria can be found in [Table 1](#).

#### *Search strategy*

In November 2023, the four following databases were searched: PsycINFO, MEDLINE, Web of Science and CINAHL. Key search terms and MeSh terms related to the notions of 'Lesbian' and 'Gay' individuals, 'Global Majority', 'United Kingdom' and 'Minority Stressors' e.g., 'Rejec\*', 'Conceal\*' and 'Violen\*' were used (See [Appendix Table A1](#) for the full list of search terms). English language and human participant restrictors were applied. Due to the lack of research within the area no date restrictions were applied. The grey literature was also searched through Google Scholar and ProQuest. Of the relevant studies, the reference lists were reviewed to find further relevant literature (Horsley et al., 2011).

#### *Quality appraisal*

All included studies were appraised for quality using Walsh and Downe (2006) quality appraisal checklist, focussing on integrity, transparency, and transferability during appraisal (Walsh & Downe, 2006). The authors also designed the appraisal to be applied reflexively and imaginatively. Quality appraisal was completed independently by one reviewer (\*\*\*) and 25% completed by a second reviewer (\*\*). Any discrepancies were discussed with

**Table 1.** Criteria for inclusion and exclusion.

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Qualitative methods and mixed methods studies to explore experiences of minority stressors (racism and homophobia) within LGP-GM. If using mixed methods, the qualitative data must be extracted independently.	Studies not published in English or translated to English
The use of accepted qualitative methods e.g., IPA, thematic analysis, grounded theory, etc. Any study that reported a less familiar qualitative method was discussed with co-reviewers and a decision was made regarding inclusion following this.	Quantitative method studies exclusively
	Mixed methods where qualitative data cannot be extracted

the two other authors (\*\*, \*\*). The checklist contains 12 items assessing aspects of methodological and interpretative quality, including design and analysis. A rating system was adopted based on that used by previous meta-synthesis authors (e.g., Lumsden et al., 2019; Joyce et al., 2024) where each item was awarded 0, 0.5 or 1 point based on whether they met none/less than half of the criteria, half of the criteria, or nearly all/all the criteria respectively. Studies were categorized as A (high quality and low risk of methodological bias: between 9 and 12 points), B (moderate quality: 6–8.5 points), or C (low quality and high risk of methodological bias: 0–5.5 points). The decisions justifying the scoring of each study were recorded (see [Appendix Table B1](#) for an example). See [Table 2](#) for study ratings.

### ***Thematic synthesis***

Thomas and Harden (2008) three step thematic synthesis structure were utilized to analyze data, develop themes across studies, interpret the overarching themes and draw conclusions (Thomas & Harden, 2008). The following three steps were followed:

1. Coding text
2. Developing descriptive themes
3. Generating analytical themes

Firstly, the results sections of each study were extracted from the papers and entered into a Microsoft Word (Microsoft Word for Mac, Version 16.66.1. 22101101) document. Each paper was line by line coded for themes in relation to meaning and content. Secondly, codes were sorted into semantic groups, highlighting similarities and differences to inform grouping. These groups were then given descriptive codes to define their meaning. Finally, the descriptive codes were grouped into higher order analytical themes, which allowed the research team to interpret and describe LGP-GM's experiences of minority stressors within the UK. The primary researcher (\*\*) conducted the thematic synthesis, using analytic logs and reflections of emerging themes to develop credibility and trustworthiness, as well as some investigator triangulation with the research team (\*\* and \*\*) discussing and agreeing descriptive and analytical themes. In line with Thomas and Harden (2008) recommendations, conceptual saturation was utilized, whereby a range of concepts and contexts be uncovered in the analysis, creating a complex understanding that includes diverse findings and heterogeneity.

### ***Reflexivity***

The first author (\*\*) engaged in reflective practice to support reflexivity (Clancy, 2013). \*\* is a heterosexual British Filipina and trainee clinical

**Table 2.** Main study characteristics.

Study ID	Author(s), year	Study focus	Method	Data collection	Participants	Gender	Ethnicity	Sexuality	Religion	Age	Rating
1	Yip (2002)	To explore life circumstances and lived experiences of non-heterosexual Muslims of Asian descent	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis	Support groups, press, personal networks, snowballing and public places	42	Female (n = 20) Male (n = 22)	88% Of the participants are of South Asian descent (Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi).	Lesbian (n = 20) and gay (n = 22)	Muslim (n = 42)	Not stated	B
2	Keogh et al. (2004)	To explore social and cultural factors that shape gay male identity and influence gay male social life in London	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis	Physically in gay spaces, online gay websites and gay press and snowballing	40	Male (n = 40)	Black Caribbean (n = 18) White and Black Caribbean (n = 2) and White Irish (n = 20)	Gay (n = 40)	Christian	Range of age 22-58 (M = 33)	A
3	Yip (2004)	Non-heterosexual Muslims of Asian descent experiences in relation to their sexuality	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis	Snowball strategy, press, meetings, and online support networks	42	Female (n = 20) Male (n = 22)	88% Of the participants are of South Asian descent (Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi).	Lesbian (n = 20) and gay (n = 22)	Muslim (n = 42)	Not stated	B
4	Doyal et al. (2008)	Exploring Sub-Saharan African gay and bisexual men's experiences of their sexuality in their home countries and upon moving to London	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Thematic Analysis	Snowball strategy	8	Male (n = 8)	Black African (n = 8)	Gay/bisexual (n = 8)	None stated	Age ranged between 18-40	A

(Continued)

Table 2. Continued.

Study ID	Author(s), year	Study focus	Method	Data collection	Participants	Gender	Ethnicity	Sexuality	Religion	Age	Rating
5	Anderson et al. (2009)	Examines the sociocultural environment where men are forced to negotiate their same sex emotions and some indicators of its impact on their identity	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis	Recruited directly from preexisting project	10	Male (n = 10)	African descent (n = 10)	Gay (n = 7) and bisexual (n = 3)	None stated	Age ranged between 26 and 61	B
6	McKeown et al. (2010)	Examine the challenges of being from an ethnic minority background and being a man who has sex with men	Qualitative, semi-structured email interviews. Content analysis	Websites, social and dating networking sites, and offline recruitment (e.g., sexual health, bars, clubs)	47	Male (n = 47)	Black African (n = 5), Black African and White (n = 6), Black Caribbean (n = 8), Black Caribbean and White (n = 8), Indian (n = 7), Indian and White (n = 5), and Pakistani (n = 8)	Gay (n = 47)	None stated	Age ranged between 18 and 52	A
7	Siraj (2011)	To explore the hidden and untold story of a Scottish Pakistani Muslim Lesbian	Qualitative, interview. Life story approach	Researcher personal network	1	Female (n = 1)	Scottish Pakistani (n = 8)	Lesbian (n = 1)	Muslim (n = 1)	27	A
8	Siraj (2012)	Examines how religious identity interplays with sexual identity	Qualitative, email interviews. Does not specifically state analysis	Imaan	5	Female (n = 5)	Pakistani (n = 4) and Indian (n = 1)	Lesbian (n = 5)	Muslim (n = 5)	Age ranged between 19 and 47	A

(Continued)

**Table 2.** Continued.

Study ID	Author(s), year	Study focus	Method	Data collection	Participants	Gender	Ethnicity	Sexuality	Religion	Age	Rating
9	Giametta (2014)	Explores lesbian and gay asylum seekers in the UK experiences of moving to the UK and the climate of the UK regarding their sexuality	Qualitative, interviews and observation. Ethnography	None specified	5	Female (n=3), Male (n=2)	Black African (n=2), Pakistani (n=2) and Indian (n=1)	Lesbian (n=3), Gay (n=2)	Muslim (n=3), Catholic (n=1), and unknown (n=1)	Age ranged between 24 and 35	B
10	Jaspal (2014)	Examines British Asian gay men's feelings around arranged marriage, family pressure, identity processes and wellbeing	Qualitative, diaries, IPA	Snowball strategy	12	Male (n=12)	British Pakistani (n=7) and British Indian (n=5)	Gay (n=12)	Muslim (n=7) and Sikh or Hindu (n=5)	Age ranged between 18 and 26 (M=21.6)	A
11	Jaspal (2017)	Exploration of SA gay men's experiences and perceived prejudice on the gay scene	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Thematic Analysis	Snowball strategy	12	Male (n=12)	British Pakistani (n=7) and British Indian (n=5)	Gay (n=12)	Muslim (n=7) and Sikh (n=5)	Age ranged between 18 and 25	B
12	Siraj (2018)	Exploration of the relationship between friendship and sexual identity and negotiations with sexual identity	Qualitative, email interviews. Does not specifically state analysis	Snowball strategy	2	Female (n=2)	British Pakistani (n=2)	Lesbian (n=2)	Muslim (n=2)	Ages 25 and 34	B
13	Siraj (2018)	British Pakistani lesbians experiences of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and concealment of sexual identity	Qualitative, email interviews. Grounded theory	Online forums, Imaan and social media	7	Female (n=7)	British Pakistani (n=7)	Lesbian (n=7)	Muslim (n=7)	Age ranged between 17 and 28	B

(Continued)

**Table 2.** Continued.

Study ID	Author(s), year	Study focus	Method	Data collection	Participants	Gender	Ethnicity	Sexuality	Religion	Age	Rating
14	Jaspal and Ferozali (2021)	British SA gay men's experiences of social representations of Britishness and the impact on constructing ethnic and sexual identities	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis	Snowball strategy	15	Male (n = 15)	Indian (n = 8) and Pakistani (n = 7)	Gay (n = 15)	Muslim (n = 7) and Sikh or Hindu (n = 8)	Age ranged between 18 and 33	B
15	Jaspal (2021)	Focus on the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on identity, relationships, and wellbeing in SA gay men	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis	Snowball strategy	15	Male (n = 15)	Indian (n = 6) and Pakistani (n = 9)	Gay (n = 15)	None stated	Age ranged between 19 and 26	A
16	Mitha et al. (2021)	Exploration of experiences of non-heterosexual SA men of integration of sexuality identity, religious identity in the UK	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis	Snowball strategy and social media	38	Male (n = 38)	Pakistani (71%), Bangladeshi (13%) and other South Asian (16%)	Attracted to same sex; does not use gay as a label due to negative connotations regarding the label (n = 38)	Muslim (n = 38)	Age ranged between 18-37 (M = 26.5; SD = 4.3)	A

Note: Green = Good quality; amber = moderate quality; red = poor quality.

psychologist. \*\* is a White British, Queer, consultant clinical psychologist and academic and \*\* is a White British, heterosexual, consultant clinical psychologist and academic. Thomas (2000) and Schlichter (2004) both argue that heterosexual research may not be as effective in GSRD research in comparison to those who are GSRD themselves. However, Allen (2010) suggests that a researcher's identity does not determine outcomes and that heteronormative biases are rooted within longstanding power structures. The research team remained aware, open, and flexible in relation to their ethnicities, culture, whiteness, and sexualities. These were discussed openly, with feelings, unconscious bias, personal positions and owning relevant identities being celebrated and required (Agyeman, 2008).

## Results

### *Study selection*

After conducting a thorough systematic literature search, studies were identified to be included in the review. All relevant articles were screened via titles and abstracts for duplicates and to ensure they met inclusion criteria. An independent second blind reviewer (JW) screened 25% of the titles and abstracts, with 99.82% agreeance and a Kappa score of 0.92, signifying an almost perfect agreement (McHugh, 2012). All full texts were screened by CH and JW with 90.48% agreeance and a Kappa score of 0.77, demonstrating a substantial agreement (McHugh, 2012). Any disagreements arising were discussed and resolved within the research team. The PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1) outlines the process including exclusions and reasons for exclusion, in line with PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021).

### *Main study characteristics*

The main study characteristics can be seen in Table 2. All studies were UK based, qualitative and published from 2002 to 2021. A range of recruitment methods were used, with majority electing the snowballing strategy ( $k=10$ ). Many studies used online recruitment methods e.g., gay websites, gay dating sites, social networks, forums, and social media ( $k=7$ ). Some studies used offline methods e.g., gay spaces (clubs, bars etc.), support groups and researcher personal networks ( $k=5$ ). One study recruited from a preexisting project (Anderson et al., 2009) and one study did not specify (Giametta, 2014). Ten studies used semi-structured interviews. Other data collection methods were email interviews ( $k=3$ ), interview and observation ( $k=1$ ), interview ( $k=1$ ), and diaries ( $k=1$ ).

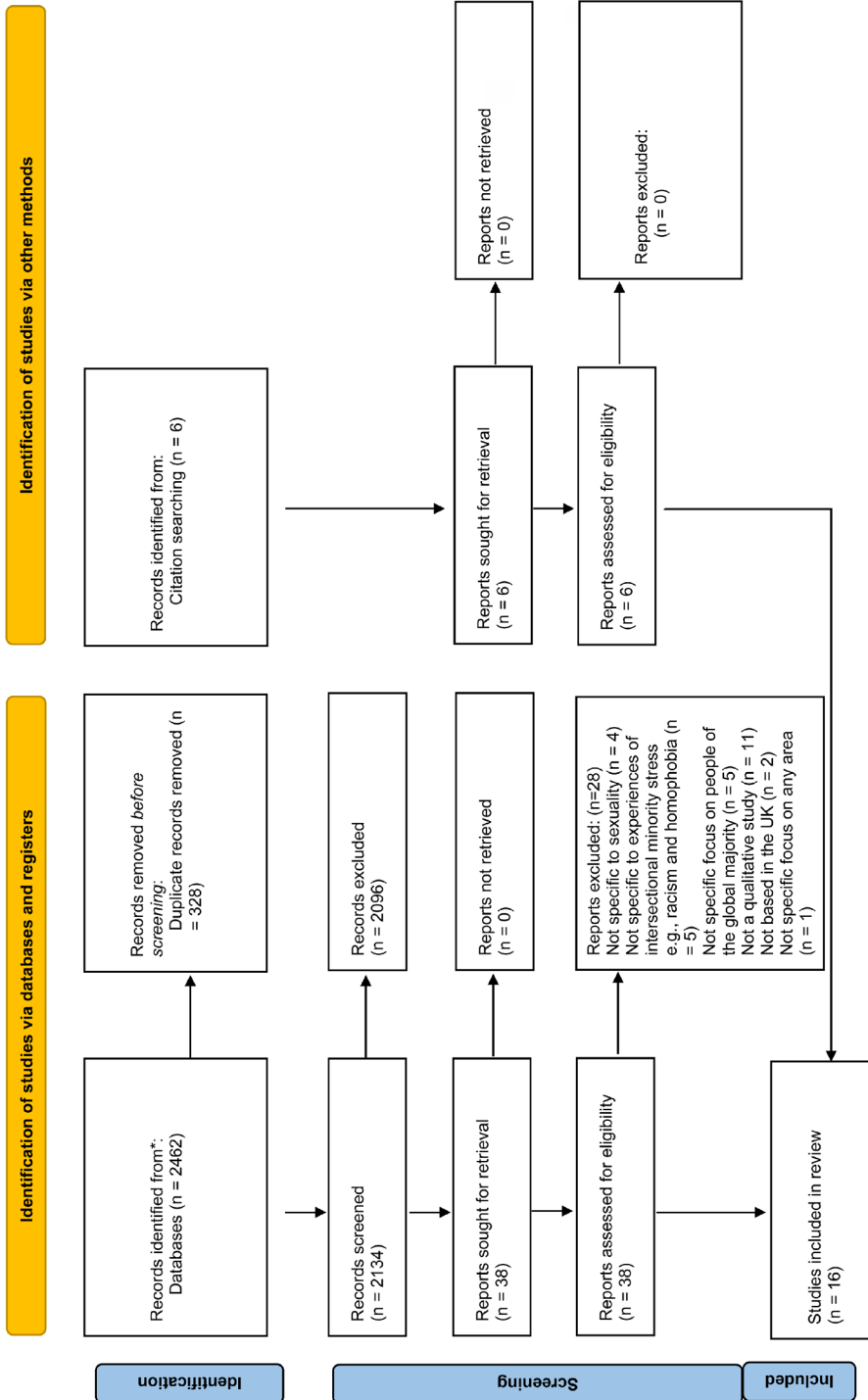


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram.

Overall, 278 participants were included, 20 participants were excluded as they were White Irish (Keogh et al., 2004) and 3 participants excluded due to identifying as bisexual (Anderson et al., 2009). Overall, there were 58 female participants and 220 male participants. All the female participants identified as lesbian. Most men identified as gay ( $n=174$ ), 'Attracted to the same sex' ( $n=38$ ) and 'gay/bisexual' ( $n=8$ ). Doyal et al. (2008) labeled men ( $n=8$ ) gay/bisexual, however the men only referred to themselves as gay, therefore this study remained included.

Eleven studies focussed on individuals of South Asian descent, which included Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi participants. Yip's (2002, 2004) studies, stated 88% of the participants are of South Asian descent (Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi), but did not specify what Asian descent the other 12% are. Two studies combined people of the GM ( $n=2$ ) but separated the results dependent on participants ethnicity. The remaining studies focused on people of Caribbean or African descent ( $n=3$ ). In most studies religion was specified ( $n=11$ ), where most participants identified as Muslim ( $n=7$ ) and some with a mixture of Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Catholic ( $n=4$ ). Most studies specified age ( $n=14$ ). Across all studies ages ranged from 18-61. Operationalizing different aspects of an individual's identity (e.g., sexuality and ethnicity) is complex and human experience is difficult to define within this way.

### **Quality of the reviewed articles**

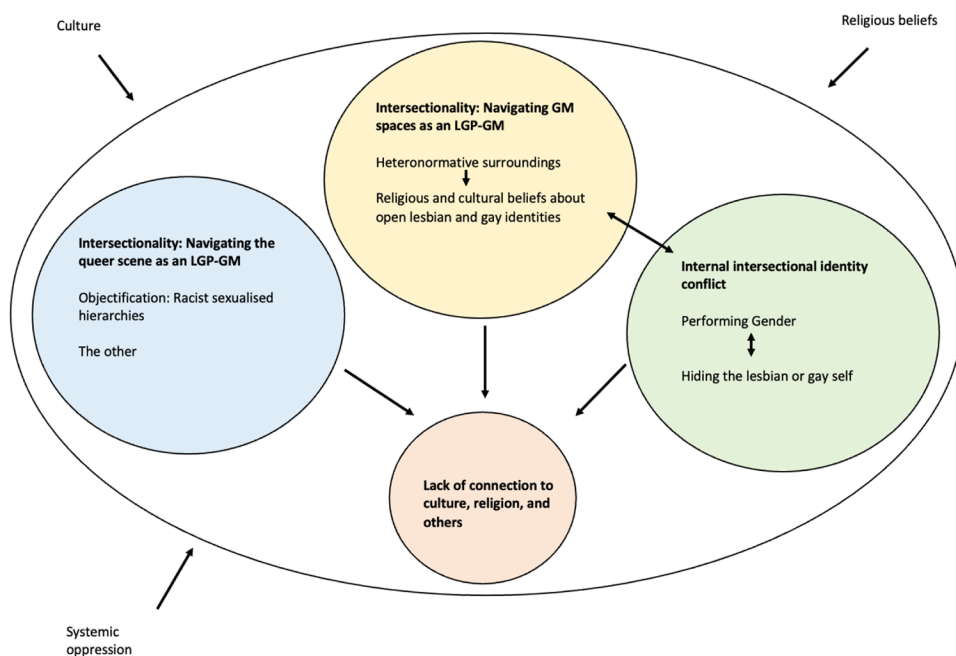
Appendix Table B1 provides a detailed summary of the quality appraisal in line with Walsh and Downe (2006) quality appraisal checklist.

### **Thematic synthesis**

Following the synthesis of the sixteen studies, four analytical themes were identified: (1) Intersectionality: Navigating the queer scene as an LGP-GM, (2) Intersectionality: Navigating GM spaces as an LGP-GM, (3) Internal intersectional identity conflict and (4) Lack of connection to culture, religion, and others. Six sub-themes were also identified. Themes were consistent across South Asian (SA) and Black African and Caribbean (BAC) participants. An overview of analytical and sub-themes is illustrated in Figure 2.

### **Intersectionality: Navigating the queer scene as an LGP-GM**

For LGP-GM, their intersectional identities caused multiple difficulties whilst navigating queer spaces e.g., clubs and bars. Difficulties were also



**Figure 2.** Overview of themes.

faced whilst navigating relationships, which in turn led to objectification of LGP-GM. Interestingly, only one paper (Yip, 2002) mentioned SA lesbian women's experiences of navigating the queer scene. Therefore, due to the limited information on SA lesbian women, this theme primarily focuses on the experiences of SA and BAC men.

### ***Objectification: Racist sexualized hierarchies***

SA men reported experiences of racism whilst navigating queer affirming spaces. Many participants experienced white peers explicitly stating, "No Asians" (SA Male, Jaspal, 2017; SA Male, McKeown et al., 2010), on their dating profiles. This understandably led to participants feeling unwanted and undesired, due to their GM status:

"I am not wanted by most guys on here, am I?" It's like your colour they can't even see is already like out and you're not given a chance because of who you are (SA Male, Jaspal, 2017)

It is clear from these experiences that male participants experienced prejudice due to their SA identities. It appears that white peers may feel more comfortable expressing ethnic preferences, potentially due to the anonymity an online platform provides. Keum and Miller (2018), found that white participants felt more confident expressing racist views behind a veil of invisibility e.g., online. Understandably, this led to a sense of

“hypervigilance” (Researcher, Jaspal & Ferozali, 2021), which in turn would make it difficult to form meaningful relationships on the scene. The sexualized racism continued offline in face-to-face GSRD (Gender, Sexuality, Relationship Diverse) affirming spaces:

I do see it as racism, like when you try to get closer to a person and they automatically think oh, shit, this Asian’s hitting on me, Asians are not my type and then they back off (SA Male, Jaspal, 2017)

This may make SA men feel like they are not equally as attractive or desired as their white peers, which can hinder opportunities to form meaningful relationships (Stacey & Forbes, 2022). In contrast to the experiences of undesirability and rejection experienced by SA men, BAC gay men were more likely to be desired, but this was degrading, and objectifying focussed on certain racially stereotyped ideas:

I have been taken advantage of sexually by some men who I’ve later come to believe are attracted to black/mixed-race men because of the myth of the ‘big black dick’ and the ‘sweet black ass.’ ... They were generally interested in me only for sex (BAC male, Mitha et al., 2021)

Stating ethnic preferences could be considered a more subtle form of racism and/or racialized objectification that individuals may perceive as socially acceptable. Personal preferences have been found to normalize and disguise racism (Peck et al., 2021). It appeared that this also caused a sense of hypervigilance on the scene for BAC men:

You catch someone looking at you then you are always wondering what the motivation behind this is and so you are semi-conscious of this dynamic at all times (BAC Male, McKeown et al., 2010)

Although less evident, a few SA men experienced a similar form of desire:

Oh, you are a novelty and I’m going to have sex with you tonight because I’ve never had sex with an Indian before... it is a very colonial kind of attitude (SA Male, Yip, 2002)

This objectification promotes a superior value on whiteness, which may feed into previously biologically defined colonial racial hierarchies (Han & Choi, 2018; Shain, 2020). This racial hierarchy positions whiteness at the top, as something that is desired and other ethnicities are ranked below in accordance with their proximity to whiteness. For instance, SA men and BAC would be toward the bottom. Worryingly, colonial attitudes have been highlighted within recent events in the UK such as Brexit, an increase in support for xenophobic parties and a hostile move toward anti-immigration (Shain, 2020). This in turn

manifests into colonial attitudes toward sex and desire when considering LGP-GM, within the UK. For some individuals this led to internalized racism, one participant even feigning his ethnicity within the research interview:

I'm actually Pakistani. Everyone wants to be Arab. I really want to (SA Male, Mitha et al., 2021)

Participants seemed to hold the idea that they were considered undesirable, feeding into the racist sexualized hierarchy at play. Which in turn leads to internalized racism, which can help individuals assimilate to the dominant culture and this helps maintain a sense of belonging (Seet, 2021). Cascalheira and Smith (2020) found that 'Light skinned', 'Masculine' and 'European features', were desired characteristics, which in turn relates to the current findings and SA men's experiences of feigning their ethnicities. However, as BAC men are stereotyped as more masculine, this places them higher on the racist sexualized hierarchy, as opposed to SA men. It is important to note, SA lesbian voices were only heard within the Yip (2002) study. In relation to discussion about objectification of SA LGP, Yip (2002) stated:

Significantly, female participants are much more likely than their male counterparts to report their unease with the above issues (Researcher, Yip, 2002)

Due to the lack of voices of SA lesbian women, it appears that they may tend to avoid the queer scene. The limited evidence found within the review suggests that lesbian participants may be more aware of the objectifying racist sexualized hierarchies, which in turn may lead to avoidance of the scene all together.

### *The other*

For many LGP-GM, they were often the minority on the scene, which led to feelings of being "Other-ed" (Researcher, Mitha et al., 2021) and "Otherized" (Researcher, Jaspal, 2017). Participants were unlikely to see others that looked like them:

...often I will look round and not see a face that's similar to mine (BAC Male, Keogh et al., 2004)

This led participants to feel "lonely" (SA Male, Jaspal, 2017) and "out of place" (SA Male, Mitha et al., 2021) when on the scene. Participants described the scene as not very "multicultural-friendly" (SA Male, Jaspal & Ferozali, 2021). There were notable differences in culture on the queer scene:

You see, for black people there is not a lot of good places to go to. We have only Heaven that plays hip-hop, and, especially for me as a black African person, I would like to hear my own music playing somewhere, but you really don't have a place where you can get those types of music (BAC Male, Doyal et al., 2008)

Queer clubs tend to play more disco and pop music (Lawrence, 2006), which is not inclusive for some LGP-GM. Furthermore, there were differences due to cultural beliefs:

I do go to Soho sometimes with mates but I'm definitely not comfortable going to the bars there. I go, then I'm out shortly after. It's too full on for my liking, with go-go dancers and tight spaces (SA Male, Mitha et al., 2021)

For some LGP-GM, the stereotyped typical mainstream queer scene was not experienced as comfortable. Although this a space for white queer individuals to comfortably explore their sexualities and socialize, this was not the case for some LGP-GM. For SA men they may feel othered and uncomfortable due to cultural expectations around public displays of affection, which is generally deemed inappropriate in SA cultures (Karandashev, 2016). Furthermore, the mainstream queer scene presents itself as maintaining a privileged position of hegemonic whiteness, which places white culture, norms, and values at the forefront (Miller, 2022). The dominance of whiteness on the queer scene only exacerbates feelings of otherness for SA and BAC men. Uncomfortableness on the scene may also be due to fear of involuntary disclosure:

They aren't many Asians on the scene – you know how it is, most of them aren't out and they are too scared to be seen out (SA Male, Jaspal, 2017)

This may lead to further feelings of otherization, as the consequences of 'coming out' are assumed to be higher for LGP-GM, due to rejection faced on multiple fronts (Meyer, 2010). For LGP-GM on the scene, feelings of otherization may be heightened as they feel they cannot be open with their sexualities like the out and proud lot (SA Male, Mitha et al., 2021), due to double jeopardies that come with their intersectional identities. Furthermore, due to the general otherization, this led to feelings of exclusion from the scene:

Being gay is a white man's culture ... you're not really part of it, you're not really part of them (BAC Male, Doyal et al., 2008)

As previously mentioned, it is important to note the voices of SA women were not heard across this theme, as there was only one paper to mention their experiences on the scene (Yip, 2002). SA women described the scene as:

“bitchy”, “cruisey”, “pretentious”, “cold”, “competitive”, “promiscuous” and “ageist” (Multiple SA Women, Yip, 2002).

This may suggest they have similar experiences of otherization in line with SA and BAC men.

### ***Intersectionality: Navigating GM spaces as an LGP-GM***

Participants intersectional identity did not only pose difficulties navigating the queer scene but also GM spaces. All participants grew up encased by systems, cultures, religious beliefs, and traditions that viewed anything other than heterosexual as abnormal, which substantively impacted on participant's beliefs about themselves.

### ***Heteronormative surroundings***

Almost all the studies discussed experiences of heteronormative surroundings experienced due to intersectional identities. Participants grew up within a system that promotes heterosexuality and shames non-heterosexuality, due to the beliefs held by the system that surrounds them:

White British culture is more accommodating than Caribbean culture which can be relatively homophobic (MAC Male, McKeown et al., 2010)

There are still 31 countries in Africa, 5 countries in the Caribbean and 22 countries in Asia that criminalize LGBT+ people (Human Dignity Trust, 2024). Due to this, it appears heteronormative and homophobic attitudes remain within these communities. Many participants described their families as homophobic:

My family are quite homophobic in their language and attitude—but that's no different to any other Asian family (SA Woman, Siraj, 2011)

It appears homophobia was a norm within many participants family settings, which may further exacerbate participants beliefs that non-heterosexuality is wrong. Participants often feared their families' reactions if they disclosed their sexualities:

There's no way I'd tell my dad. I wouldn't leave his place alive. (BAC Male, Keogh et al., 2004)

This was often due to participants close family systems holding alternative negative and hateful views to open gay and lesbian identities:

She thinks it's a western disease and I'm in that cult! I think the majority of the Asian, Pakistani mothers or fathers, or brothers or sisters think that way (SA Male, Yip, 2004)

Some parents would silently condone sexuality if it remained invisible and "silenced", (Researcher, Jaspal, 2014) or would state "we don't talk

about that” (SA Male, Jaspal, 2021). This was understood by participants as well:

It’s like almost you can be accepted as long as you are... It’s not as long as you are invisible (BAC Male, Keogh et al., 2004)

This conveys the sense that some family members and communities may not completely condemn non-heterosexuality. However, it appears that a family’s reputation within the community is of more importance than any sense of approval toward an individual’s sexuality. This further exacerbates the idea that living as an out LGP is wrong, which may intensify participant’s experiences of internalized homophobia. Participants reported that if parents were aware of their child’s sexuality, they would be more likely to coerce and push for a heterosexual arranged marriage, seeing it as a “cure” (Researcher, Yip, 2002). Culturally enforced experiences were common, as heterosexual marriage is seen as a cultural and religious duty for SA individuals (Dutt, 2019). For BAC men there is a pressure to maintain traditional beliefs around upholding a masculine image (Odimegwu & Okemgbo, 2008; Van Herden et al., 2015), which may further explain the pressure related to heterosexual relationships. Participants were constantly surrounded by heteronormativity and homophobia as the norm, this understandably led to participants beliefs around their sexualities to become doubtful and in turn lead to internalized homophobia:

Was I abused when I was young? ... The longings that I had came out of an innocent longing for a father figure ... that grew ... into this twisted attraction for me, sort of sexual all muddled up (BAC Male, Anderson et al., 2009)

I just happen to have a glitch. It’s a disability which I’ve learned to live with (SA Woman, Siraj, 2018)

These inner experiences due to intersectional oppression were painful for participants: “I hated myself” (SA Woman, 2011) and “I was even Suicidal” (BAC Male, Doyal et al., 2008). This was partly displayed as homophobia toward other LGP-GM:

He himself would have to behave in homophobic ways in order to satisfy the heterosexual dictate and not be “picked on”, even though doing so “disgusted” him (Researcher quoting BAC Male, Anderson et al., 2009)

I was afraid of confronting my own feelings and by discouraging her I may have been projecting (SA Woman, Siraj, 2011).

This could be seen as a survival technique to protect against the same abuse or due to feelings of internalized homophobia in relation to their cultural-religious backgrounds.

### *Religious and cultural beliefs about open lesbian and gay identities*

Participant's religious beliefs played a substantial role in their experiences of minority stressors, adding another complex intersection to their identities. It felt as though participants believed they had contravened their religions by identifying as an LGP:

Though I am a sinner he will punish me and then things will be done... I feel that I am not pure enough to go to the mosque because I am homosexual, so I don't go to the mosque (SA Male, Giametta, 2014)

BAC men also referred to religious beliefs and stated that being gay was "Sinful" (BAC Male, Keogh et al., 2004; BAC Male, McKeown et al., 2010), but the religious aversion to non-heterosexuality did not seem as strong as SA participants. This may be in part to an increase in queer affirming and LGBT+ inclusive churches within the UK, with the Inclusive Church<sup>4</sup> having over 700 churches signed up to their inclusive network (Inclusive church, 2022). This may have started a shift in the conversation around Christianity and sexuality, although all gay and lesbian Christians still struggle with internalized homophobia as we live in a heterosexist world (Freeman-Coppadge & Horne, 2019). The conversation around Islam and non-heterosexuality is complex as individuals interpret the Quran in conflicting ways regarding LGP (Jahangir & Abdullatif, 2018), which may contribute to the complexity to which Muslim participants experience religion and sexuality. As far as the research team are aware there is only one queer affirming Mosque within the UK "The Inclusive Mosque Imitative", however this is an online charity and not a physical mosque. Therefore, there are far fewer options for SA lesbian and gay Muslims. Religious explanations for lesbian and gay identities may help participants feel more at ease with their sexuality in the short term but in the long term may increase feelings of internalized homophobia. Some participants completely rejected the "gay" or "lesbian" label due to this:

I don't class myself as gay, because that makes you sound you are not normal (SA Male, Mitha et al., 2021)

It appears participants believed that anything other than heterosexual was not normal, which participants spoke about with confusion, frustration, and pain. It was clear that many participants struggled with accepting their sexualities, which only exacerbates struggles with internalized homophobia. This appeared to be largely because of the heteronormative nature of the world generally, and the specific religious-cultural surroundings and beliefs, which both tell them that non-heterosexuality is inherently wrong. The complex intersection of sexuality and religion appeared to cause conflict between the two identities, with participants often uncertain on what path to follow:

You cannot be a Mormon and also have a gay lifestyle...you have to be either one of the other (BAC Male, Keogh et al., 2004)

I believe it's a contradiction, I still believe the two cannot co-exist, but I can't change my sexuality. I have ignored it in order to be a better Muslim, but I don't think it's possible. It's a part of me, as is Islam (SA Woman, Siraj, 2012)

Participants battled with their feelings for the same sex and their commitment to their religion, the two often not compatible. Throughout the papers there was a consistent mention of traditional and cultural values that participants felt were mandatory. Across all SA cultures and religions, the most common was heterosexual marriage:

I need to complete my din<sup>5</sup> and get married [to a woman] ... My mother feels that she has to fulfil her obligation to get her sons married...I [will] feel a failure if I don't get married (SA Male, Mitha et al., 2021)

It appeared that if participants did not fulfill their duty to marry and procreate, this would imply a lack of commitment to their religions. Similarly, BAC men were faced with the pressure of having children and “fathering the next generation” (Researcher, Doyal et al., 2008).

### ***Internal intersectional identity conflict***

All participants struggled with the identity conflict between various parts of their identities such as: sexuality, gender, religion, and ethnicity. SA and BAC men displayed damaging attitudes and behaviors regarding their masculinity, whereas SA women were more likely to challenge perceived gender roles. All participants struggled to be their “true” selves, often feeling trapped in an inauthentic life.

### ***Performing gender***

Researchers mentioned cultural beliefs around stereotypical societal norms of masculinity that impacted on gay men in BAC cultures:

Many men from black Caribbean and African backgrounds said the major issues they faced was the view of homosexuality as a taboo, that it challenges orthodox models of masculinity and simply that it is something which is not accepted by people in their families and communities (Researcher, McKeown et al., 2010)

Within African and Caribbean communities there is an immense cultural pressure on men to be “real men” and enact duties around this such as being heterosexual and dominant (Pan American Health Organisation, 2023). This may link to the objectification and racialized sexual hierarchies experienced by BAC men as having a large penis is viewed as more dominant, therefore more “manly”. For LGP-GM it appeared there was an element of

gender performativity<sup>6</sup> at play, which states that individuals will witness certain gender performances throughout life and will then perform these rituals to demonstrate gender (Butler, 1990). For some LGP-GM this was demonstrated through homophobic attitudes to more open LGP:

Definitely have a phobia, if you call it, of the out and proud lot (SA Male, Mitha et al., 2021)

I think I feel I'm slightly superior to them, I mean I am part of them (gays) but not really being with them (SA Woman, Siraj, 2011)

Participants appeared to shun open LGP, which could link to the idea of gender performances, as these individuals were going against their perceived gender norms, which appeared an uncomfortable experience for some LGP-GM. Furthermore, this also gave the notion that SA and BAC gay men strive for the idealized hegemonic masculinity<sup>7</sup>, which includes men perpetuating gender inequality and having power over women and other minority men (Connell, 2013), which includes homophobia. This can often be demonstrated through heterosexuality, physical strength, and aggression (Jewkes et al., 2015; Morrell et al., 2013). SA and BAC men often engaged in heterosexual relationships whilst engaging in romantic and sexual relationships with men:

Maybe I'm hurting my wife and kids more [by engaging in clandestine sexual encounters with men] but I see no need to come out (SA Male, Mitha et al., 2021)

It appeared that SA and BAC showed little concern to the women they were in heterosexual relationships with, demonstrating the perceived power they have over them, which also suggests undertones of toxic masculinity<sup>8</sup>. It appeared that engaging in heterosexual relationships, to fulfill perceived gender roles, had become a norm for participants, further enforcing perceived and damaging ideas of gender identity, which are upheld by western society (Hearn, 2004). Although, some SA lesbian women reacted in a homophobic way toward more open lesbian women, there seemed to be a conflict with adhering to SA gender roles e.g., being a wife and a mother (Nainar, 2013; Tonsing & Tonsing, 2019). For example:

I'm gay, but you can't expect to marry (in my case a woman) (SA Woman, Siraj, 2012)

This conflicted with SA lesbian's rejecting stereotyped gender norms, therefore defying the patriarchy which held them within these norms:

I can't relate to their values and beliefs and what they consider to be sacred, things like marriage and womanhood. How can I as a lesbian and feminist accept and embrace such patriarchal values? My mind revolts against it (SA Woman, Siraj, 2011)

It appeared that the difference in SA women and performing gender were closely related to the experiences they had with their sexualities e.g., if they had disclosed sexuality to friends and had a positive response, they were more likely to reject stereotyped norms e.g., heterosexuality and femininity.

### *Hiding the lesbian or gay self*

It was a very common experience for participants to conceal their sexual identities in certain areas of their lives, if not all. One man spoke of an active gay sex life, yet in regard to his family:

They don't know, and they will never know (BAC Male, McKeown et al., 2010)

Participants discussed experiences of concealment with varying levels of distress and pain:

It makes me feel like I'm going to have a panic attack (SA Male, Jaspal, 2021)

I feel guilty (SA Woman, Siraj, 2018)

The reasons for participants concealment appeared complex and intertwined with their intersectional identities. Participants would often conceal their lesbian or gay identities to protect their families' reputations:

Letting people know that there is a gay man in the family would be very shameful for our families. This is true for many Jamaicans in particular (BAC, Male, McKeown et al., 2010)

LGP-GM seemed to prioritize their family's reputation and honor within the community by sacrificing their sexual identities. Personal sacrifices may not be uncommon, as SA and BAC cultures tend to place substantial importance on the family system and kinship (Idang, 2018; Masmood et al., 2009; Nwadiora, 1996). LGP-GM may have also been aware that due to their intersecting identities, they would have to face a different array of difficulties in disclosing their sexual identities, as opposed to white LGP e.g., rejection from ethnic community, rejection from sexual community and rejection from religion, in turn leading to a lack of support (Meyer, 2010). It appeared that for some LGP-GM the risk of disclosure was too high. To manage this, participants often opted to compartmentalize their identities:

My friends David and Kay—I know it sounds cheesy—they got the “real me”, they knew about my family and what would happen if I came out. While at my first job, which was an Islamic organization, it was the “religious me”, clean, attempting to find a place in religion (SA Woman, Siraj, 2011)

Compartmentalizing is as a coping strategy to deal with incompatible identities (Breakwell, 1986), that appears to be utilized by LGP-GM.

Though compartmentalizing identities can help reduce stress, there are times where this is not an option and individuals are left feeling an increasing sense of inauthenticity (Jaspal, 2019). The sense of living an inauthentic life was felt throughout the studies:

I have at times felt inauthentic because I'm not living my life the way I think I should be – being “out and proud” (SA Woman, Siraj, 2018)

Due to their intersectional identities, LGP-GM often had to conceal their identities which in turn surrendered their opportunities to live as they wished. It appears many LGP-GM yearned for a different life but were trapped by the complex intersections their identities involved and therefore remained in their current situations, with little hope to escape it.

### ***Lack of connection to culture, religion, and others***

Due to their intersectional identities and having to conceal sexuality from their families and communities, LGP-GM felt distance from those closest to them:

To be honest with you, I love my family, yeah, but you know I feel this massive distance because of all the lies and all the hiding. It's like I'm there but a million miles away (SA Male, Jaspal, 2021)

It seemed that participants held superficial relationships with their families, potentially creating less social support for LGP-GM, especially as family is considered one of the highest values in both cultures (Idang, 2018; Masood et al., 2009; Nwadiora, 1996). Participants also became distanced from their cultures and religions:

The sense of having little or no connection with their parents' country of origin was related to their gay identity (Researcher, Keogh et al., 2004)

I've become increasingly distant from Islam (SA Woman, Siraj, 2012)

As previously mentioned, LGP-GM struggle to find connections in the mainstream queer scene and are often faced with racism, otherization and prejudice, so an obvious distance is felt within this area too. However, despite these difficulties LGP-GM were able to form connections with other LGP-GM, which presented itself as a source of support for some LGP-GM:

I was only hanging around with just gay people, just black gay men, cos that's what I felt comfortable with (BAC Male, Doyal et al., 2008)

For BAC men, many found friendship through other BAC men and spent time together socially e.g., clubbing and dinners. This may have happened as BAC men can form resilience to adversities faced and this

leads to forming connections with other gay BAC men (Meyer, 2010). SA women were also able to find connection to other SA lesbian women through a GSRD Muslim support groups:

It is nice to know that other people have lived it [the struggle].... Their presence validates me (SA Woman, Yip, 2002)

I think Imaan is good place for people looking for support and I suppose it's the only "space" where it's perfectly acceptable to be gay and Muslim (SA Woman, Siraj, 2012)

Siraj's (2012) paper in particular spoke about GSRD Muslim charity Imaan<sup>9</sup> and the experiences of attending Imaan, presented as a normalizing experience for SA women. Although all women still experienced internalized homophobia, as this is the result of an oppressive heteronormative world (Froster & Meyer, 2009), it seemed to be validating to know that they are not alone. It is important to note that SA women restricted their support to within these groups, unlike BAC men they did not socialize with other SA women outside of this remit, which may suggest the fear and consequences of involuntary disclosure are higher within SA women. However, SA men were unable to surpass the complex intersectional barriers to create connections with other SA men and were often left with no support at all:

White people never will accept us...Asians are too secretive, so I don't hang out with them. Straight Asians think I'm just a queer, so they are not really interested either. My parents? Don't even go there...I feel pretty trapped in my life (SA Male, Jaspal, 2017)

It seems that due to complex intersectional minority stressors experienced by SA men, which may be more than white gay men, SA gay men are rejected on every front and struggle to form connections (Meyer, 2010). Interestingly, this confirms the earlier mentioned risk hypothesis, yet SA lesbian women and gay BAC men confirm the resilience hypothesis (Meyer, 2010).

## Discussion

The systematic meta synthesis explored what unique minority stressors were experienced by LGP-GM, within the UK by using MST, intersectionality theory and the racial weathering hypothesis to examine people's experiences. The review highlighted unique and complex minority stressors for SA LGP and BAC gay men illustrating shared experiences and specific differences. Four main themes and corresponding subthemes emerged: (1) Intersectionality: Navigating the queer scene as an LGP-GM (objectification: racist sexualized hierarchies, and the other; (2) Intersectionality: Navigating

GM spaces as an LGP-GM (heteronormative surroundings, and religious and cultural beliefs about open lesbian and gay identities); (3) Internal intersectional identity conflict (performing gender, and hiding the lesbian or gay self; and (4) Lack of connection to culture, religion, and others.

Findings related to “Objectification: Racist sexualized hierarchies” suggested that BAC gay men are objectified sexually and desired, more than SA men. It could be argued that this is due to racial stereotypes, whereby BAC are exoticized and believed to have a large penis, be aggressive and dominant and have sexual prowess (Calabrese et al., 2018), therefore demonstrating that BAC are more in line with the desired hegemonic masculinity. However, being desired due to sexual racist assumptions is objectifying and reduces these men to a stereotype, rather than a full human being (Stacey & Forbes, 2022). Conversely, other researchers have questioned whether BAC men have performed to racist sexual stereotypes and used it to increase sexual encounters with women and men (Smith et al., 2018). Unfortunately, sexual racism exists within structural racism, whereby this oppression influence’s partner choice to advantage whiteness, whilst oppressing GM individuals, which expresses itself through structures, cultures and between ethnicities (Orne, 2017). For SA gay men, they were also objectified and reduced to a stereotype and viewed as a less desirable sexual partner. Pervasive racism is common for people from SA descent (Dua, 2021; Kamp et al., 2022). There was evidence within the analysis that SA gay men would prefer to be “lighter skinned”, as this is considered more attractive within the mainstream queer scene (Jordens & Griffiths, 2022). It appears that “Colourism” is demonstrated by SA and white gay men, which is a form of discrimination and prejudice that favors and privileges lighter skin tones (Dixon & Telles, 2017). This further exacerbates hegemonic whiteness throughout the queer scene in turn contributing to the continued system of racial oppression SA and BAC gay men continue to be objectified under.

Intriguingly, there was little mention of SA lesbian women’s experiences of navigating the queer scene, as if their sexuality is stripped from them. SA lesbian women hold a unique intersectional identity compared to SA gay men, due to their experiences of misogyny as women. SA culture is structured in patriarchal and heterosexist views (Bhopal, 2019), e.g., a woman needs to have children, attend to the family, and have sex with her husband, to have no sexual desire of her own and be “good” (Nainar, 2013; Tonsing & Tonsing, 2019). It could be speculated that SA women feel oppressed by cultural beliefs and misogyny, which in turn lead to their avoidance of the queer scene for fear of judgment. Women may also feel oppressed by overarching racist sexual hierarchies and being exoticized, which make the queer scene feel dangerous and unapproachable. Research has found that GM lesbians experience further marginalization within the

mainstream queer community (Alimahomed, 2010), which was supported by the current findings. However, this review also found that some SA women started to rebel against traditional and patriarchal gender roles. This may be due to a steady rise of SA feminism within the UK, which was triggered by recent violence against SA women, racism, and “othering” by the government (Anitha & Dhaliwal, 2019). This may have increased SA women’s confidence to question and protest patriarchal attitudes and traditions.

There were also differences between groups in terms of upholding cultural and religious traditions. For SA participants, there was significant pressure to be in a heterosexual marriage, more so than BAC men. This is supported by previous research, whereby across SA, there is a cultural expectation to enter a heterosexual marriage (Mehrotra, 2016; Tripathi, 2020), possibly due to the collectivist cultural norms, which places substantial burdens on people to maintain family honor and conform to cultural beliefs (Lowe et al., 2021). A further explanation for pressure to have a heterosexual marriage may be due to religious norms and expectations. Within Islam and Hinduism marriage is seen as a religious duty and an act of devoutness (Meraj, 2018; Kaydani, 2016). Therefore, SA participants may hold traditions around marriage strongly, which in turn proves commitment to religion. In turn religious beliefs and collectivist nature led more SA participants to living inauthentic lives by engaging in heterosexual marriages. It was unexpected that this was not the case for BAC gay men in the context of Christianity, suggesting a potential area for future research.

The last significant difference to note is the connections participants formed with other LGP-GM. In line with Meyer’s MST for LGP-GM (2010) and Moradi et al. (2010) resilience hypothesis, BAC men and SA women in the review tended to build resilience through the intersectional minority stressors they faced e.g., racism in queer spaces, being “The Other” and homophobia from within their cultural groups. Quinn et al. (2022) found that oppression of gay black men produces resilience due to pride in intersectional identity and support for other gay black men, which has been demonstrated within the thematic synthesis. However, it is unclear why this does not apply to SA gay men. Meyer’s (2010) MST for LGP-GM in relation to building resilience, is largely conducted with black and Latino sexual minority groups, so this may not apply SA men. SA men may not have formed positive connections with their ingroup due to beliefs around help-seeking in SA culture. SA people in the UK struggle to seek support due to distance from services, mistrust, and threat to their cultural identities (Prajapati & Liebling, 2022), which may explain why SA men did not form helpful connections. Liu et al. (2011) also found that gay men from collectivist cultures are less likely to seek support. However,

this does not explain why SA women found support, but men did not. This may be explained by SA men's idea of masculinity and wanting to appear more heterosexual that creates a barrier to help seeking. Overall, the review finds some support for Meyer's (2010) MST for LGP-GM and Moradi et al. (2010) resilience hypotheses, but not in relation to SA men.

However, there were some similarities between groups. Despite the differences between BAC and SA cultures, they were both seen as "The Other" on the queer scene. This may be due to the hegemonic whiteness that the UK queer scene favors with implicit racial barriers surrounding the UK queer social world (DasGupta & Dasgupta, 2018). Even though LGP-GM were objectified differently, with BAC placing higher on the racist sexualized hierarchy they are both still viewed as foreign (Ridge et al., 1999), therefore being viewed as "The Other". Furthermore, BAC and SA individuals were both encased by heteronormative surroundings, with both cultures being viewed as homophobic (Hart et al., 2023; Ireland, 2013; Stanislas, 2014). Both cultures were expected to maintain cultural beliefs around heteronormativity including heterosexual marriage and masculinity. This also linked into BAC and SA individuals concealing their sexualities and hiding their true selves, which was also similar across groups, as concealment is a prevalent stressor for LGP (Meyer, 2003). While there are similarities and distinctions between groups these remain multifaceted and complex due to individuals' intersectional identities.

### ***Limitations and future research***

The review demonstrated the complexities around operationalizing parts of an individual's identity, especially in relation to sexuality. For example, the Mitha et al. (2021) study labeled participants as "Attracted to the same sex". Authors stated this was due to negative connotations around the label "gay" within SA communities. However, this may mean the study included men who are attracted to men sexually but do not hold the social identity of a gay person, which is what the study aimed to explore. This could be a limitation of the current meta-synthesis.

Due to the niche focus and limited research on LGP-GM within the UK, multiple studies were included within the review completed by the same two authors. Due to this, there is a risk of researcher bias, although Siraj was one of only two authors who described her researcher reflexivity position. However, many of the themes across Jaspal's studies were matched to other papers included within the review. Furthermore, each study utilized new data, avoiding repetition. Qualitative research should not argue that it is opinion free and impartial, but that it is unique due to researcher interpretation and that there is no correct or true interpretation of the data (Galdas, 2017; Tobin & Begley, 2004). Nevertheless, the research team

remained cautious of potential biases during the synthesis and continually reflected on their own reflexive positions throughout.

The thematic synthesis only focused on individuals from SA and BAC backgrounds. Conversely, this was unavoidable as the search did not uncover any papers on other ethnicities e.g., people from an East Asian background. Furthermore, it is important to note that the voices of BAC lesbians have not been heard within the review due to the lack of research within this area too. Therefore, further research within these areas would be beneficial. Furthermore, research is needed to investigate SA gay men's experiences of resilience and connection.

It is important to note that recently Jaspal et al. (2023) have linked Identity Process Theory (Breakwell, 2015) and MST to analyze minority stressors within minority populations. Therefore, it may be useful for future research within this area to consider Identity Process Theory, alongside MST, as this will aid examination of how individuals who experience minority stressors will react with a specific focus on their sense of identity.

An important aim of the current thematic synthesis was to reduce "intersectional invisibility" (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008), which has created a significant gap in the literature regarding minority stressors experienced by LGP-GM (McConnell et al., 2018). The authors hope this visibility will be beneficial for the body of literature and would urge fellow researchers to focus on developing intersectional visibility in our field.

### ***Clinical implications***

The current findings suggest that healthcare professionals should be aware of the complex intersectional minority stressors experienced by LGP-GM. Professionals should approach sexuality-related discussion with caution, as it may evoke feelings of tension and shame within LGP-GM. LGP-GM may be reluctant to disclose their sexualities due to these challenges. Clinicians should recognize the significance of maintaining confidentiality, as they may be the only person LGP-GM confide in about their sexuality. For those LGP-GM people who seek support through services, it could be beneficial for mental health professionals to utilize the Intersectional, Social and Systems-based (InSoS) framework (Dunlop & Lea, 2023a), which is flexible and expansive to assess and understand intersectional identities of those who are LGP-GM. The InSoS is a useful tool to support assessment, formulation and intervention whilst honoring and prioritizing a person's complex social and internal experiences of othering and discrimination.

It would also be helpful for professionals to be aware of the heightened risk issues within this population e.g., complex intersectional minority stressors such as racism on the queer scene. It is important that clinicians adjust current generic risk assessments to ask clients about: experiences

of discrimination, racism, forced marriage and loneliness. It is specifically important to ask SA men about loneliness due to their lack of connections. Loneliness and lack of connection also leads to an increased risk of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and health issues (Beutel et al., 2017). Clinicians also need to remain aware that if an individual's sexuality is voluntary or involuntarily disclosed this could increase risk e.g., being made homeless, abuse from community and/or family and further loneliness.

Lastly, health professionals should be attuned to giving LGP-GM the correct support and to strengthen their social connections and support systems, which has been shown to be important for sexuality minority groups (Joyce et al., 2024). Due to their intersecting identities, many LGP-GM are distant or estranged from family members, therefore it may be important to discuss or build a client's "logical and/or chosen family". A chosen family is made of people that are not our biological family but may be close friends who offer much needed support. For example, BAC men could be signposted to "House of Rainbow"<sup>10</sup> that provides BAC, and other people of the GM with varying types of support but importantly the opportunity to connect with other LGP-GM. For SA LGP, in particular SA men, it will be important to encourage further support e.g., signposting to Imaan. Imaan hold "Demystifying Sharia" workshops, which involves discussing and challenging conventional Islamic teachings around non-heterosexuality, which has had positive feedback (Shah, 2016). The workshops enhanced shared knowledge around Islamic teaching and non-heterosexuality to client's systems but also encouraged participants to become involved in the LGP-GM community. It would be helpful to signpost SA LGP to Imaan or create a space like Imaan in local communities.

## Conclusion

To the authors knowledge this is the first systematic thematic synthesis of qualitative papers exploring experiences of minority stress faced by LGP-GM, in the UK. This review has uncovered unique minority stressors faced LGP-GM and discusses similarities and differences between SA LGP and BAC gay men. Clinical implications are discussed. Further research into the experiences of LGP-GM in the UK and internationally is required to inform specialist mental health provision to address the unique minority stressors faced and the increased risk of psychological distress and difficulties this may create.

## Notes

1. When using the term "Lesbian and Gay People of the Global Majority", we refer to South Asian LGP and Black African and Caribbean gay men (based on the papers found during the thematic synthesis). The term "Global Majority" has been utilised

as the term challenges the negative and devastating connotations associated with being categorised a racial minority and aims to decolonise the literature around people of the Global Majority (Campbell-Stevens, 2021).

2. Heterosexism can be defined as discrimination or bias against individuals who identify as gay, stemming from the presumption that heterosexuality is the standard or default sexual orientation (Jun, 2024).
3. For further discussions on “White Privilege” and “Whiteness” please see, Eddo-Lodge (2019).
4. The Inclusive Church is an UK based educational charity which encourages churches to increase inclusivity and challenges churches to when they discriminate over sexuality. For more information please visit: <https://www.inclusive-church.org>.
5. Din refers to the Islam religion and is a way to describe someone’s ‘way of life’ and this is then considered in the afterlife.
6. For further discussion on Gender Performativity please see (Butler, 1990).
7. Hegemonic Masculinity refers to Western societies dominant form of masculinity and elevates masculinity other others.
8. Toxic masculinity refers to a set of attitudes and behaviours that society expects of a man that advocate dangerous stereotyped masculinity e.g., dominance and aggression.
9. Imaan is a Muslim LGBT+ charity that provides support and aims to “reconcile faith with sexuality and gender identity” (Imaan, 2014). For more information please visit: <https://imaanlondon.wordpress.com>.
10. For more information on House of Rainbow, please see: <https://www.houseofrainbow.org>.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Funding

Funding was provided by the University of Manchester.

## Data availability statement

All data for the thematic synthesis is included within the manuscript and in the original studies on which it is based.

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\*Represents papers that were included in the synthesis

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## Appendix A.

**Table A1.** Search terms.

Database (and platform)	PsycInfo (OVID); Medline (OVID); CINAHL plus (EBSCOhost); Web of Science (Clarivate)			
Key search categories	"Minority stress"	Lesbian* OR Gay*	"Global majority"	"United Kingdom"
Search terms	OR discr*	OR homosexual	OR ethnic minor*	OR UK
	OR victi*	OR LB	OR minority ethn*	OR
	OR rejec*	OR LGBT*	OR minority rac*	United-
	OR conceal*	OR Queer	OR racial mino*	Kingdom
	OR homophob*	OR sexual minorit*	OR national mino*	OR Great Britain
	OR antigay*	OR minoritized sexuality	OR cultural mino*	OR England
	OR internalized*	OR minority sexuality	OR minoritized	OR Wales
	OR internalized*	OR gender	ethnicity	OR Scotland
	OR stigma*	nonconforming	OR minoritized race	OR Northern
	OR prejud*	OR gender identity	OR asylum seeker	Ireland OR
	OR ident*	disorder	OR refugee	Britain
	OR racis*	OR gender dysphoria	OR person of color	OR English
	OR microaggression*	OR gender minorit*	OR POC	OR British
	OR violen*	OR same sex	OR BME	OR Ireland
	OR harass*	OR homosexual*	OR BAME*	
	OR disclosure	OR homosexuality*	OR Asian	
	OR outness	OR gender identity	OR black	
	OR hypervigil*	OR non-heterosexual*	OR biracial	
	OR vigilan*	OR non heterosexual*	OR multiracial	
		OR questioning	OR mixed heritage	
			OR dual heritage	
			OR Gyps*	
			OR Traveller*	
			OR Asian British	
			OR Black British	
			OR Arab*	

**Appendix B.****Table B1.** Example of quality appraisal.

Criteria/reference for study	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Clear statement of, and rationale for, research question/aims/purposes	0.5	1	0.5	1	1	0.5	1	0.5	1	1	1	1	0	0.5	1	1
2. Study thoroughly contextualized by existing literature	0	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	1
3. Method/design apparent, and consistent with research intent	1	1	0.5	1	0	1	1	0.5	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	1	1
4. Data collection strategy apparent and appropriate	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	0.5	1	1	1
5. Sample and sampling method appropriate	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	0	0.5	1
6. Analytic approach appropriate	0.5	1	0	1	0.5	1	1	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	0	1	1	0.5	1
7. Context described and taken account of in interpretation	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	1
8. Clear audit trail given	0.5	1	0.5	1	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
9. Data used to support interpretation	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
10. Researcher reflexivity demonstrated	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
11. Demonstration of sensitivity to ethical concerns	1	0	0	1	0	1	0.5	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
12. Relevance and transferability evident	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	0.5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Total (category)	8.5 (B)	10 (A)	7.5 (B)	10.5 (A)	8 (B)	10 (A)	10.5 (A)	9 (A)	7 (B)	9.5 (A)	8.5 (B)	8.5 (B)	8.5 (B)	8.5 (B)	9.5 (A)	12 (A)