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A Grounded Theory Analysis of How the Identities (Refugee and Sexuality) of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Minoritised Refugees are Influenced by the Migration Process in the UK.

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Abstract

Background: This research aims to address how sexual and gender identity minority (SOGI) refugees develop their SOGI and refugee identities as a result of the migration process in the UK. The literature has explored the legal, social, structural and political dimensions related to the lives of this population, with a recent focus on their mental health (Lee et al., 2020). This study employs intersectionality as a theoretical framework to explore the intersecting marginalised identities of SOGI refugees within interconnected and co-produced power systems. Therefore, it examines how SOGI refugees experience multiple forms of oppression and prejudice due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, refugee status, race, ethnicity and class. Intersectionality provides the language and understanding to recognise how the distinct structural systems in the UK, such as the migration policies, the healthcare system, and the queer culture, render the SOGI refugee experience in the UK unique and worthy of research.

Methodology: This study employs a qualitative method since this topic has not been sufficiently explored or developed. Constructivist grounded theory (CGT) was chosen as this research aims to understand and analyse the interpersonal processes and dynamics regarding how SOGI refugees' identities develop throughout their migration process in the UK. Purposeful sampling was utilised to recruit six participants to undergo semi-structured interviews. The participants claimed asylum at least once in the UK, were fluent in English and did not present above 10, 'moderate' or scores above 0 on question 9 in the PhQ-9 questionnaire.

Results: Following the CGT's stages of analysis, five categories were developed, each with three subcategories: Challenges of the asylum system (Negotiating one's rights, Control and authority, Gaps in the system); Migration hardships (Subjected to discrimination, The struggle to integrate, Unique mental health challenges); Support (Community and support networks, Receiving therapy, Giving back); Building knowledge and experience (Learning about the UK legal system, Exposure to LGBTQ+ culture in the UK, Developing work and education); Developing an identity (Intersecting identities, Safety and freedom, Self-realisation and acceptance).

Discussion: This research ends with a critical reflection on the implications of this study within the broader literature, its strengths and limitations, and how it contributes to the development of the field of Counselling Psychology within the counselling room and beyond in terms of policy change and social justice.

Keywords: migration, sexuality, gender, mental health, refugee, forced migration, newcomer, intersectionality.

Introduction

The last few decades have seen a global increase in migration, particularly forced migration, which occurs when a person is compelled to leave their country of origin due to social, economic and geopolitical forces (Castles, De Haas, & Miller, 2014). Although forced migrants share some common challenges and needs, such as housing, food and security (Gillespie et al., 2016), they also have different difficulties, including types of discrimination and persecution (Dhoest, 2017). Refugees are a group of forced migrants defined by the United Nations as:

> A person who must flee their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of religion, nationality, race, gender, sexual orientation, political opinion or membership of any other social group. (UNHCR, 2020)

The specific group of refugees that this research focuses on is Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Minority (SOGI) refugees, who can claim asylum based on the fear of persecution due to legal traditions or customs arising from an applicant's gender or sexual orientation (Nilsson et al., 2021). SOGI minorities began to be accepted as a social group at risk of persecution following a European Directive in 2011, which stated that individuals facing a well-founded fear of persecution due to their sexual orientation or gender identity should be given consideration. Although refugees, as a whole, share similar challenges and needs, the key element that distinguishes SOGI refugees is the credibility of their gender identity or sexual orientation and their persecution (Dhoest, 2017). This particular asylum claim is distinctive because the way in which its facticity is established relies on the idea that sexual orientation and gender identity are perceived as fixed traits and, sometimes, invisible identities which can only be confirmed in the live interactions during the asylum process, for example through interviews (Hertoghs & Schinkel, 2018). The applicant is, therefore, required to share what is assumed to be their profoundly internal and personal sense of self-identification (Berger, 2009). The process of having to make credible one's experience of sexuality, gender and persecution renders an acceptable definition of sexuality, gender and persecution to be a legal procedure which is determined by the state. The asylum procedures operate with a notion of truth that is strictly procedural and beyond the reach of the asylum administrator. Therefore, this type of asylum claim is distinguished from other forms because its validity is determined by the credibility and persuasiveness of the applicant's narrative and their ability to establish trustworthiness (Hertoghs & Schinkel, 2018).

When referring to this group of refugees, I use the term 'SOGI' rather than 'LGBTQ+' (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, +), as LGBTQ+ categories originate in the Western world and

may not be the same labels used by SOGI individuals from different cultures (White, 2019). However, the term 'LGBTQ+' may be employed in this research when referring to the Western sexual orientation and gender identity categories and the individuals who self-identify as LGBTQ+. SOGI refugees encounter various levels of violence, discrimination and exclusion in their home and host countries (Abu-Assab, Nasser-Eddin, & Greatrick, 2017; Carroll & Ramon Mendos, 2017). SOGI individuals live through varying migration experiences and may face interpersonal and structural challenges, including mental health issues (Lee et al., 2020). While the overarching discussion of this thesis deals with the broader group of SOGI refugees, the empirical research focuses on individuals who have claimed asylum based on their sexual orientation. Therefore, this research only represents an element of the SOGI migration experience as it can only discuss it in relation to sexual orientation. While sexual orientation and gender identity are placed together as a type of asylum claim, it is essential not to conflate them as the experience of gender identity includes other discourses, such as gender dysphoria, transitioning and other challenges (Jordan, 2011).

Moreover, I use the term SOGI 'minoritised' refugees to acknowledge the nuances and complexity of the identities of this population and emphasise the active processes involved. The term minoritised was introduced by Yasmin Gunaratnum in 2003 (Selvarajah et al., 2020). This concept highlights the perpetuation of systems and structures that limit minoritised people's ability to live without discrimination and oppression (Selvarajah et al., 2020). It adopts a social constructionist approach, suggesting that individuals are actively subjected to minoritisation by others rather than inherently existing as a minority as opposed to a majority. Therefore highlighting that minoritisation is a socially constructed process influenced by power (Milner and Jumbe, 2020).

By shedding light on the experiences of this population, this study aims to contribute to the field of Counselling Psychology and to the discourse on SOGI refugees in the UK. By exploring the mental health and identity development of SOGI refugees, this study hopes to elucidate some of this population's social justice concerns and the challenges they face. These insights can help mental health professionals and policymakers become more aware of the issues faced by this population, potentially leading to policy changes and broader social change in the UK. By gaining a deeper understanding of SOGI refugees' migration experience in the UK, psychologists can challenge problematic aspects of asylum procedures and contribute to the development of immigration systems that do not promote homonational and hegemonic narratives.

This research emphasises how the different structural elements of the asylum procedure, broader migration hardships, and support that SOGI refugees experience during their migration to the UK shape the development of their identities. Mental health professionals can utilise this information to provide more culturally sensitive and trauma-informed care tailored to the specific needs of SOGI refugees. Additionally, mental health services and support groups can utilise the findings of this study to increase the accessibility of their services. In line with Counselling Psychology's core value of social justice, this research aims to address systemic institutional barriers and inequalities with the hope of dismantling systems of oppression. To account for these nuances of the SOGI refugee experience in the UK, this study employs an intersectional theoretical framework, which will now be introduced.

Theoretical Framework: Intersectionality

To account for the unique complexity of SOGI's identities, I will employ an intersectional theoretical framework throughout this research. The term intersectionality was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 as a part of her critique of feminism's oversight of the experience of Black women. Women of colour continued to develop and advance intersectional thinking to replace the single-axis framework when examining the experiences of individuals who have been subjected to various types of oppression (Shin et al., 2017). This framework recognises how systems of power cannot be understood in isolation as they intersect and co-produce one another, which leads to distinctive social and mental health experiences (Frankfurt, Frazier, Syed, & Jung, 2016; Grzanka, 2016). Intersectionality is thus an appropriate theoretical framework for this critical literature review as it provides the perspective and terminology for examining the interrelations and interdependencies between the social systems and categories that play a role in the SOGI refugee experience. This will enrich the analysis of how concepts such as ethnicity, culture, race, sexual orientation, and gender contribute to how SOGI refugees experience the migration process in the UK. The awareness provided by intersectionality to such differences amplifies our understanding of social justice matters and systemic, institutional, and structural inequalities, thus maximising the chance of social change (Atewologun, 2018).

An intersectional theoretical framework will provide an appropriate lens for this research to meet its aim of contributing to Counselling Psychology's social justice movement. Counselling Psychology is built on core ethical values centralising the client's subjective experience. Counselling Psychologists respond to clients empathetically to promote growth, empowerment and actualisation (Bor & Watts, 2010). More recently, Counselling Psychology has begun to recognise its broader abilities in working beyond an individual level when supporting clients in

the face of harmful societal structures to working towards durable social change for society (Bryant, 2007). This has made social justice a core value of Counselling Psychology, emphasising social matters, including equity, interdependence and social responsibility (Bell, 1997). Such placing of importance includes Counselling Psychologists' commitment to recognising and addressing their own biases by increasing their awareness of power and privilege (Bor & Watts, 2010). Counselling Psychologists also aim to be reflexive practitioners and utilise research to inform them about how prejudices may impact the therapeutic process within the counselling room and the broader social context. Therefore, the expansion of Counselling Psychology research in prejudice and discrimination aims to deepen the understanding of the self and others (Vera & Speight, 2003).

Counselling Psychologists have been essential in advancing social justice movements and multicultural counselling competencies (Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Minieri, Reese, Miserocchi, & Pascale-Hague, 2015). This growth is characterised by the development of knowledge, understanding and skills in providing effective therapy for individuals from diverse backgrounds and the involvement in social action (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Ali & Sichel, 2014; Fouad, Gerstein, & Toporek, 2006). The recent adoption of intersectionality approaches in Counselling Psychology has contributed to the growth and infusion of social justice into research, practice and training (Shin et al., 2017). Furthermore, intersectionality's emphasis on oppressive systems and social activism helps shift Counselling Psychology's focus away from primarily addressing individual-level interventions to confronting the systemic institutional obstacles that lead to the psychological difficulties of marginalised individuals (Shin et al., 2017; Vera & Speight, 2003).

This growing interest in employing intersectional theory across many areas of psychology, including Counselling Psychology, has led these fields to begin addressing how multiple systems intersect to produce and perpetuate complex inequalities (Parent et al., 2013). Nevertheless, the application of intersectionality within psychological research has faced many challenges, notably in how research methodologies might inadvertently simplify or ignore the critique of systems of oppression and their constitution (Dill & Kohlman, 2012). This risks the potential of depoliticising, diminishing, and co-opting the complexity of intersectionality. Intersectionality is critical to addressing the potential unintentional oversights in theories of identity that may neglect the broader context of social inequalities and power dynamics (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). Informed by the scholarly recommendations on the use of intersectionality in SOGI refugee research (Murray, 2011; Alessi & Kahn, 2017), I apply intersectionality to this research by exploring the interrelationship between the identities of SOGI refugees and systemic structures, aiming to address social systems of power. Following

the insights of Crenshaw (1991) and Cole (2008), this research shifts the focus from individual self-concepts to a dynamic framework that emphasises the role of social systems of power in shaping the oppression and privilege of certain categories.

Queer migration scholarships suggest that intersectionality facilitates the understanding of the complex and dynamic systems of power that may influence the identity development of SOGI refugees (Alessi & Kahn, 2018; Jordan, 2009; Murray, 2011). Intersectionality allows for an exploration of identity development as a multifaceted, interdependent, and fluid process (Parent et al., 2013). Therefore, intersectionality as a framework can be a method for examining identity (Syed, 2010; Warner & Shields, 2013). By employing intersectionality, this research seeks to highlight the social systems of power and oppression that influence how SOGI refugees experience their intersecting identities throughout their migration to the UK.

This study explores identity development; as such, I briefly consider certain concepts of identity theory and identity politics, such as Lisa Diamond's (2008; 2016) and Surya Monro's (2000) insights on sexual and gender fluidity, and Spivak's (1996) concepts of strategic essentialism. Although these scholars offer valuable insight into identity formation, I approach these concepts through a critical lens, informed by intersectionality, as they are predominantly a product of the West and may thus not fully apply to individuals with diverse identities such as those explored in this research (Koc & Kafa, 2019).

Diamond's work on sexuality explores identity as a continuous dynamic development process (Diamond, 2016). Diamond's research on identity development and sexual orientation challenges the traditional linear identity development model (Diamond, 2008). Diamond's work offers a more nuanced understanding of how individuals come to understand and express their sexual orientation over time. It reveals the complex and nuanced journey of self-discovery, marked by various phases, including exploration and questioning, underscoring identity development's non-linear and multifaceted nature (Diamond, 2016). This identity model is valuable and relevant to this research as it advocates for a more fluid and inclusive understanding of identity formation which is not categorical and rigid (Diamond, 2016). Therefore, it provides a flexible perspective for understanding the identities of SOGI refugees.

Surya Monro's contributions further deepen our understanding of identities by challenging the conventional binary classifications of gender and sexuality (Monro, 2007). Monro suggests that individuals may not fit neatly into traditional binary categories, for example, male or female. Instead, gender, sex, and sexuality can be seen as a spectrum where individuals can experience these identities in diverse and fluid ways over time (Monro, 2000). Monro

integrates the concept of intersectionality in their work by highlighting how various factors like race, class and ability intersect to shape one's experience of gender and sexuality (Monro & Richardson, 2010). This perspective on sexuality and gender fluidity is crucial for comprehending the complexities surrounding the identities of SOGI refugees and challenging assumptions about fixed identities.

Moreover, Spivak's concept of strategic essentialism introduces a nuanced notion of the use of essentialist identities by marginalised and oppressed groups as a strategy for political mobilisation or resistance against oppression (Spivak, 2012). While acknowledging the potential benefits of essentialist categories in specific contexts, strategic essentialism maintains its critical stance towards essentialism and highlights its risk of reinforcing hierarchies and oppression (Eide, 2010). Strategic essentialism may be relevant to the study of SOGI refugees when addressing how the UK migration system renders certain identities of SOGI refugees more visible. Strategic essentialism may shed light on understanding whether SOGI refugees emphasise certain aspects of their identities during their migration process for strategic reasons. However, strategic essentialism may oversimplify the complexities of individuals' lived experiences. By focusing on one essentialised identity, strategic essentialism may overlook how other intersecting identities contribute to individuals' social positioning and experiences of marginalisation and oppression (Kenney, 2018). Intersectionality recognises the fluidity and contextuality of identity and how identities may shift and develop over time and in different social contexts (Parent et al., 2013). Strategic essentialism, however, may overlook identity development's fluid and nuanced nature and the intersecting forms of oppression that individuals may face (Kenney, 2018).

These understandings of identity, while insightful, often rely on a single-axis model of identity and tend toward universalising the identity formation process (Corlett & Mavin, 2014; Ponterotto & Taulor, 2007). Additionally, intersectionality critiques the tendency of identity models to prioritise individual experiences over the broader societal structures that influence identity, such as systemic discrimination, institutionalised inequalities, and social norms (Few-Demo & Allen, 2020). This is particularly relevant when considering the unique challenges faced by SOGI refugees in the UK, whose experiences are shaped by structural barriers and systemic inequalities (Dhoest, 2017). Literature on SOGI refugees suggests that intersectional theory may be more appropriate when exploring this community as it reflects that identity development is a lifelong, fluid, and complex process that may differ depending on social contexts and power structures (Murray, 2011; Jordan, 2009). Such an approach enables a deeper understanding of the interplay between multiple identities and the systemic structures and power systems that may impact individuals' sense of self (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017).

Intersectionality offers a lens through which to view human experiences as inherently complex and shaped by various dimensions of privilege and power (Crisp, 2014). Applying an intersectional framework to this research will facilitate my pursuit of epistemological clarity, transparency and transformation by capturing a fuller breadth and depth of the SOGI refugee migration experience. Additionally, adopting intersectionality in research on SOGI refugees can attend to the complex dynamics of identity development within oppressive systems (Murray, 2014), urging a shift towards more inclusive practices in mental health and Counselling Psychology.

This paper will begin with the researcher's reflexive statement. This is followed by Chapter 1, with a literature review that will contextualise this research within broader international research. Subsequently, Chapter 2 will explore the methodology of this research. Next, Chapter 3 will describe the results using a theoretical model. The study will end with Chapter 4, a discussion of the analysis, strengths and limitations of the research, and a conclusive reflexive statement.

Introductory Reflexive Statement

Decisions about what to research and which studies to fund are reflections of the current social, cultural and political climate (Mosselson, 2010). Counselling Psychologists attempt to be mindful of these influences in research by engaging in a reflexive process to monitor their subjectivity (Kasket, 2012). I describe here my reflections on how my identity as a Queer British-Arab Counselling Psychology trainee influenced and shaped my topic choice and how this has been managed throughout the research process.

My history of international migration for education and work and my Arab-British mixed-cultural upbringing have played an essential role in my choice to research SOGI refugees. My mixed-cultural background influences my individual and social values and how I make sense of myself within different contexts. My upbringing in Lebanon shaped my early understanding of sexuality and gender. Lebanon is considered one of the safer places in the Arab region for gender and sexually diverse people (Keene & Greatrick, 2017). This is due to the greater degree of public acceptance and the development of the legal system in favour of queer individuals (Nasr & Zeidan, 2015). However, the Lebanese law includes Article 534, which stems from the French Penal Code (1810) and states that "any carnal union against the order of nature shall be punished with imprisonment for up to one year". Although the Judiciary system seems to be evolving towards decriminalising SOGI relations, queer individuals are occasionally detained, arrested and tortured by Lebanese security forces (Nasr & Zeidan,

2015). Therefore, I grew up in a country where I associated the expression of queer identities and behaviours with a sense of lack of safety. These forms of discrimination are echoed in societal and familial interactions. I grew up with queer friends who refrained from expressing their sexuality and gender due to the fear of the reactions of their families and community. To better understand my mixed cultural background and context, I moved away from home and exposed myself to different cultures, perspectives and readings. As Sarah Ahmed suggests, " In a way, we learn what home means, or how we occupy space at Home and as home when we leave home" (2020, p.9). These new perspectives ignited my interest in exploring the way I make sense of my identity by learning about the diverse histories and cultures associated with the notions of gender and sexuality.

I started by reading non-fiction books written from a White/Western perspective. This familiarised me with the culture, history and politics of the British environment I am currently living in. However, I noticed that I could not always relate to these gender and sexuality categories. A part of me felt restricted by the language and identity politics that shaped them. I noticed how much my upbringing in Lebanon influenced how I make sense of myself and others. These frustrations led to my readings on the discourses of homonationalism (Balkenhol et al., 2016; Hertoghs & Schinkel, 2018), the historicisation of queer culture (Awondo, 2010), and the critics of the 'happy migrant' and 'migration to liberation' narratives (Ahmed, 2006). This prompted my initial interest in exploring the queer Lebanese diaspora in the UK. My research on this topic taught me about the colonial influences in the historicisation of queer culture in the Arab world (Massad, 2007). In line with the BPS (2017) guidance on research ethics and the importance of acknowledging subjectivity and intersubjectivity, I attempted to take a curious and naïve stance and let the research guide me. As I took a broader approach to my search, I started looking at different cultures and migrants in the UK and learnt about SOGI refugees. I became aware of the structural and emotional challenges these individuals must face throughout the migration process. Having a British passport means that I have never had to experience the restrictions of migration laws and the potentially traumatic elements of the migration system in the UK. I have had the freedom to explore my sexual identity as a queer woman without fearing for my safety or considering my legal status in a country. I felt a strong sense of injustice at the systemic oppression that SOGI refugees face.

While writing this paper, I noticed that my context and surroundings orient me in different ways. My upbringing, my culture, the table I write on, the resources I access, and the books I glance at as I write all influence me. Therefore, I aim to acknowledge my personal interpretations and influences throughout my conceptual analysis. As such, I attempt to queer (twist) the way I write and research, trying not to limit myself by a disciplinary line or the need to be

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straightforward. Throughout my training, as I aimed to orient myself towards this research, I was paying attention to the objects of my writing at the loss of giving my attention to other objects and attachments. Through this, I understood Ahmed's (2020) concept of attention involving a political economy. My ability to sustain my orientation towards this research depended on other orientations, which impacted how and when I could face this research over time. These other attachments and experiences have inherently shaped and influenced my research and vice versa. For example, my understanding of my sexuality and gender has shifted as I have delved deeper into this research. I have also changed how I relate and orient myself to the world and the people surrounding me. For instance, my work has begun to focus more on working with migrants and the LGBTQ+ community. Moreover, I have started to engage in spaces that aim to challenge and dismantle the 'migration to liberation' narrative and to decolonise the mental health system. The more I immersed myself in this project, the more I began to understand how much I am a part of the development of this research.

These reflections shed light on the limitations of researching the SOGI refugee population from a Western perspective. I am writing this research as a British citizen within a British academic institution. My reflections were influenced by Jordan (2011) as I began to question how I am to accurately represent the experiences of SOGI refugees migrating from their home country to the UK without othering cultures or countries as homophobic and transphobic and promoting a politics of rescue. This involves questioning how I will structure, frame and make sense of the development and reorientations of identities throughout the migration process without retelling a transnational version of the coming out narrative and reinforcing the Western LGBTQ+ identity model.

Deliberating my personal history and its connection to this topic, I know I hold biases that could shape my perspective and angle with this research. This may influence what I choose to highlight and how I interpret my findings. When I began to explore the research on SOGI refugees, I noticed that my search was steered towards literature that addressed non-Western understandings of gender and sexuality. I also tended to look at research that highlighted the negative aspects of the migration process, such as its impact on the poor mental health of SOGI refugees due to the lack of awareness of their experiences and needs. However, engaging in reflexivity has helped me become more aware of my assumptions, allowing me to bracket them. I have kept a reflective diary to track my personal thoughts throughout this research. This has helped me understand how my personal material may influence the research process, from recruiting participants, conducting interviews, analysing the data and exploring the literature. This reflection and my discussions in personal therapy have helped me distance myself from the topic. I have chosen to zoom out of exploring the discourse of

homonationalism or legal and historical accounts of the SOGI refugee population to look more closely at how these individuals make sense of the shifts and changes in their identities throughout the migration process. As I do so, I will continue to recognise that, as Murray (2014) suggests, with all narratives, decisions are made about the inclusion or omission of content, what to address and what to remain silent about. Therefore, although this research aims to give an understanding of the development of the identities of SOGI refugees throughout the migration process in the UK, I also want to recognise that my aim is not to create any singular linear essentialist representation of the SOGI refugee experience. Throughout this paper, as I maintain my 'not knowing' and naïve stance, I will hold the awareness that I will be unable to be a completely passive observer as I assign meaning and construct an understanding of the SOGI refugee experience (Charmaz, 2006). To contextualise my position and my research within the wider literature, the next section will explore a review of the literature.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

This critical literature review aims to address how SOGI refugees experience the migration process. To do so, empirical literature relating to SOGI refugees was accessed through the PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, PsycTESTS, Science Direct, Web of Science and Zetoc databases and reviewed. The keywords used to derive the literature review include migration, sexuality, gender, mental health, refugee, forced migration, newcomer, and intersectionality. This literature has explored the legal, social, structural and political dimensions related to the lives of this population, with a recent focus on their mental health (Lee et al., 2020). This critical literature review employs intersectionality as a theoretical framework to explore the intersecting marginalised identities of SOGI refugees within interconnected and co-produced power systems. This literature review thus aims to provide an overview of the literature on SOGI refugees whist addressing different intersecting systems of power. I have therefore chosen not to include identity theory models in the literature review, as my focus is on intersectionality.

This literature review will begin with an overview of the social, historical and geopolitical dimensions of the SOGI migration process. To situate the reader within the SOGI refugee context, a critical review of the empirical literature addressing the various ways SOGI refugees experience the migration process and navigate mental health will be presented. This will begin with more global research on SOGI refugees, followed by UK-specific research and mental health research. Upon exploring the literature, key gaps in knowledge will be identified within the context of Counselling Psychology, concluding with suggestions for the direction of future research to place this research within the literature, contextualising its contributions.

1.1 Global Queer Refugees and Asylum Seekers

The population of forced migrants has been increasing in diversity in the past few years, varying in the country of origin and the reason for migration (Dhoest, 2017). Since forced migrants face different types of discrimination and challenges, despite some shared difficulties, it is crucial to define the language used regarding the population clearly explored (Dhoest, 2017; Gillespie et al., 2016). The literature addressing the migration population has mobilised various categories that have shifted and changed over time. This has resulted in the inclusion and exclusion of certain people in research based on the individual's circumstances and government migration control (Lee et al., 2020). The use of these migrant categories has been inconsistent, resulting in a lack of clarity about how different types of migration are experienced (Lee et al., 2020). For instance, migrant categories such as "immigrant" and

"refugee" divide people by those who "choose" versus those who are "forced" to migrate. The social production of these categories has been criticised by scholars who explore the historical construction of immigration and colonisation laws in radicalised, gendered and sexualised ways which allow for and justify surveillance, deportation, exclusion and the othering of particular groups of people (Castles et al., 2014; Lee, 2018; Luibheid, 2008). This literature has undoubtedly helped give insight into the global historical, economic, and geopolitical forces that contribute to the migration process of SOGI migrants (Lee et al., 2020). However, this research does not clarify the nuances that different migration labels might have on the experience of the migration process. Whilst informed by the complex ways migration categories have been mobilised in academia, communities and the state, this research will focus on SOGI individuals who were forced to migrate due to a fear of persecution. I will refer to this population as SOGI refugees, in line with the previously mentioned UNHCR (2020) definition of a refugee. Future researchers should be attentive to the language they use as they explore the lived experiences of different types of SOGI migrants. While using the overarching term 'refugee' throughout this research, I will also use the term 'asylum seeker' to refer to individuals who have initiated the procedure at the time of the interview and have not yet obtained asylum. Moreover, as this research explored the migration process in the UK, it aims to account for different stages of the asylum claims process. This includes the arrival into the UK, the experience of not yet being in the asylum system, initiating the procedure, being refused or having to appeal a decision, and obtaining asylum in the UK.

While the last decade has seen substantial advances in acknowledging the legal rights and providing support and protection for SOGI marginalised individuals, 66 countries continue to criminalise private, consensual same-sex sexual activities, 32 of which are part of the Commonwealth, and 12 of which can or do impose the death penalty for same-sex intimacy (Human Dignity Trust, 2023). By approving and enforcing discriminatory laws, governments allow for ubiquitous and frequent abuses by non-state actors (Organization for Refuge, Asylum & Migration (ORAM), 2012). A United Nations report highlighted that violence against LGBTQ+ people surpasses other types of hate crimes and involves perpetrators from various sectors, including state authorities, religious leaders, communities, and families (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2015). SOGI refugees have reported being subjected to psychological and physical abuse, forcing them to seek protection in the West, specifically in European countries and North America (Kahn & Alessi, 2017). Research has demonstrated that SOGI refugees are among the most vulnerable populations globally (ORAM, 2012). Being a part of multiple minority groups, these individuals face an elevated risk of social exclusion, violence and discrimination in their countries of origin, transit or asylum (ORAM, 2012).

The asylum process varies depending on the country's migration regulations; however, it usually requires refugees to prove their SOGI identity and fear of persecution due to public and visible threats (Lee et al., 2020). These distinctive processes add to the delicate nature of the asylum interview, as participants are often required to discuss private, vulnerable and often traumatising issues in front of strangers (Dhoest, 2017). The literature has shown that utilising the 'right' language and identifying with Western sexuality and gender categories is an important aspect of a successful asylum claim (Dhoest, 2017). This has been reaffirmed by successful applicants who identified as 'LGBTQ+' before they departed from their home country and had to refine their self-presentation during the asylum procedure to match the Western expectations of the adjudicators (Dhoest, 2017). The literature also shows that this results in service providers often having to encourage their clients to share testimonies of their sexual behaviours in a way which conforms to Western notions of 'coming out' (Lewis, 2014). Scholars suggest that the need for SOGI claimants to 'come out' may originate from the stigma and stereotypes related to the LGBTQ+ identity model in Western cultures (Millbank 2002; Jenicek et al. 2009; LaViolette 2009). This understanding of gender and sexuality often fails to account for differences related to religious beliefs, ethnicity, cultural factors, socioeconomic status, and personal values (Kahn & Alessi, 2017). Therefore, this claim criteria and conceptualisation may invalidate the experiences of SOGI asylum claimants who do not identify with the Western LGBTQ+ identity model (Lee & Brotman, 2011). These expectations are often challenging as many SOGI refugees come from cultures where sexuality and gender diversity are stigmatised or criminalised, resulting in a preference to be discreet or to not act on non-hetero-cisnormative sexual or gendered desires (Dhoest, 2017). For a higher chance of a successful application, these individuals are therefore encouraged to shift from being cautious about their SOGI identity to adopting Western LGBTQ+ labels, enacting old-fashioned stereotypical behaviour such as homosexual men being 'effeminate' and homosexual women being 'masculine', and publicly coming out (Kahn & Alessi, 2017). SOGI claimants often fear this public announcement as it may put them at risk of violence and discrimination from members of their diaspora community in their host country. This can extend to the fear of their family in their country of origin and the risk of violence for having a SOGI family member (Kahn & Alessi, 2017). Research has shown that this process is often disturbing to SOGI refugees and that these requirements can have severe psychological consequences (Kahn & Alessi, 2017).

1.2 SOGI Refugees in the UK

To contextualise the asylum process of SOGI refugees in the UK, statistics provided by the Home Office (HO) will be introduced. The Home Office reports experimental statistics regarding asylum claims related to sexual orientation but does not offer similar statistics for claims based on gender identity. In 2021, the Home Office data showed that the total number of asylum claims in the UK was 48,540, and those based on sexual orientation were 415, approximately 1% of the total (Sturge, 2023). These reports also show that the approval rate for asylum claims from individuals identifying as LGB is similar to the approval rate for non-LGB asylum applications. Additionally, these statistics show that there were higher grant rates for asylum claims based on sexual orientation from countries that have the death penalty for consensual same-sex acts between adults (Sturge, 2023). SOGI NGOs in the UK, such as Rainbow Migration, are urging the Home Office to improve their statistics on asylum claims based on sexual orientation to no longer be 'experimental' and to include the statics on asylum claims based on gender identity.

In the last decade, research on SOGI refugees in the UK has started to grow, resulting in positive changes in the policies that protect and support SOGI refugees throughout their migration process (UK Lesbian & Gay Immigration Group (UKLGIG), 2018). Moreover, this attention has led to vocal condemnations of some of the Home Office practices and resulted in the readiness of the government to improve the SOGI asylum process (UKLGIG, 2018). The asylum process in the UK typically includes a credibility assessment, which involves evaluating the applicant's claim (Home Office, 2017). This consists of evaluating documentation and supporting evidence, an initial screening interview, and a more comprehensive asylum interview, which can extend over several hours or even span multiple days (Home Office, 2017). This includes claimants providing their personal narrative during the substantive interview, which consists of a detailed account of their experiences related to their sexual orientation or gender identity, including instances of persecution, discrimination, or violence they may have faced in their home country as well as personal accounts related to these identities (UKLGIG, 2018). Decision makers also expect claimants to articulate how they've come to understand their sexual orientation over time. This process is particularly complex as it requires disclosing their SOGI identity in a manner deemed acceptable by the state. This may rely on stereotypes of LGBTQI+ people, which may be misaligned with the experiences of claimants (UKLGIG, 2018). This requirement presents a significant challenge as SOGI refugees often conceal these aspects of their identity due to the risk of persecution and discrimination in their home country (Murray, 2011). It can, therefore, be unsettling for SOGI refugees as it is often the first time the claimant would present a detailed account of

their identity and reflection on personal and intimate experiences (Bennett, 2013). While the Home Office has made improvements in its interview practices, such as reducing persistent questioning about sexual practices (Home Office, 2017), there are still concerns about failures to follow asylum policy instructions. These include instances where claimants' preferred terminology was ignored and where interviewers failed to establish an open and supportive environment (Murray, 2011; UKLGIG, 2018). Therefore, SOGI refugees in the UK continue to experience problematic credibility assessments, the downplaying of risks encountered in countries of origin, the use of immigration detention, and insufficient safeguarding regarding the provision of accommodation and access to services such as healthcare and mental health services (Bennett, 2013; UKLGIG, 2018).

1.3 The Historicization of Queer Migration

To contextualise the political, social and cultural challenges that SOGI refugees face during the migration process, the literature on the influence of coloniality on the historicisation of queer migration will be briefly explored. Scholars have addressed the intersectional structural barriers SOGI refugees face within and outside the refugee determination system (Luibhéid, 2008). This frequently involves interrogating how immigration processes intertwine with homonational and settler colonial discourses (Awondo, 2010). The term 'homonationalism' was coined by Jasbir Puar in 2007 and refers to a systemic form of oppression targeting marginalised, queer, racialised and sexualised communities in an effort to support neoliberal structures and ideals (Puar, 2018). This historical perspective positions queer migrations from the Global South to the Global North within the context of Western colonial empire-building histories. It maps out the creation of hierarchies and classifications within and across social groups and locations, all influenced by colonial and imperial ideologies (Lee, 2018). For example, the British Empire's hetero-cisnormative processes tied to the nuclear family created a notion of respectable white intimacy versus racialised degeneracy (Lee, 2018). Ahmed (2006) illustrates that the endeavour to legitimise empire as a form of liberation from deplorable conditions has a long history. However, the SOGI refugee 'migration to liberation' introduces a new layer of complexity to Ahmed's concept of the 'happy migrant'. In this context, the 'empire' assumes that being an LGBTQ+/ SOGI refugee entails arriving in a nation where sexual and gender diversity is regarded as a hallmark of a 'civilised' society in contrast to the 'uncivilised' Global South, which is characterised by 'homophobia and transphobia' (Murray, 2014). This hegemonic narrative adheres to a linear trajectory of sexual identity progression, transitioning from being 'closeted and oppressed' in their country of origin to 'out and proud' in their Western host nation (Ahmed, 2006). This narrative is literally and metaphorically 'straight' and unswerving in its spatial and temporal orientation. This historicisation questions the

current structuring and portrayal of the global LGBTQ+ human rights agenda and renders visible the histories of colonial violence (Lee, 2018). This being said, it is also essential to recognise that the conceptualisation of the LGBTQ+ identity model is no longer purely Western. This language and understanding have been globally spread, making this a broader internationally circulating discourse about sexuality and gender identity (Dhoest, 2017). As such, this research is not primarily focused on discourses of homonationalism or the historical or legal elements of the SOGI refugee experience. Instead, it aims to zoom into the accounts of SOGI refugees and how their identities develop throughout the migration process to the UK.

1.4 Mental Health of SOGI Refugees

With the global flux of forced migrations, a growing body of literature has explored the many challenges that SOGI refugees navigate on both interpersonal and structural levels. This literature has explored the legal, social, structural and political dimensions related to the lives of this population and, more recently, has started to focus on mental health (Lee et al., 2020). Most of these studies have only included mental health as one element among many social issues, such as access to health care and social services (Lee et al., 2020). Therefore, future research should focus on centralising mental health when exploring the SOGI refugee migration experience.

The minimal studies directly exploring the mental health of SOGI refugees have found that they frequently contend with depression, substance abuse, PTSD, anxiety, and suicidal ideation and attempts (Lee et al., 2020). More specifically, Piwowarczyk, Fernandez, and Sharma's (2017) and Gowin et al.'s (2017) studies reported a high occurrence of mental health disorders. The statistics in these studies respectively showed that participants reported for PTSD 70% and 100%, depression 76% and 93%, anxiety 28% and 60% and substance use 2% and 36%. Moreover, Gowin et al.'s (2017) and Hopkinson et al.'s (2017) studies respectively reported 56% and 72.1% for past and present suicidality. Both Piwowarczyk, Fernandez, and Sharma's (2017) and Hopkinson et al.'s (2017) studies did not include transgender participants. Hopkinson et al.'s (2017) study predominately included cis men, whereas, in Piwowarczyk et al.'s (2017) study, 56% of the participants were cis women. In contrast, Gowin et al.'s (2017) participants were all trans women asylum seekers. Despite the minimal diverse sexuality and gender representation in these studies and a lack of acknowledgement of potential inter-group differences, the rates of psychological symptoms are conspicuous and notably high among SOGI refugees. Moreover, they are significantly higher than those in studies looking at cis or heterosexual forced migrant populations (White, Cooper, & Lawrence, 2019).

Literature addressing SOGI refugees' experiences of pre and post-migration gives an understanding of the factors contributing to their poor mental health. These studies have demonstrated that before they arrived in a host country, SOGI refugees may have experienced severe trauma as a result of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, discrimination, and imprisonment due to their SOGI identity (Alessi, Kahn, & Chatterji, 2016; Alessi, Kahn, & Van Der Horn, 2017; Alessi, Kahn, Woolner, & Van Der Horn, 2018; Hopkinson et al., 2017; Kahn, Alessi, Kim, Olivieri, & Woolner, 2017). This exposure to violence is perpetrated by state actors, community members and family and often starts in childhood and continues through to adulthood (Alessi et al., 2016, 2017; Jordan, 2009). Lee et al. (2018) found a link between the regional political climate and the kinds of discriminatory violence SOGI individuals experience. In line with the intersectional framework, this study on SOGI refugees aims to address the complex historical, geopolitical and cultural forces that impact this population's migration experience and mental health (Lee et al., 2017). This will allow for a greater understanding of how diverse systems of power in the UK shape the lived experience of SOGI refugees.

Furthermore, research has shown that the international and host countries' national refugee laws influence how SOGI claimants experience and navigate mental health challenges. Both Lee & Brotman's (2011) and Kahn & Alessi's (2018) studies suggested that elements of the SOGI asylum-seeking process may lead to the re-traumatisation of SOGI claimants. Their findings indicate that the rushed deadlines, the premature and mandatory need to publicly disclose a history of sexual, physical and psychological abuse, and the need to prove one's SOGI identity and adopt Western sexuality and gender categories could contribute to mental health issues. Another stressor that occurs from migration is the distance from family and community (Kahn, 2015; Lee & Brotman, 2011). This may be exacerbated by the potential need to publicly 'come out' during the asylum claim process, which risks further alienation from the diaspora community. This loss of a social network can lead to a lack of support and, in turn, poor well-being and social integration (Hynie, Crooks, & Barragan, 2011; Alessi & Kahn, 2017).

In line with my intersectional framework, it is vital to account for the multiple identities of SOGI refugees when making sense of their mental health. Research on the LGBTQ+ community has utilised a minority stress framework to explore the different forms of minority stress they may experience due to their sexual and/or gender identity (Meyer, 2003). This includes internalised stigma, concealment of sexual orientation and/or gender identity, anticipation of prejudice and exclusion from others and subjection to discrimination and violence. This

research aims to contribute to the literature by exploring how SOGI refugees may experience these forms of minority stresses and inequalities in the context of their intersecting identities.

Having intersecting marginalised identities, SOGI refugees are also subject to the stressors experienced by other refugee sub-groups. These include acculturation, securing housing, gaining employment, accessing healthcare and building a social network (Alessi, 2016; Kahn, 2015). This also includes stress caused by stigmatisation and exposure to discrimination related to their forced migrant identity (Cochran & Cauce, 2006; Meyer, 2003). Notably, repeated exposure to racial discrimination has been shown to result in mental health disorders and cognitive impairments (Mays et al., 2007) and diminishes the likelihood of seeking needed mental health and medical support (Trivedi & Ayanian, 2006; Van Houtven et al., 2005). Moreover, research shows that refugees are severely affected by trauma caused by their pre and post-migration experiences (George, 2010). George (2010) highlights that there are distinct and significant mental health challenges at every stage of the migratory experience of refugees. In the case of SOGI refugees, it is essential to account for the trauma they may have experienced due to their persecution in their home country and the trauma they may experience throughout their migratory journey and in their host country (Lee et al., 2017). To gain a greater understanding of the mental health of SOGI refugees, this study attends to the distinct structural, institutional and systemic inequalities of the UK's migration process, healthcare system, and culture that shape the prejudice and oppression of the intersecting marginalised identities of SOGI refugees.

1.5 Resilience

When exploring the literature on the mental health of SOGI refugees, resilience was shown to be a common factor contributing to the positive mental health of this population (Lee et al., 2020). Resilience is a psychological notion that is explored in the context of oppression. Resilience refers to successful adaptation in the face of internal and external minority stressors such as discrimination (Meyer, 2015). Since research has found that minority stress strongly correlates with adverse mental health, recent studies have started exploring resilience's role in moderating these poor outcomes (Kwon, 2013). Literature exploring resilience among LGBTQ+ people has found that developing resilience through coping and resistance skills can improve well-being and personal growth despite negative experiences (Szymanski et al., 2017). Kwon's (2013) literature review found three factors that contribute to the development of resilience among LGBTQ+ people: the ability to process and accept emotions, hope, and social support. Although some of these contributing factors may be similar to those of SOGI refugees, some may also differ. Research must account for the unique factors promoting

resilience within the intersecting identities of SOGI refugees. For example, SOGI refugees face additional structural inequalities resulting from their refugee status, such as racism and classism (Meyer, 2015). Studies looking at other refugee populations also found that higher levels of resilience were related to improved mental health (Alessi, 2016). The resilience of the refugee population was evident in their reliance on familial and ethnic community members for support (Schweitzer et al., 2006). However, SOGI refugees may find it challenging to find support in their diaspora community due to concerns about homophobia. They may also find it difficult to seek support from LGBTQ+ organisations in host countries due to internalised homophobia, the lack of association with the Western LGBTQ+ identity model, or the fear of other forms of discrimination, such as racism. Therefore, support networks may feel unattainable for SOGI refugees, making it more challenging for them to build resilience (Kahn, 2015). One empirical study found that despite these additional obstacles, SOGI refugees can still build resilience by having a hopeful and positive outlook, connecting with their faith, leveraging legal and community services, giving back, and 'doing whatever it takes' (Alessi, 2016). This study also showed that SOGI refugees could navigate the challenges they face while continuing to be affected by mental health disorders (Alessi, 2016). Therefore, the research suggests that SOGI refugees would benefit from improved resilience to maintain better mental health (Alessi, 2016).

It is important to highlight that when exploring resilience in relation to the human condition, there is little consensus on what threat triggers resilience, therefore overlooking the complexity of the disruption in itself (Wandji, 2019). Literature echoing Michel Foucault's governmentality thesis criticises resilience as a 'pervasive idiom of global governance' (Walker & Cooper, 2011, p. 157). A strategy through which the West avoids any accountability and attempts to conceal its self-serving neoliberal motives (Chandler, 2013; Joseph, 2013). This understanding stretches the concept of resilience beyond its traditional meaning of recovery and equilibrium (Walker & Cooper, 2011). Bourbeau (2018) and Manyena (2006) point out the danger in conceptualising resilience as one perspective or policy goal. For instance, looking at resilience as threat-dependent (Alexander, 2013) and different from everyday resistance bestows the responsibility to define what a threat is on outsiders such as aid or state agencies (Wandji, 2019). On the other hand, Ryan (2015) explores conceptualising resilience as resistance, giving the community the power to engage in their own resilience-building based on their objectives and agency. By broadening our interpretation of resilience, we can start to challenge our comprehension of what is considered to be a disruption or threat. This allows for the acknowledgement and accountability of post-coloniality and colonialism in defining vulnerability and resilience (Wandji, 2019). In other words, examining which systems and communities define threats and vulnerabilities (Chandler, 2013). Therefore, future research

should explore what SOGI refugees perceive as threats throughout their migration process and how they make sense of their own resilience to further the understanding of the mental health of SOGI refugees. This, in turn, may lead to more culturally affirmative mental health practices.

1.6 Mental Health of SOGI Refugees in the UK

Although international research has started to focus on the mental health of SOGI refugees, most studies have been conducted in Canada and the United States of America (Lee et al., 2020). Similarly to North America, SOGI refugees in the UK need to navigate a multifaceted socio-political and cultural context while facing the oppression of their multiple marginalised identities. These structural challenges also contribute to the barriers to accessing supportive services like mental health and general healthcare facilities, resulting in the maintenance and exacerbation of poor mental health. For instance, post-migration discrimination is frequently due to structural violence perpetrated by governmental immigration procedures. During these processes, SOGI claimants face the possibility of being denied asylum and deported whilst facing limited access to social care, employment rights, and healthcare (Lee et al., 2020). For example, when attempting to gain access to a general practitioner (GP) in the UK, SOGI refugees might be apprehensive about encountering bureaucratic barriers, such as the need for identification or proof of address. These concerns may be heightened by the recent government directives urging GP practices and emergency departments to implement identification checks before providing healthcare to migrants (White, 2019). Despite these pressures, healthcare professionals still have the power to advocate for forced migrants and provide information on how these practices operate and what services are free to access (White, 2019). Future research should address how the distinct structural, institutional and systemic features of the UK migration policies, healthcare system, and culture impact the mental health of SOGI refugees in the UK. Future research should also account for the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the accessibility and provision of mental health and healthcare services in the UK.

1.7 Mental Health Interventions for SOGI Refugees

Scholars have begun identifying best practices regarding mental health provision for SOGI refugees. Both qualitative and quantitative studies have discussed group therapy as a suitable modality for SOGI refugees. These studies show that group therapy helps SOGI refugees process mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety and suicide (Beaudry, 2018). This modality facilitates the creation of social support groups and the implementation of

psychoeducation, which results in improved mental health, reduced stigma and the building of resilience (Beaudry, 2018; Logie et al., 2016; Nerses, Kleinplatz, & Moser, 2015). This form of therapeutic support might be particularly suitable and beneficial for SOGI refugees since family and community members are often involved in their persecution. Therefore, it is often challenging for this population to place trust in a new support system, which puts them at risk of increased isolation (Herman, 1997; Shidlo & Ahola, 2013). Group therapy can bring together SOGI refugees and form a sense of community and collective empowerment, which is resistant to the oppressive hetero-cisnormative forces they face (Beaudry, 2018).

Researchers have also begun to discuss best practices for working with this population regarding providing culturally competent and affirmative services. Hopkinson and Keatley's (2017) research explores how mental health and healthcare services can improve to provide more effective support for SOGI refugees. This study addresses the importance of building trust in the healthcare system among SOGI refugees. This involves providing this population with support and strategies that meet their unique needs and help manage overwhelming feelings that may arise when disclosing personal and medical history. This research paper also addresses the need for services to ensure that SOGI refugees have access to basic needs and amenities such as shelter, food and clothing. In a more clinically focused study, Alessi and Kahn (2017) suggest using a culturally competent, affirmative, trauma-informed framework when working with SOGI asylum seekers. This involves supporting this population in building trust, establishing safety externally (environment) and internally (emotions), promoting practical and emotional skills and tools for managing the asylum claims process, building a social and supportive network, and developing a sense of purpose. Research has found that SOGI individuals experience significant psychological distress when they are compelled to hide their sexuality or gender identity in countries where non-hetero-cisnormative behaviour is stigmatised and criminalised (Alessi et al. 2016). Alessi and Kahn (2017) explore how this element of the lived experience of SOGI refugees puts them at risk of potential re-traumatisation due to the claim's requirements of disclosing the personal history of victimisation and proving one's SOGI identity. These aspects of the asylum claim process involve a significant loss of autonomy and control. Building on concepts of complex trauma (Courtois, 2004; Herman, 1997), minority stress (Meyer, 2003), integration (Ager & Strang, 2008), and resilience (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000), Kahn and Alessi (2017) highlight the relevance of using trauma-informed frameworks with SOGI refugees. These frameworks ensure a sense of physical and psychological safety, avoid actions that may be re-traumatising and restore a sense of control. Mollica's (2006) Trauma Theory suggests that narrative, storytelling, relaxation techniques and a holistic approach to healing the body and mind are crucial when addressing trauma. Furthermore, Lee and Brotman (2013) highlight that a key

feature in such anti-oppressive practices is the importance of making the structural dimensions that contribute to the oppression visible; this, in turn, will allow for the construction of a narrative of resistance.

While scholars have begun to explore mental health best practices for this population, research on access to mental health services for SOGI refugees remains scant. Kahn et al. (2018) found that it is often challenging to locate mental health providers who recognise and understand the psychosocial impacts of intersecting marginalised identities, who are culturally sensitive, and who are SOGI affirmative. Their study addressed further issues with accessing services, such as the stigmatisation of mental health difficulties, the lack of trust in mental health services due to negative experiences in the country of origin, and structural factors, such as the lack of culturally or linguistically appropriate services (Kahn et al., 2018).

It is important to note that this body of research has been primarily conducted in the USA and Canada. Therefore, more international research should be done on the adaptation, implementation and evaluation of mental health interventions and frameworks for SOGI refugees. Building on Alessi and Kahn's (2017) theory of adopting culturally contextualised practice, as well as Lee and Brotman's (2013) suggestion of making oppressive structural dimensions visible, exploring how SOGI refugees' identities develop as a result of their migration process in the UK will provide a contextual foundation for future psychological practice and research regarding SOGI refugees in the UK.

1.8 Conclusion

The body of literature has begun to recognise and address the complex experiences of SOGI refugees, which comprise of trauma in their country of origin, in transit, throughout the claims process and while acclimatising in their host country. However, this literature review suggests that further research that puts the mental health needs of this population in the foreground should be done. Thus, psychologists need to continue conducting empirical research to understand better how to support SOGI refugees in processing the past and preparing for the future (Messih, 2016). The participants in most of the studies exploring this population were cis gay men, except for Gowin et al.'s (2017) study, which focused on trans refugees. Few studies have examined the experience of non-binary individuals, cis lesbian women and bisexual individuals. This research attempts to fill this gap in the literature by focusing on these sub-groups and expanding the diversity of the population explored to understand the complexities and nuances of the SOGI refugee experience. To do so, this study's sample includes cis lesbian and cis gay participants. However, it does not include gender queer

participants; therefore, this research cannot attend to potential additional challenges such as transphobia (Lee & Brotman, 2011).

Furthermore, these studies have been primarily conducted in the USA and Canada. In line with intersectionality's focus on interconnected systems of power, this research contributes to the literature by exploring how the distinct structural, institutional and systemic features of the migration policies, healthcare system, and culture of the UK shape the way SOGI refugees make sense of their migration experience. This gained insight will guide counselling psychologists to better support SOGI refugees by attending to contextual experiences of prejudice and oppression in their everyday lives. Research that centralises the mental health of SOGI refugees challenges social justice issues and may allow policymakers to become aware of the difficulties that SOGI refugees must face. This can have a positive impact beyond the counselling room. For example, bringing attention to the long-standing implications of the requirement to 'come out' to attorneys, claim officers, and government social and employment service providers may lead to policy amendments and broader social change (Kahn & Alessi, 2017). Psychologists can begin to challenge the government's need for SOGI refugees to adopt the Western LGBTQ+ identity model by providing a better understanding of how claimants experience their SOGI identity in their country of origin. This will allow for the advancement of immigration systems in a way that does not privilege Western LGBTQ+ identity categories. To achieve this and enrich the field of Counselling Psychology in the UK, I suggest exploring these elements of the lived experience of this population by researching:

> (1) *How do the refugee and sexual orientation identities of SOGI refugees develop through the migration process in the UK?*
> (2) *What processes influence the refugee and sexual orientation identities of SOGI refugees throughout their migration to the UK?*

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Overview

This section describes the methodological approach chosen for this study. This begins with explaining how the study is situated within a qualitative research framework. Then, a rationale for why Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) was chosen for this study is detailed. This is followed by an outline of how this method was employed, including research procedures, the study's design and the ethical considerations. This section concludes with a reflexive statement on the methodology.

2.2 Design

2.2.i The Rationale for Using Qualitative Methodology

This study explores SOGI refugees' perspective regarding their UK migration process. To do so, an intersectional theoretical framework is applied to address the context and relation of the systems of power that impact their lived experiences (Shin et al., 2017). To achieve this, a qualitative methodology has been chosen. Qualitative research is interested in exploring people's lived experiences and the meaning they bring to the phenomena in question (Barker, Pistrang, & Elliott, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The rich accounts and flexibility gained from qualitative research permit the researcher to follow emerging leads and gain insight into an individual's subjective experiences (Barker et al., 2002). This aims to broaden our understanding of people's behaviour, opinions and attitudes whilst exploring how their context may affect them and how culture and practice develop as a result of this (Patton, 1990). Qualitative methodology is also particularly beneficial for topics that lack prior research or theory (Jones & Alony, 2011). Since the literature review showed that the subject of this study has not been sufficiently explored or developed, a qualitative methodology will be particularly beneficial.

2.2.ii The Rationale for Using CGT

Grounded theory is the most appropriate qualitative method for this research as it is suitable for research exploring individual processes, interpersonal relations and the individual within a larger social context (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory's purpose is to challenge or develop new theories by traditionally assuming a realist position, which considers that data gathered is a direct connection to the truth of the phenomena (Willig, 2013).

Grounded theory was first introduced by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 when they published *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. They encouraged developing theories based on qualitative research data rather than deriving testable hypotheses from pre-existing theories. This publication was cutting-edge as it offered systematic strategies for qualitative research practice to generate theory. Therefore, it moves qualitative inquiry beyond descriptive studies and towards theory development. Thus offering conceptual, theoretical insights into the studied phenomena (Charmaz, 2006). Glaser and Strauss's (1967) original version of GT became known for its positivistic assumptions and gained acceptance in both quantitative and qualitative research thanks to its flexibility and legitimacy.

Since Glaser and Strauss's 1967 publication, GT has moved away from positivism. For instance, CGT highlights the method's adaptability whilst avoiding its rigid mechanical application. It adopts the open-ended, inductive, comparative approach of GT whilst challenging the assumption of an impartial external reality, a passive observer or constricted empiricism (Charmaz, 2006). CGT considers the researcher's position, perspectives, privileges and context as an inherent part of the research reality as it assumes that social reality is constructed (Charmaz, 2006). As Clarke (2005) stresses, the research reality develops in a specific situation, including how the researcher and participants interact with and within it. This gives the researcher room to reflect on the research construction process and its structural and situational encroachments. The perception of research as constructed allows researchers to be reflexive about their actions, decisions and roles. Therefore, CGT aims to acknowledge subjectivity and the researcher's involvement in constructing and interpreting the data (Charmaz, 2006). CGT's focus on the researcher's position will allow me to reflect on my role in co-constructing the categories and theories that emerge from the data.

This method is valuable to this research as I want to understand and explore interpersonal processes and dynamics regarding how SOGI refugees' identities develop throughout their migration process in the UK. I am interested in how the participants create and interpret meanings when making sense of their migration experience in relation to their identity. Charmaz's version of Grounded Theory will also allow me to attend to contexts, meanings and actions, enabling me to acknowledge how power, oppression and prejudices affect individuals differently, which may advance our understanding of social justice issues (Charmaz, 2006).

2.2.iii The Researcher's Epistemological Stance

A constructivist methodology and a constructivist epistemology will be adopted for this research to explore the multiple intersecting social identities of SOGI refugees within the interdependent and co-producing systems of power in the UK. The constructivist epistemology refers to the social processes of creating meaning, and the constructivist methodology refers to individual meaning-making. Regarding epistemology, constructionism assumes there is no meaning in the world until we construct it. Our social interpretation of experiences and interaction with the phenomenon shapes this meaning. Whereas constructivism, as a methodology, looks at how we construct knowledge based on our understanding of what occurs in society, focusing on the influence of culture and context in forming this understanding (Doan, 1997).

Charmaz's (2006) constructivist GT believes that we must create meaning in the external world with which we interact to understand and interpret reality. It recognises that knowledge is produced by both participants and researchers as they attend to contexts, positions and discourses. Willig (2008) also states that the social constructivist researcher is reflective and open to recognising how their own identity and context influence the grounded theory process and the interpretation and understanding of how participants make sense of the phenomena explored. Therefore, the researcher's history and context shape how they explicate, organise and present the data (Charmaz, 1990). Researchers are thus encouraged to attend to meaning and action and how the language within the data may allude to power relationships, the reproduction of inequality, and our understanding of reality (Charmaz, 2017).

A design based on the constructivist paradigm is appropriate for this study as it aims to explore the multiple realities and co-existent meanings related to SOGI refugees' identities in relation to their migration to the UK. This is in line with the relativist ontology of Counselling Psychology, which assumes that there is no objective reality or truth (Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2003). A relativist ontology believes that reality is complex and recognises the multiple realities co-constructed by the researcher and participants. This allows the researcher to acknowledge that it is unlikely to fully represent all realities whilst grounding the interpretations of the data to connect with reality (Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2003).

In line with the research question, CGT will therefore allow for the acquisition of information about the phenomena being explored whilst being a method for developing theories to understand and advance social justice. As a social constructivist researcher, I aim to be open and reflective on how my own identity and understanding of the participants' experiences will

play a role in the grounded theory process (Willig, 2008). By exploring the multiple intersecting social identities of SOGI refugees within the interdependent and co-producing systems of power in the UK, I hope to advance our understanding of social justice and explore how power, oppression, and inequalities affect individuals. Moreover, constructivist GT reflects Counselling Psychology's science-practitioner model that involves both theory and practice by constructing a theory based on lived experiences (Fassinger, 2005)

2.2.iv CGT Versus Other Qualitative Methods

Discourse Analysis and Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) were deliberated over as alternative qualitative research methods for this study. Discourse Analysis aims to make sense of social interactions by ascribing to a social constructionist epistemology (Willig, 2001). This method focuses on the resources individuals use to create meaning rather than exploring the meaning of particular life events. Therefore, Discourse Analysis was deemed less appropriate for this research.

Both IPA and Grounded Theory believe that the analysis of interviews can allude to the participant's inner world. However, IPA looks more narrowly at particular lived experiences rather than a theoretical account of the experience (Smith et al., 1999). Since there is a significant gap in the psychological research on SOGI refugees, Grounded Theory is deemed the most appropriate method for this study as it will allow for a more general understanding of this population's experience and theory development.

2.3 Procedure

2.3.i Participants

Grounded Theory suggests that the appropriate sample size is determined by theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2006). This research defines saturation as conceptual density, which is achieved by addressing processes and generating categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Participants were considered appropriate for this CGT research if they had experienced, observed and had knowledge of the phenomena under investigation (Charmaz, 2006). Therefore, purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants who could provide a comprehensive judgement of the phenomena explored in this study. This purposeful sample was composed of 6 SOGI refugees in the UK. Once tentative categories began to emerge,

theoretical sampling was conducted. This entailed collecting further data to refine and develop proposed categories in the emerging theory (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

All of the participants were invited for re-interviews, four of whom agreed to partake. More information about this can be found in the Theoretical Sampling section.

2.3.ii Recruitment

Participants were recruited via advertisements (Appendix A) posted on the platform of support groups and forums in the UK for SOGI-forced migrants. The advertisement outlined the aim of the research and included the researcher's email address so potential participants could contact me to express their interest in the study. The advertisement also stated that participants could request a support letter stating that they partook in research on SOGI refugees in the UK at the end of the interview. This decision was made following conversations with organisations supporting SOGI refugees, who suggested that it would be more appropriate and would give more incentive for SOGI refugees to participate in the study if they were provided with a support letter. Once participants confirmed their interest, I sent them an information sheet. We discussed their English level to ensure they could partake in the interview comfortably without an interpreter. If they met these criteria and were still interested in participating, I then sent them the PhQ-9 form to complete. If they matched all the study requirements, an appointment was set with them. The participants could choose whether the interview took place in person in a private room at a local library or online via Zoom at a time and date convenient for them. All participants chose to have the interviews remotely. Interviews took up to approximately one hour.

2.3.iii Inclusion Criteria and Exclusion Criteria

To partake in this research, participants had to be SOGI refugees in the UK. Participants needed to have first-hand experience with the SOGI migration process, which included leaving their home country and going through the SOGI asylum claims process in the UK at least once. Participants did not need to have a successful claim to qualify for participation. This is because I wanted to account for waiting periods, rejections and the need to appeal a claim. Notably, a significant number of the participants in this research were at the beginning stages of the asylum process, waiting to have their substantive interview. During this stage of the asylum claim, individuals experience heightened vulnerability due to a range of factors including limited support, economic insecurity, and precarious housing. Although asylum seekers in the UK are provided with accommodation, financial support, legal advice and access to healthcare from the UK government, the quality of the support varies widely in

reliability and suitability (UKLGIG, 2018). Asylum seekers in the UK are granted additional legal rights and protections once they receive refugee status. This includes the right to remain in the UK, work, and access to public funds (Home Office, 2017). As this research includes asylum seekers at various stages of their migration process, with different access to support (financial and housing), it accounts for a variety of levels of vulnerability. Even though the participants were not selected on the basis of their asylum status or access to support such as housing, these varied vulnerabilities may have played a role in the participants' engagement in the study and their narratives around their identity development. These various vulnerabilities may have added potential risks in participating in the study due to the participants' different levels of support and legal rights. Additionally, although the interview structures were informed by trauma and culturally sensitive research on SOGI refugees to mitigate risk, the sensitive topics discussed in the interviews could impact the mental health and well-being of the participants. These risks were mitigated through a distress protocol to monitor the participant's well-being had they experienced any distress throughout the interview. I also utilised my Counselling Psychology skills, which increased my ability to be empathic and non-judgmental throughout the interview process. At the end of the interviews, the participants were also given a list of organisations in the UK which provide support, advice and mental health services for SOGI refugees. To account for the potential financial difficulties of participants, specifically those without refugee status who may not have the funds for transport, the participants were offered the option of having in-person or online interviews. In future research, I would mitigate these risks more by offering financial compensation for travel and further highlighting my ability to travel to the participants' local library or SOGI community space if they preferred an in-person interview. Future studies should further explore the experience of SOGI refugees at different stages of their asylum process to understand better the influence of asylum procedures on SOGI refugees. This would deepen our understanding of the influence of asylum procedures on the vulnerabilities and mental health of SOGI refugees, as well as the different systems of power that impact their experiences.

Moreover, the participants had to be verbally fluent in English and based in the UK when the study was conducted. Fluency in English was essential to ensure that the participants could understand screening tools and comfortably participate in a detailed interview, thus enhancing the study's validity. This language requirement represents a limitation of this study as it may introduce bias into the sample (the sample would be composed of people with a certain education level, exposure to Western culture, socioeconomic background etc.). The presence of a professional interpreter may have mitigated this limitation; however, due to the sensitive nature of this research and practical constraints such as lack of access and funding to professional interpreters, the language criterion was deemed more suitable for this study. To

determine their level of English language proficiency, the researcher arranged a phone call with them to ask them whether they felt comfortable expressing their emotions and narrative in English and whether they required a translator for any of their Home Office appointments. Their verbal expression, understanding and answers were used to determine whether they had a level of English proficiency to fully and comfortably articulate their experience of the phenomena under investigation.

The exclusion criteria include any clinical presentations on the PhQ-9 and scores above 10, 'moderate', or a 1,2, or 3 on question 9. If an individual scored above ten or above zero on question 9 during the screening process, I explained that their score indicated they were experiencing particularly low mood or distress and may be too sensitive to participate in the study. They were then signposted to appropriate services. I informed them they could contact their GP or access the NHS mental health page for advice about appropriate treatment and support for mental health conditions. I also provided them with the contact details of the Samaritans and The C&I Crisis Line for more urgent support. This only occurred with one individual who expressed interest in the study. This exclusion criterion is a limitation of the study as this research's ontological and social justice aim is to empower people. However, by including this criterion, I am exerting power over this population by eliminating their choice to participate. Considering the context of this research, using the PhQ-9 was a way of quantifying mental health, screening for depression and mitigating risk. Upon reflection, an alternative would have been to have a conversation with potential participants, informing them of the risks and allowing them to make an informed decision about participation.

2.3.iv Sampling Composition

Six participants expressed interest in the study and met the criteria. Whilst this research aims to deal with the broader group of SOGI refugees in the UK and will use that inclusive umbrella term, it is important to note that the participants in this study identified as either 'gay' or 'lesbian' and as 'cis-gender'. All of the participants I interviewed expressed fleeing their country of origin primarily or partially due to their sexual orientation, and none invoked gender identity as a reason for migration. Therefore, this paper will primarily focus on sexual orientation, although gender identity is a component of the SOGI procedure. I aim not to conflate sexual orientation and gender identity as transgender and non-binary individuals may encounter distinct challenges related to their gender identity, such as gender dysphoria (Jordan, 2009), which this research cannot account for.

Table 1

Demographics of the study sample

Participant Number	Age	Gender	Preferred Pronouns	Sexual Orientation	Asylum Status at the time of the interview	Country of Origin	Re-interview
1	20-30	Male	He/him	Gay	Asylum claimant (awaiting substantiative interview)	Kenya	Yes
2	30-40	Female	She/her	Lesbian	Asylum claimant (awaiting substantiative interview)	Kenya	No
3	20-30	Male	He/him	Gay	Asylum claimant (awaiting substantiative interview)	Kenya	Yes
4	30-40	Male	He/him	Gay	Refugee (indefinite leave to remain)	Syria	Yes
5	20-30	Female	She/Her	Lesbian	Asylum claimant (awaiting substantiative interview)	Uganda	No
6	50-60	Male	He/him	Gay	Asylum claimant (4th appeal)	Trinidad & Tobago	Yes

2.3.v The Process of Developing the Interview Schedule

This study employed semi-structured interviews, which provided the freedom for both myself and the participant to explore what we perceived as important whilst providing a structure to guide the deeper exploration of the participant's understanding of their experience of the phenomena explored (Flick, 2009). This interview format acted as a guide, giving both the participants and me the freedom to address whatever was organically perceived as important while avoiding overly directing the participant (Charmaz, 2010). Semi-structured interviews

also allowed me to ask probing questions and gain clarification to enrich the data (Irvine, Drew & Sainsbury, 2013). Moreover, this interview format allowed me to follow a new path when something unexpected came up during the interviews (Knox and Burkard, 2009). According to Adams (2015), this flexible and less formal structure of interviews facilitates the space for deeper self-reflection and openness toward exploring sensitive topics thanks to its conversational atmosphere. The initial interview schedule is provided in (Appendix B). As the interviews progressed, the questions were adjusted to enhance the development of the theory (Charmaz, 2006). Considering the delicate subject matter as well as the similarities in the interview structure with that of the Home Office interview, some participants requested guidance and support. I utilised basic counselling skills such as paraphrasing. This helped me establish a good rapport with the participants and allowed them to feel understood and valued. Charmaz (2006) suggests that these techniques help the researcher check for accuracy in their understanding and interpretation of the participant's narratives.

It Is Important to note that my interview schedule may be similar to the Home Office substantiative interview in that the underlying common topic explores the experiences of SOGI refugees and it follows a chronological structure. However, my interview schedule differs from typical immigration interviews in that it is semi-structured and open ended. It includes questions specifically tailored to gather information about the experiences of SOGI refugees and how they make sense of their sexual orientation and refugee identities. This involved exploring personal experiences as well as societal attitudes and cultural factors that the participants felt influenced by. The core distinction between my interview schedule and that of the Home Office is that this study prioritises assessing the psychological perspective of the SOGI refugee migration experience, recognising the potential trauma and mental health challenges that participants may have experienced. Therefore, some of my questions were designed to elicit information about coping mechanisms, support networks and the impact of past and current traumas on the participants. This differs from the Home Office's interviews which have the purpose of assessing the credibility of the participants' asylum claim. Additionally, my interview schedule was informed by the literature on SOGI refugees to incorporate principles of cultural sensitivity and competencies to acknowledge the diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences of the participants. I also devised a distress protocol to monitor the participants' wellbeing had they experienced any distress throughout the interview. The participants were also provided with a list of organisations in the UK which provide support, advice, and mental health services for SOGI refugees. Therefore, my interview schedule was developed to reveal more of the rich complexity of movements, feelings, social relationships, and identifications in these lives.

The participants were given the option of having the Interview In person In a private room at a local library or online via Zoom at a time and date convenient for them. All of the participants chose to have their interviews remotely via Zoom.

2.3.vi Ethical Considerations

This study aims to fully adhere to the ethical guidelines outlined by the British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2017). To do so, the following ethical issues are addressed:

Once participants expressed an interest in the study, they were sent an information sheet (Appendix D) via email outlining the research topic, its aims, what to expect during the interview, and the researcher's contact details. If they were still interested and demonstrated an appropriate level of English, they were sent a demographics (Appendix F) form and a Patient Health Questionnaire- 9 (PhQ-9) (Appendix G) form to complete. Due to the sensitive nature of this research, the PhQ-9 form allowed for the mitigation of risk by excluding participants who scored above 10 'moderate' or score above 0 on question 9. Once the clients were deemed suitable for the study, they were invited for an interview.

All participants chose to have their interviews remotely in a confidential and comfortable space. However, had the participant wished to have the interview in person, to maintain the researcher's welfare whilst maintaining confidentiality, the researcher was to hand a responsible third party a sealed envelope containing the date, time, estimated finish time and location of the interview. The researcher was to contact them at the end of the interview. If the researcher failed to do this after thirty minutes past the estimated finish time, they were to call the researcher. If this failed, they could open the envelope and contact emergency services.

At the start of the interview appointment, issues regarding confidentiality of data, the rights to withdraw up to two weeks post-interview, and recording and storage of the interviews were discussed with the participants. Participants were then given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the study and its ethical considerations. Next, the participants were given a consent form (Appendix E). Once they ticked all the boxes and signed the consent form, the audio recording on the Dictaphone commenced, and they then moved to the interview stage of this process. A distress protocol (Appendix I) was devised to monitor the participant's well-being had they experienced any distress throughout the interview.

At the end of the interview, participants were given the opportunity to voice their thoughts and feelings about the interview experience. The participants were then given a debrief form (Appendix H) outlining the research aims and providing the researcher's contact details in case a participant would like to discuss the research further or would like to withdraw from the study. The participants were also given a list of organisations in the UK which provide support, advice and mental health services for SOGI refugees (Appendix H). If the participants expressed wanting a proof of participation support letter (Appendix K), they were sent one at the end of the interview.

To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, all identifying information was omitted from recordings and transcripts, and a participant number was used for each participant. Subject to the Data Protection Act (1998) requirement, data and signed forms are kept separate and stored in locked cabinets only accessible by the researcher. Electronic data is stored in password-protected files on the researcher's computer. Materials will be kept for up to 5 years for publication purposes, after which they will be destroyed.

2.4 Principles of Analysis

2.4.i Coding

The grounded theory framework involves immersing oneself in the data. To do so, the interviews conducted for this research were transcribed into data and analysed using a constructivist grounded theory framework (Charmaz, 2006). The first step of the analysis began with initial coding. Coding permits the researcher to capture what is in the data and gain an understanding of how the participants make sense of their experience of the phenomena under investigation. Coding is crucial when linking the data collection process and the development of emergent theory (Charmaz, 1996). Coding consists of categorising sections of data word-by-word, line-by-line and sentence-by-sentence. The codes in themselves represent how the data is sorted. Charmaz (2012) advises coding in gerunds to allude to processes, meanings and actions. This coding method also allows the researcher to remain close to the data as they begin to understand it and attend to meanings, linguistic structure, and flow (Charmaz, 2017). This served as a representation of the participants' views of reality and was the start of theory development.

This was followed by focused coding, where I started to move through interviews and observations, comparing participants' experiences and interpretations to amalgamate data segments and determine the significance of the initial codes. I selected the initial codes that

appeared more often and which were more relevant to the research question (Charmaz, 2006). The focused coding condensed these data portions into themes describing the phenomena being explored. Theoretical coding then allowed for the grouping of substantive codes into abstract categories. This coding stage addresses the relationships between the categories identified during focused coding. I then used the constant comparison method and moved backwards and forwards through the data to look at similarities and differences between the emerging categories. As Willig (2008) suggests, this allowed me to understand and capture all the variations in the data through the emerging theory.

2.4.ii Memo Writing

Throughout the coding process, I partook in memo writing (Glaser, 1978) as a record of the theory development and my active engagement with the data throughout the research process (Appendix O). These memos outline reflections on the data and the rationale for the next stages of data collection via theoretical sampling. The memos differ in length, level of detail and profundity, serving as a record of real-time insights and findings. This increased the level of abstraction of ideas, thoughts and comparisons, keeping me involved in the analysis. Memo writing also allowed for the free exploration of coded data, showing transparency in how connections between categories and concepts were generated. I also used grounded theory's diagramming (Appendix L) as it created a visual representation that facilitated sorting, merging and refining categories to build theory (Charmaz, 2012). Both memo writing and diagramming promoted my reflexivity throughout the process of analysis.

2.4.iii Theoretical Sampling

The next stage of analysis was theoretical sampling which involved additional data collection to further the exploration of meaning, refine the codes, and gain more specific data to support or explain a category (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2011). Since finding participants who met the specific criteria of the study was complex and had pragmatic constraints, this theoretical sampling was quite challenging to implement. Since the original participants were already familiar with the concepts discussed, I opted for re-interviews rather than recruiting new participants. I believed this would be more conducive to thoroughly evaluating the categories that emerged throughout the analysis. I re-contacted and established the availability of all six former participants, four of whom agreed to be re-interviewed. This involved using an amended interview schedule (Appendix C) informed by the categories that had begun to emerge and be constructed in the analysis. The process of theoretical sampling allowed me to appreciate the full multiplicity of the data and consider all possible theoretical explanations

for the data (Charmaz, 2012). Once the conceptual analysis of the data was developed, the relevant literature was explored to understand how and where this study fits in.

2.4.iv Theoretical Sufficiency

Grounded Theory suggests that the researcher should continue theoretical sampling of new data until saturation is achieved and the theory can no longer be developed through additional data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, given the limitations of this specific research and due to the restraints which restricted gathering new data, saturation is considered an ideal (Willig, 2013). Instead, I claimed theoretical sufficiency once no new patterns, developments or relationships emerged in the data. This research defines sufficiency as conceptual density, which is achieved by addressing processes and generating categories (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Therefore, the ensuing theory represents a balance between the desired approach of Grounded Theory and the limitations posed by the availability of resources. Five core themes were developed through diagramming and memos following the theoretical integration, combination and sorting of categories. This process culminated in the development of a framework that elucidates how the identities of SOGI refugees develop as a result of the migration process in the UK.

2.4.v Strategies of Verification and Validation

As I hold a constructionist stance in this qualitative research, I claim no objectivity or ultimate truth as I acknowledge that I play a role in co-constructing and analysing the data. Therefore, some strategies that can verify the validity and quality of the data were employed. Theoretical sampling is considered a verification technique as it challenges a researcher's initial presumptions (Fassinger, 2005). By conducting follow-up interviews at a later stage in my research, I could cross-check the patterns and categories that were developing between interviews. This helped increase the legitimacy of my emerging understanding.

Peer and supervision auditing and debriefing were also conducted with colleagues and researchers at various stages of my research process. When auditing, I presented the raw data, codes, and categories being developed to an external auditor. This assisted in determining how much of my interpretations and findings were rooted in the data and how my personal biases impacted the data. This allowed me to reassess certain interpretations and make the process as transparent as possible. The debriefing sessions took place in collaboration with a fellow researcher to reflect on emerging insights and concerns whilst keeping my assumptions and process in check. I also used debriefing with non-academic

individuals as I aimed to make the research accessible and easily understandable. This helped me reflect on the influence of the academic structure and system on my research. Finally, I attempted to keep a record of my own process as a researcher through the use of a reflexive journal. This helped me keep a record of my active participation in the research, allowing me to observe and keep track of my thoughts, feelings and values throughout the research process.

2.5 Methodology Reflexivity

When choosing the methodology for this research, specifically the Grounded Theory methodology, I realised that I was also required to reflect on my own epistemological position. The constructivist version I have chosen for this research is also the most fitting with my philosophical beliefs about the nature of reality. Constructivism assumes that reality is constructed differently depending on a person's social context and experience. This allowed me to recognise and reflect on my own experiences, prejudices and philosophical beliefs, which impacted how I interpreted the data and developed codes, categories and theories.

Although this methodology reflects my personal values, it also includes limitations that may have impacted this research. For instance, the chosen method of interviews may have influenced the participants' narratives due to its resemblance with the Home Office substantive interview. I also note that by asking participants to explain the way they make sense of their queer identity and its intersection with their migrant identity, I placed them in a position where they were more likely to use language and understanding that mirrors the social context that we were in. Thus, the structure of my questions risked recreating Western understandings of sexuality and 'refugees'. As Judith Butler (2005) suggests, an individual's sense of self is shaped by social factors and cannot possess complete self-awareness about the elements that contribute to its formation. In the case of SOGI refugees, by claiming asylum based on their gender or sexual orientation, they initiate a procedure in which the veracity of their sexuality is to be determined by the state (Millbank, 2009). In this process, they must narrate an account of their sexual selves, Ih will grant them access to the nation-state if told well by the state's standards (Hertoghs & Schinkel, 2018). It is essential to recognise how this context may have limited or influenced how the participants narrated their experiences in our interview. Other forces that may have influenced the participants' responses include the participants' internalised need for secrecy and avoidance, difficulties in addressing sexuality due to past trauma and shame, and concerns about deportation in relation to any disclosures due to potential recreated power differences in our interviews. Despite these limitations, by using open-ended questions, I hoped to give room for experiences that do not resemble social

constructions of gender, sexuality and migrant categories. I also attempted to pay attention to the tangential discussions that emerged from my questions, hoping to reveal more of the complex nature of the SOGI refugee experience.

Furthermore, I believe that it is imperative for me to reflect on the dynamic of the relationship between myself as a researcher and the participants since this relationship affects how the interviews unfolded. I aimed to be as transparent and honest as possible with my participants about my position and identity and respect all ethical boundaries. I assume that sharing my experience and roles as a queer Arab-British researcher and counselling psychologist has affected how the participants related to me. Yardley (2008) suggested that the researcher's familiarity with the field allows for an increased understanding of participants' lived experiences. Therefore, I hoped my shared queer identity would facilitate a good rapport with participants and enhance my empathy. However, it is imperative to acknowledge the power differences. As a researcher, I held a relatively powerful position. I was able to structure and ask the questions and then interpret the answers. Although my shared sexual orientation may have bridged some of this decision, my privilege as a middle-class British citizen may have exacerbated it. My awareness of this divide and my skills as a trainee in Counselling Psychology helped me hold an uninformed and curious position. They increased my ability to be empathic and non-judgmental throughout the interview process. Despite this, I cannot completely eliminate the power inequality. Therefore, maintaining a reflexive journal throughout the research process allowed me to keep a record of my thoughts, feelings and assumptions.

Chapter 3: Results

3.1 Analysis Introduction

The sample of this study was composed of 4 male and two female participants. All participants claimed asylum in the UK based on their sexual orientation. One of the participants had received settled status in the UK, three had claimed asylum and were waiting to hear back from the HO to be appointed a substantive interview appointment, one claimed asylum and was about to have her substantive interview, and one had claimed asylum, received three rejections and was appealing his last denial. The complete demographic information collected can be found in Table 1. The participants described the different processes that contributed to developing their identities as SOGI refugees throughout their migration process in the UK. This involved reflecting on pre-migration, arrival and post-migration experiences.

Data analysis resulted in 5 main categories, each with three subcategories resulting in 15 subcategories, all of which emerged from the participants' narratives (Table 2). Evidence of the development of these categories can be found in Appendix N. The links and interactions of these categories are presented in the model below (Figure 1). This chapter will begin with a description of the developed theoretical model and then give an explication of each of the five categories and their subcategories, which will be illustrated with short excerpts from the participant's narratives. To distinguish between quotes from initial and follow-up interviews, the letter "a" has been added following the participant number to indicate that it is from the initial interview and the letter "b" indicates that it is from the follow-up interview.

Table 2

Categories, Subcategories and Participants Involved

Categories	Subcategories	Participants
Challenges of the asylum system	Negotiating one's rights	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
	Control & authority	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
	Gaps in the system	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
Migration Hardships	Subjected to discrimination	P2, P4, P5, P6
	The struggle to integrate	P4, P6
	Unique mental health challenges	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
Support	Community and support network	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
	Receiving therapy	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
	Giving back	P1, P3, P4, P5, P6
Building Knowledge & Experience	Learning about the UK legal system	P1, P2, P4, P6
	Exposure to LGBTQ+ culture in the UK	P1, P2, P4, P5, P6
	Developing work and education	P2, P3, P4, P5
Developing an identity	Intersecting identities	P2, P3, P4, P5
	Safety and freedom	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5
	Self-realisation and acceptance	P1, P2, P3, P4, P6

3.2 The Research Model

Figure 1

The theoretical model of the identity development of SOGI refugees as a result of the migration process in the UK.
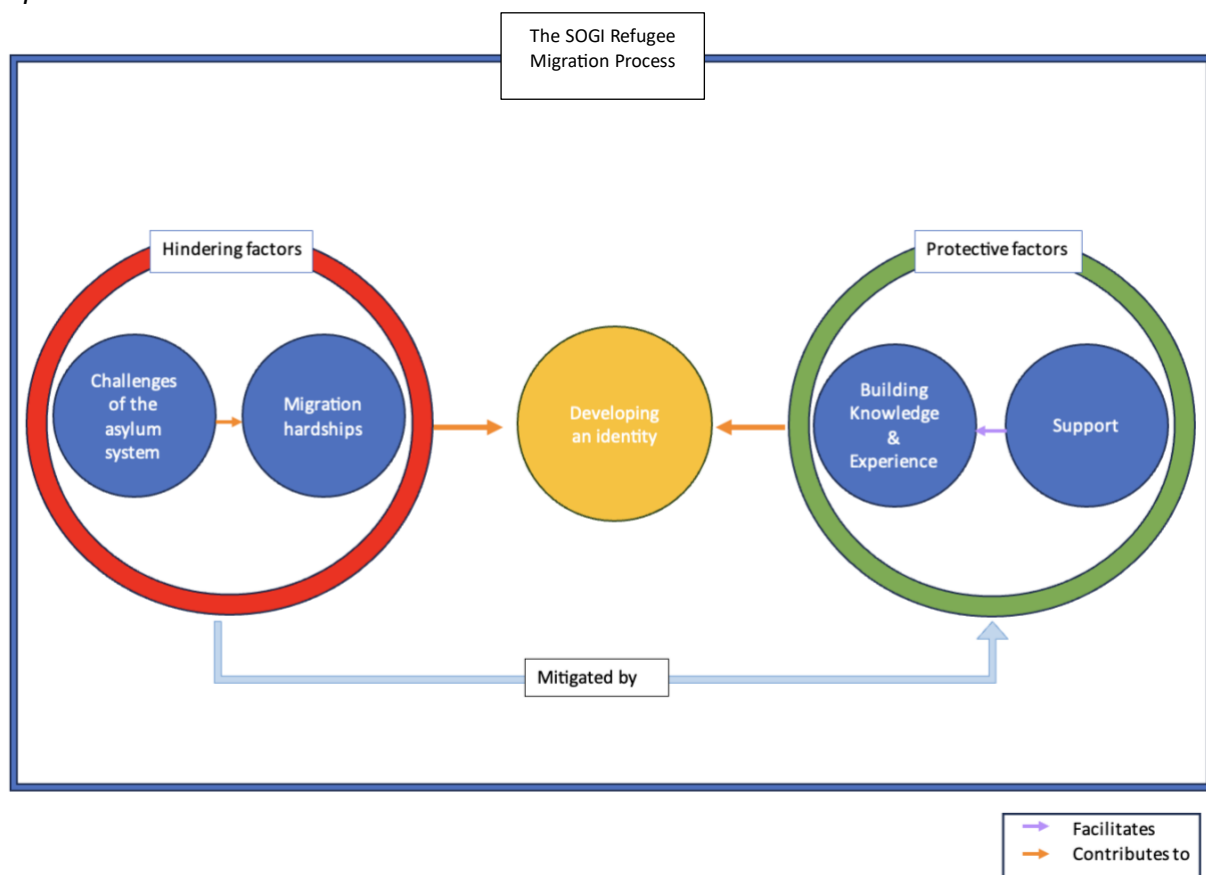
A model was devised to make sense of the development of the identities of SOGI refugees as a result of their migration process in the UK. This model suggests that the identities of SOGI refugees develop and change due to multiple unique functions of the UK migration experience. This involves processes associated with the new cultures, social contexts, and systems of power that influence the understanding and expression of SOGI refugees' sexual orientation, gender identity, and refugee identity.

The model aims to identify the processes that contribute to the development of the identities of SOGI refugees as a result of their migration to the UK. The model identifies two clusters of processes contributing to the developing identities of SOGI refugees. The first cluster comprises the hindering factors, including the 'challenges of the asylum system', which contribute to the 'migration hardships'. These hindering factors are mitigated by the second cluster of processes which are the protective factors. This is composed of the process of 'support', which facilitates 'building knowledge and experience'.

The unique challenges and vulnerabilities characterise the hindering cluster of processes that migration to the UK exposes SOGI refugees to. This includes facing hostility, discrimination, the struggle to integrate and unique systemic challenges in the UK. These experiences can shape the identities of SOGI refugees due to the mental health impact and practical limitations caused by these hardships.

The protective factors cluster of this model is characterised by the opportunity for self-discovery, exploration, learning and validation that the migration process can provide. This is facilitated by exposure to communities and support networks affirming and validating SOGI refugees' identities. This support network also impacted the participants' knowledge of the LGBTQ+ culture, the legal system and human rights in the UK. Moreover, the exposure to local SOGI migrant communities, support and access to therapy contributed to a newfound desire among the participants to give back to their community by volunteering. This, along with access to resources, shaped the participants' career and education development. These positive processes led the participants to experience a greater sense of self-realisation and acceptance.

It's important to note that the development of the identities of SOGI refugees is a complex and multifaceted process influenced by personal experiences, cultural contexts and multiple systems of power. Therefore, each SOGI refugee has a unique experience of their migration experience and development of identities.

3.3.i Category 1: Challenges of the Asylum System

This first category has three sub-categories that describe the different types of systemic challenges that contribute to developing the identities of SOGI refugees. The asylum process in the UK exposes SOGI refugees to many challenges due to the specific nature of their claims. The key challenges that the participants describe involve negotiating their rights due to the lack of an adequate framework which recognises and understands the specific experience, needs and vulnerabilities of the SOGI refugee population; A sense of losing control, and power dynamics due to the lack of available information for SOGI migrants about the asylum system and the lengthy and complex asylum procedures which can cause significant stress and uncertainty; and finally gaps in the system due to the limited knowledge and understanding of SOGI-related issues among government representatives, the Home Office and supporting organisations.

3.3.i.i Negotiating One's Rights

The participants explain that SOGI refugees, similarly to other refugees, have minimal rights that differ depending on the asylum process stage. This includes freedom of movement, the ability to pursue a career, financial independence, and control over one's privacy. As a result, participants expressed having to fight for their rights and feeling stuck throughout their migration process.

> *Participant 3a: As a refugee, it's limited with the things you can do and the things you cannot do. I want to do something with my life, but rather than being able, it's telling me you can't do it […] I'm constantly stuck.*

> *Participant 5: So everything you have to fight to get for, ugh, it's annoying. You have to fight to get anything in this country, even when you have no status. It's like a punishment cause nothing comes easy.*

Furthermore, participants expressed that a unique experience for SOGI refugees is the need to negotiate their rights about the sensitive and personal disclosures they make during their credibility assessment. They explained that the credibility assessments determine the validity of their claim. However, they involve the requirement of disclosing intimate details of their sexuality and gender. These disclosures are made publicly to members of the Home Office, and for some participants, it was the first time they shared such personal narratives. The

participants explained that due to the lack of an adequate framework that recognises the specific vulnerabilities that SOGI refugees face, they often have to negotiate their rights to maximise their protection and privacy. Participants 4 and 5 illustrated the challenges they faced with their credibility assessments:

> *Participant 4a: They had an interpreter, but I asked him to leave because I thought this is much… uh… like, more confidential… I can do it.*

> *Participant 5: Those deep things that you can't go into, they are personal, and nobody has a right to know everything about me […], but I have to share it with the home office.*

Therefore, the systemic challenges that SOGI refugees face may impact their mental health, shape their identities and drive them to advocate for their rights and the rights of others.

3.3.i.ii Control & Authority

The participants describe a key element of the SOGI asylum process to be the sense of losing control. The participants describe this feeling as resulting from often being in the unknown, needing to be more informed and waiting due to the lengthy and complex asylum procedures. They explain that this is due to the need for more communication with the Home Office and available information about the asylum process. They explain that this results in them being in a state of standstill, frustration, and unable to fully understand who they are and where to go with their life.

> *Participant 2: So, in the process of waiting, it's been very difficult for me because I want to know what my status is so that I can move my life ahead. So my life is… at the moment, it's at a standstill.*

> *Participant 3b: You know they… like… no communication from [the Home office]. I don't know what to expect… like… I'm still worried. I still have… like… I am overthinking. My experience with them it's not that good.*

Some participants also explained how this feeling of lack of control is evident in their interviews when they realise they have less knowledge than the Home Office. For example, when they do not know the questions' nature or intention.

Participant 4a: [The interviewer] tried to trick me with a lot of questions, especially about being gay, especially. That was really surprising for me.

Furthermore, the participants explained that this state of losing control, waiting and being in the unknown is exacerbated by a fear of being detained or sent back to their home country, as Participant 4 illustrates:

Participant 4b: I would definitely say it was so stressing to… when… when you don't know if you… if your application will be accepted or not, there is a fear of deportation all the time as well. This is really scary, and you feel that you are powerless. You don't have any control actually of your future. You throw… like you… You've taken the decision that you want to leave your country or your home and to move somewhere else, and you think that everything will be all right, but it's not because your future in… is in the hands of someone else.

Therefore, the sense of lack of control and uncertainty resulting from the asylum procedures may exacerbate the vulnerabilities of SOGI refugees, leading to mental health concerns such as aggravated trauma and high stress levels.

3.3.i.iii Gaps in the System

Participants describe facing systemic challenges during the SOGI migration experience due to the lack of an adequate structure that recognises and understands the specific needs and vulnerabilities of SOGI refugees. For instance, the participants expressed disappointment with the lack of support from the Home Office, including inadequate housing for SOGI or LGBTQ+ individuals, limited financial assistance, and a lack of help in accessing community and support.

Participant 6a (about the provision of housing): The process [in the UK] needs to change because mentally LGBTQ persons, especially if someone is transitioning from he to her, they are still misused their accommodation where there are no safety policies for LGBTQI [individuals].

The participants explain that the hardships that result from structural challenges are exacerbated by the lack of communication and support from the Home Office, often leaving the participants in a state of uncertainty and stress. Participant 3 reflects on this when

explaining whose responsibility it is to build an adequate and supportive framework for SOGI refugees.

> *Participant 3b: I think it's definitely [the HO] cause you can't do anything. But the impact on me it's like… it's depressing, yeah… it's negative, the morale is not like the way I was expecting it to be. There is no support in any way.*

Moreover, the participants explain that systemic flaws are also aggravated by the absence of empathy during their asylum procedures, such as in their interviews. They expressed that this heightened their anxiety and distress when self-disclosing vulnerable and intimate information.

> *Participant 5: The way [HO interviewer] asks the questions, like, they will ask with no feelings of empathy, there is no empathy, no remorse, it's just throwing it at you, and you give them what you're going to give them. Yeah, so I think in a nutshell it is the experience is scary, it's horrific, it is intimidating, it takes a lot of time, and it's mentally exhausting... yeah... especially when you know you have no support.*

Participants explained that they have turned to organisations for support due to the flawed governmental support. While they generally expressed having positive experiences with SOGI refugee organisations, they also faced challenges with them due to high demand and insufficient funding. Additionally, they explained that organisations that do not specifically cater to the intersectional SOGI refugee population and instead focus on the larger LGBTQ+ community in the UK often lack the knowledge and resources to address their needs adequately. This includes providing legal support for SOGI asylum claims and substantiating their SOGI identity claims.

> *Participant 6a: Yeah… well, I had really horrible solicitors for my first year and a half, and that didn't help because it was denied on my 1st … this is now my 3rd appeal… going into my 3rd appeal, maybe actually the 4th to be fair and… umm… it's been a process not having an organisation with support at the time during the whole thing.*

Moreover, Participant 5 expressed frustration towards the lack of awareness and sensitivity about their SOGI refugee needs, which they experienced within LGBTQ+ organisations in the UK. The participant expressed that the intention of non-intersectional LGBTQ+ organisations did not seem to be one of a genuine desire to support the SOGI refugee community.

> *Participant 5: Some of [the LGBTQ+ organisations] are just there to get funding… are just there to use us to sign their attendance things. That's how they're getting their*

salaries, but they're not helping us, we're just service users […] these other LGBT communities that are for white people, or whatever… whatever… they will never like work with [SOGI refugees] to the tribunal to represent them.

The participants, therefore, highlight the need for intersectional support that meets the unique needs of SOGI refugees, whether governmental or not.

3.3.ii Category 2: Migration Hardships

Participants explain that the above-mentioned challenges of the asylum procedures contribute to their broader migration hardships. The participants expressed that SOGI refugees are exposed to a multitude of challenges and vulnerabilities that span beyond asylum procedures. Therefore, this category explores the broader migration hardships by addressing the hostility and discrimination they experience, the struggle to integrate due to cultural and linguistic differences, and the unique mental health challenges of SOGI refugees. These hardships all contribute to and shape the identities of SOGI refugees.

3.3.ii.i Subjected to Discrimination

Participants described being exposed to discrimination and hostility in the UK mostly due to their ethnicity, race or refugee status. They explained that this discrimination is linked to government policies which have induced a social and political narrative of hostility towards refugees in the UK. It is important to consider this discrimination within the context that these individuals fled their country of origin due to being persecuted for their sexuality and having experienced significant amounts of discrimination for that part of their identity. They explain that although fleeing to the UK has allowed their SOGI identity to be celebrated and accepted, their new refugee/migrant identity has led to further discrimination. Therefore, they do not successfully escape discrimination by fleeing their home country.

> *Participant 6b: They are other-ising, dehumanising, and making enemies of people seeking asylum and forgetting the issues and problems that are going on in this country, [the UK government is] putting it on asylum seekers, and they're labelling it and making us the pariah and outcast.*

> *Participant 4b: Even when I become British, I feel that since I'm originally not from here, that makes me, that makes me less than the other people if that makes sense.*

Moreover, one participant describes experiencing discrimination towards his intersecting identity of being a gay Arab refugee.

>Participant 4a: *When I used to use [gay male dating app] and all these dating apps. When people used to know that I'm from Syria or I am a refugee, they used to block me or just stop talking. So also, within the gay community, you have those people who are against you as a… as a migrant or refugee or asylum seeker… yeah.*

The participants reflect on how this discrimination negatively influences their refugee and SOGI identities and highlight that their experience would be much more positive without it.

>Participant 5: *If people can be more welcoming and accepting to especially the LGBT minorities or asylum seekers and refugees, then the world would be a better place.*

3.3.ii.ii The Struggle to Integrate

Two of the participants describe an element of their migration to the UK to be their struggle with integration. The participants explain that feeling settled and based in the UK is hard without feeling fully integrated. The participants explain that integration is facilitated by mutual understanding between the migrants and the British community. They explain that this is challenging to achieve within the current climate of hostility towards migrants as well as with practical challenges such as the language barrier.

>Participant 4a: *This is something I feel like, uh, I failed to do… which is to be integrated into the British society, to have more British friends. I think this is one of the challenges I face […] we don't feel that we could express ourselves in [English]. It's not only about that you are fluent in it or not, it's more about like can you… can you… can you express your feelings with this language?*

>Participant 6a: *You didn't travel over boats and far lands and slept in ditches and all that to reach somewhere here where you're not going to give the people a chance and the culture a chance. Because integration means commonality, you understand each other, and you'll get to understand each other's concepts and faults.*

The participants describe integration as a goal they would like to achieve, which is linked to their sense of self and their understanding of their identity as SOGI refugees in the UK. The

need for integration seems to be crucial for these participants as it represents a sense of stability and settlement in their host country.

> *Participant 4a: I would never think about to go back to Syria now. So it's really important to understand now that my life will be here in the UK. So I… I need to have, like, solid base to build on it for the future.*

3.3.ii.iii Unique Mental Health Challenges

The participants described that as SOGI refugees, they faced unique mental health challenges throughout the migration process. Firstly, they highlight their pre-migration stresses, such as their persecution, trauma and displacement. The participants expressed that their pre-migration experience impacts their sleep and sense of self-worth and contributes to depression and anxiety.

> *Participant 1a: Sometimes I feel like a heart attack from the memory [of persecution]. Some flashbacks.*

The participants then expressed the mental health implications of the post-migration stressors in the UK. They expressed feelings of depression, anxiety and worry due to multiple post-migration hardships and minority stress. This includes the unknown of their future, the lack of stability in their legal status in the UK, the fear of being deported or not being believed, feelings of isolation and loneliness, and the challenges of having to disclose intimate and personal information during the asylum interviews.

> *Participant 4b: [Being kicked out of the UK] this is something really like scares me, and I'm so… I'm so emotional person, so I keep thinking about those negative thoughts all the time. I feel like sometimes they're dominating my thoughts and feelings and behaviour.*

> *Participant 5: Because you think like you've escaped torture, then you come here, and you're still scared of being sent back, not being believed.*

> *Participant 5: The mental health part of it makes it really hard, living in constant fear that you're going to be sent back… the isolation.*

The participants highlight the importance of receiving support throughout the asylum process in order to survive these unique challenges.

> *Participant 6a: In the UK, the asylum process is very arduous. It is mentally depleting, it is physically as well. It leaves you, for some, very depleted, even when you've won your case, because there is still that process of the next 5 years because you're still on unsettled ground […] Then, you come out of it much less than the person you went into. Then you think, and that's a process where you will need therapy… will need help in getting you back or evolving in from the person that you thought you were, and the person you became during the process. So you can't do it alone at all.*

3.3.iii Category 3: Support

The participants described that despite the hindering factors contributing to developing their identities, they also experience protective factors that may mitigate some of their negative experiences. The participants explain that throughout their migration experience in the UK, they may encounter different forms of support that affirm and validate their identities. This category explores the various forms of support the participants expressed receiving and giving throughout their migration process. These positive experiences can further shape their identities by fostering a sense of self-realisation and acceptance, inspiring activism, advocacy for their rights and a desire to give back to their community.

3.3.iii.i Community and Support Network

The participants refer to their experience of support as a key part of their migration experience. Most of the positive support the participants refer to is received through NGOs specifically supporting SOGI refugees. The participants highlighted the importance of the charity sector in accessing support and a community as they expressed not feeling adequately supported by the Home Office and British Government. They reflect on how access to a community of people with similar intersectional identities has allowed them to gain self-acceptance, encouragement, perspective, validation and a space where they feel less alone in their journey.

> *Participant 5: The support from the NGOs, which are non-governmental, is incredible because, without the community, I don't know how I would've made it through […] I was getting to know people there who are in the same situation as you, sharing the*

same problem as you, encourage each other. I think it's what we need because the home office does not offer that.

Participant 1b: [SOGI refugee NGO has] given me the… the right to know who I am and the motivation, the encouragement.

Participant 6a: The connection with people and… there is nothing more sobering, but also it can also be a bit… not just endearing but also it can be heart-breaking. Endearing in that when you think your boat is sinking and it has a hole in the boat, a lifeboat. Then you think, someone else's lifeboat can have a bigger hole and they're still you know… keeping above water. So in having connections with people… people help you grow. As I said earlier that for me, interactions with bad people and good help me grow as an individual and also helps me.

Moreover, the participants highlight that these NGOs allow them to feel safe knowing whom to turn to for support or guidance and how to gain access to information that will enable them to feel more prepared for their asylum process and better able to navigate assimilating into the UK.

Participant 3b: They give, like, what to expect in my main interview, they support, like, every day in terms of preparation, like, what to expect.

Beyond the support from the SOGI refugee NGOs, the participants reflect on their experience of Pride in the UK and the positive support and feeling of acceptance they received from the UK population. The participants explained that they had never experienced being celebrated for being LGBTQ+ in their home country. Pride was a significant experience which ignited the feeling of being welcomed and accepted for who they are.

Participant 4a: [About Pride] I felt OK… if… if everyone in the city is welcoming those… those people, or I mean LGBTQ. So I feel safe, I feel accepted.

3.3.iii.ii Receiving Therapy

The participants found that, as well as the support they received from their community, accessing therapy during their migration process was highly valuable for processing their experiences and gaining self-understanding. Several participants expressed receiving therapy through a SOGI refugee NGO which offered group therapy in a trauma-informed and culturally

sensitive manner. It was a space in which only SOGI migrants were allowed to join to create more homogeneity and a sense of safety in the group. The participants reflect on how sharing with the group allowed them to gain perspective on their experiences, a more profound sense of self-understanding and acceptance, and tools to better cope with their mental health. The participants emphasised the importance of shared intersectional identities and cultural sensitivity within the group, ensuring their unique contexts were acknowledged, and the therapy content resonated with their experiences.

> *Participant 1a (on receiving group therapy): So helpful when they share their problems, their mental health. I feel so much for them. It makes you feel your problem is so minor… yeah… It's so spiritual, it's so deep there… yeah… When they share their stories.*

> *Participant 3a: [group counselling is] helpful so much. We deal with topics affecting us a lot, about identity and depression, how to go about it, like dealing with what we're facing […] [since therapy] I'm not too harsh on myself, I'm not too hard on myself. You would generally want energy to manage the thing, and I get more knowledgeable about how to manage things.*

Only one participant received individual therapy, highlighting the significance of finding a therapist who shared their cultural background and had experience in LGBTQ+ therapy. This alignment fostered a sense of safety and understanding regarding their SOGI diversity within their home country and throughout their migration journey.

> *Participant 4a: [Participant's therapist is] really good. I think the most important thing is that we have the same background, so he would understand my problems. I feel if I speak to a counsellor or to a therapist like a British one, they might not get the sense of the problem… uh… or understand like… understood fully my issue because we don't share the same background.*

Finally, the participants describe the challenge of accessing mental health services due to the long waiting lists and delays between when the care is needed and when it is provided. Participant 2 reflects on this in relation to losing contact with her son due to her migration to the UK.

> *Participant 2: I was referred to [counselling group name]. I was put on the queue for like two months. And by the time I was called, I didn't feel like I should talk because by*

then, I had lost contact with my son, and I couldn't reach anybody to tell me anything about what's happening, and I felt I don't want it… I don't want anything… I just want to… just let me feel the pain.

3.3.iii.iii Giving Back

The participants discuss how the hardships and the positive experiences they have had throughout their migration have ignited a desire to give back to their community. This desire may be influenced by asylum seekers' lack of employment rights in the UK. The participants explain having much time on their hands and, at points, a need for more sense of purpose. The participants describe the primary source of their fulfilment in their migration to the UK to come from their SOGI migrant communities. Therefore, the participants explain that volunteering and giving back to this community gives them a sense of purpose. They also express that it is a way in which they can disseminate their knowledge from their SOGI migration experience to support and facilitate the journey of others.

Participant 1b: I like to give back to the community, fighting for our generations, yeah… fighting for our people.

Participant 4a: It's really great to feel that OK, now I'm settled, I can give back to this community, to this group that I belong to.

Participant 5: I have been down the road of asylum… It is shit, it is horrendous, it is discriminatory, it is shameful, it is the label you carry. So my dream is to just at least give hope to the people who are passing through that system, and to tell them that there is… just bear with this system at the moment, but you will enjoy when you get your papers.

The participants also explained that part of the desire to give back to and fight for the SOGI migrant community extends beyond the UK. They explain that it is connected to their urge to fight for the rights of the SOGI community in their home country.

Participant 6a: As the future goes along, as I get older, and I can go back and, you know… do more work to improve my native country when the time comes. But sometimes, you have to leave the thing you love most… leave it to let it grow, and you have to better yourself before you can go back and improve anything.

3.3.iv Category 4: Building Knowledge & Experience

The participants explained that the support they gained throughout their migration process in the UK facilitated their acquisition of knowledge and experience. They expressed that connecting with the SOGI migrant community, accessing support and engaging in activism and advocacy allowed them to learn from others, gain knowledge about resources, and participate in workshops to enhance their understanding of the LGBTQ+ community, law and human rights in the UK. For some of the participants, this gained knowledge, experience and access to resources inspired them to develop their careers and education.

3.3.iv.i Learning About the UK Legal System

The participants explain that learning about their rights as LGBTQ+ individuals and refugees in the UK is a big part of their migration experience. This experience seems to be one of not only accessing knowledge about their rights and protection as LGBTQ+ refugees but also of unlearning the shame and fear resulting from their home country's persecutory laws. Accessing and internalising the laws and human rights that protect LGBTQ+ individuals in the UK is an essential part of the participants' experiences of beginning to feel safe in their identity and being able to express the SOGI diverse parts of themselves openly.

> *Participant 6a (on what he shares with his SOGI community): I say, move to a country where there are laws of protection for people of different sex, gender and such. Use those opportunities, do not get… do not get mentally locked that you're still in Namibia or you know Iran or Iraq or you know wherever you are. Those laws, you don't have those protection laws… protection legislation laws. Use the tools that you have. So it's also giving them socially aware, but mentally aware, but culturally aware of the laws and integration.*

The participants explain that accessing legal information and support in the UK is challenging. They explained that this contributes to feelings of fear that may cause delays in putting in an asylum claim and fear of deportation.

> *Participant 2 (on claiming asylum): If what I knew today is what I knew before, I would have done it as soon as possible, but I didn't have that knowledge.*

The participants also explained that the more knowledge and experience they gained about the asylum process, legal rights, and obligations, the more motivated they are to give back to

their community and share their knowledge to help others build a strong case for their asylum claim. Moreover, activism also allows them to develop a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by SOGI refugees, thus allowing them to be better informed on how to contribute to positive change.

> *Participant 4b: Because I went through the process, I under… I got more knowledge about it. I mean, the asylum process that give me more knowledge on how to support other people.*

3.3.iv.ii Exposure to LGBTQ+ Culture in the UK

The participants expressed that part of the migration process as a SOGI refugee is learning about the LGBTQ+ community in the UK. The participants described this as an internal and external experience of the self and their intersectional identities.

The participants reflect on their migration to the UK, resulting in learning about identity politics and the language and terminologies of the LGBTQ+ community and inclusion in the UK. The participants explained that they gained this knowledge by engaging with advocacy organisations focused on LGBTQ+ rights and refugee support. These organisations gave them access to awareness and training programs which enhanced their understanding of LGBTQ+ rights and inclusion in the UK and encouraged them to do their own personal research. This learning process impacted the internal experience of these participants and how they make sense of themselves as SOGI-diverse individuals within a larger community. The participants expressed feelings of self-acceptance and understanding and a better sense of inclusion and understanding of other LGBTQ+ community members.

> *Participant 2: My knowledge about the LGBT community has changed very much. Because as I… as I say it, I don't take it like they're not human. I just take it as people who should be respected for who they are.*

> *Participant 4b: With time, I started understanding that people could be whatever they want. Uh… and I started to break all these barriers between that I built and all these stereotypes that I had before uh, to accept everyone. Like now… I like… I consider myself as a person who accepts anyone, whatever their gender, or sexual orientation, or their behaviour.*

The participants highlight how this new knowledge differed from their experience in their home country, where language referring to the LGBTQ+ community was either limited to the Western word "gay" or derogatory language. Therefore, they did not share the same understanding of LGBTQ+ identity politics as the UK before their migration.

> *Participant 5: In terms of language, like say, 'gay', 'lesbian' is the most like sounding in my country even if some people are like bisexual or transgender, people will always generalise, they are gay […] so in the way the west interprets those terminologies is kind of different from how they are perceived here.*

The participants explain that this process of accessing knowledge of the rights, inclusion and experiences of the LGBTQ+ community in the UK contributes to their process of unlearning internalised homophobia and feelings of shame and a need to hide parts of themselves.

> *Participant 4a: I'm learning, like, I'm… I consider myself in the learning process to how to be gay in this country. There's something new for me. I was gay in Syria, but it's like completely different lives, like hidden life. And here you have the chance to be open, but you need to be sensitive like how to tell this? How approach this?*

> *Participant 1b: In my life, I have been able to know more, to explore more about being LGBTQ, and I'm proud to be an LGBTQ person.*

3.3.iv.iii Developing Work and Education

The participants reflected on how their experience of being a SOGI refugee has influenced, shaped and impacted their professional development. One of the main obstacles that the participants have faced in their asylum process is the lack of employment rights. This has halted their ability to be financially independent and pursue any career or educational development, thus often resulting in a lack of a sense of purpose.

Participants explained that the migration experience influenced their occupational and educational interests. Through the support of SOGI refugee NGOs, they accessed information on how to pursue an education and a career as a refugee. All participants explained that their limited working rights led them to devote their time to supporting other SOGI asylum seekers and giving back to their community. However, some pursued further work and education. One participant, who obtained settled status and the right to work, explained how this experience

shifted his career interest to wanting to work with the LGBTQ+ community and individuals with intersecting identities of being SOGI refugees.

> *Participant 4a: I first wanted to study psychology because I wanted to work with Syrian people. But if it's come to me now, I think my focus will be shifted to the LGBT people.*

> *Participant 4b (on further projects he wants to pursue): We don't have any Arabic videos on YouTube which targets the LGBT community and… and give them an explanation about LGBT life where, like awareness raising. There are a lot of information that they are not available on social media or on the Internet in Arabic.*

Another participant explained how her support network provided her with the resources to apply for a scholarship and pursue further education in social work.

> *Participant 5: I applied, and then for scholarship and then I got it. [SOGI NGO] didn't do it for me, but they empowered me and shared the information with me and showed me there is an opportunity for it to be done, and then I went for it.*

However, participants explained that even after obtaining the right to work, it is possible to encounter further challenges, such as meeting the employee requirements of opening a UK bank account and providing proof of address, which is often problematic for refugees struggling to secure housing.

> *Participant 2: I haven't started working since I've tried to open an account, and it has been very hard for me to open an account because of proof of address.*

Despite these challenges, the participants expressed that they were able to develop their education, career, interests and skills.

3.3.v Category 5: Developing an Identity

'Developing an identity' is the core category of the analysis. The participants reflected on how the multiple complex hindering and protective factors of the migration process in the UK contribute to shaping their understanding and expression of their various intersecting identities. It is important to note that each participant's journey was unique due to the multifaceted processes at play. However, their identities seemed to evolve as they navigated the challenges and opportunities of their migration process. The participants expressed that

through their migration process, they became more aware of their new 'refugee' identity and began to feel safer and freer to explore their SOGI identity thanks to support networks and a protective legal system. The participants also began to experience the intersections of their refugee and SOGI identities. This newfound safety and sense of freedom and their new support networks further enhanced feelings of self-realisation, acceptance and a more congruent sense of self.

3.3.v.i Intersecting Identities

The participants describe the contrast in their intersecting identities and how it leads to gaining certain privileges and losing others. They explained that by being considered LGBTQ+ in the UK, they have become more privileged, whereas by becoming a refugee in the UK, they have become less privileged than they were in their home country. The participants explained that they gained freedom and safety in the UK by being legally protected and socially accepted to be openly LGBTQ+. Simultaneously they explained that they experienced loss and the hardships of the migration procedures, such as losing the right to work, losing freedom of movement and losing friends, family, a career and the life they had in their home country. They also described being discriminated against due to their ethnicity and race and for being considered a refugee in the UK. They expressed that this often resulted in depression, uncertainty, lack of stability and fear of deportation or detention.

> *Participant 4b: These dissonances. So I don't know how it affects someone's mental health, but yeah, because one part of you is unwelcomed and your other half… your other half is like not only welcome but it's celebrated. So how do I introduce myself to the community? As a refugee or as a… as a gay person? There's one part… one part of me is… is fine for the local community, and the… the other one is not. But I'm… I'm… I'm both. So I don't wanna lie for… this is me.*

> *Participant 5 (about the migration process to the UK): It's both easy and hard. But hard is also like... first easy because I am safe. But it's hard because of the emotional journey you have to go through when you think of turning in yourself to the Home Office, what you're going to share with them, what they're going to ask, it's really fearful.*

Moreover, the participants highlight that this contrast in society's perception of their identities contributes to the importance of having specific intersectional SOGI migrant communities and organisations. They explain that this allows them to avoid being discriminated against for being

a refugee in LGBTQ+-only groups and being discriminated against for being SOGI diverse in refugee and migrant groups. Having intersecting communities allowed them to feel safer, more understood, and able to access relevant information and resources for their specific experience and needs. This, in turn, contributed to their self-realisation and acceptance.

Participant 3b: I think that would be, like, quite difficult because maybe, if you have in a group non-LGBT members, you have this feelings with LGBT members. Let's say it's a group which, like, they don't… they might have, like refugees, the LGBT members, like it's composed of people who have like different ideals. Like they have… like that can make it hard for someone to express their feelings. And they would have done that in a group which is only for LGBT members.

3.3.v.ii Safety and Freedom

The participants describe that the migration process to the UK provided them with a sense of freedom and safety as members of the LGBTQ+ community in the UK. They explained that this sense of safety contrasted with their experience of being SOGI-diverse in their home country. They reflected on the fears, trauma and shame they experienced due to SOGI-related persecution and discrimination in their home country. They explained that they often had to conceal their SOGI identity to stay safe, which resulted in feelings of restriction, deprivation and a lack of congruence. The participants explained that their migration to the UK has resulted in feeling free and safe to express themselves, having the burden of hiding oneself lifted, and not fearing persecution for being LGBTQ+. This has resulted in a sense of belonging as well as a sense of self-acceptance.

Participant 2: Because so many years back, I lived like a double life. Yeah, I had to portray what I wasn't, to just impress the family and the society. And there's some things that I was in but I didn't like, like I was forced into marriage. I didn't like it. So at least here, I can make a choice, and nobody who can force me to do what I don't want to do.

Participant 3a: I don't have to hide from anyone, from the government, I'm open here. There is, I don't think, nobody is there to judge me. So, like, I don't have to look back […] It let me, like accept myself, and any doubt in me is like not there anymore. Like I knew to live freely in this country.

> *Participant 5: Being an LGBT refugee here in the UK.. how do I say… definitely the UK is a free country where people are able to practice their sexuality freely without fear for their lives, so I find I am happy to be in the UK and being able to be who I am, who I was deprived to be, deprived to be openly in my home Uganda.*

3.3.v.iii Self-Realisation and Acceptance

The participants describe the migration process as a SOGI refugee as a journey of self-exploration, understanding, and acceptance. They describe their migration to the UK as a positive experience for their SOGI identity, leading to an improved lifestyle, confidence, self-acceptance, and a release from past regrets and shame associated with being SOGI diverse.

> *Participant 4b: How could you develop your personality based on this, and if you like… if I look at [participant 4b name] when he first came to the UK as a gay man and [participant 4b name] now it's like completely change.[…] I think it's the journey. So it's not finished yet, uh, but I think it's... I'm in better… much better place than I was before. So now I don't have all this anger, regret, all these negative feelings, I don't have them as a gay. Now I'm the opposite, I'm proud that I'm gay.*

The participants explain that this gained self-awareness has made them feel less fearful about openly expressing their SOGI identity and has helped improve their mental health. They explain that part of this process is the experience of unlearning the shame and discrimination they internalised in their home country.

> *Participant 1a: It has impacted in me in building my confidence and keeping up my spirit […] knowing who you are, can't fear anybody because of who you are. You stand by your ground, I am who I am.*

The participants explain that the support they have received from their community has been invaluable in their experience of gaining self-acceptance and confidence in becoming more vocal about being SOGI diverse and now part of the UK LGBTQ+ community.

> *Participant 3b: [Being part of the SOGI refugee group] It's making me like to be vocal, to come out, like, they're confident… I'm building my confidence.*

However, the participants also acknowledge that despite the freedoms and personal growth they have experienced regarding their SOGI identity, the refugee identity continues to pose challenges due to the lack of security and the challenges it entails.

> *Participant 4b: I already had the definite leave to remain. And I'm going to apply for the British passport soon. So I was thinking, like, when I become British, am I still a refugee or not? How do I consider myself? Is… is being a refugee will be still part of me? Or people will… if people ask me where you from, I'm British now… so… but, will I feel that I'm really British? I don't know… I don't think so… So I think refugee will… it will be part of me for forever.*

Chapter 4: Discussion

This research illustrates the multiple complex processes that contribute to the development of the identities of SOGI refugees throughout their migration processes in the UK. This research fits into the broader literature, which discusses how SOGI refugees, similar to other refugees, are an extremely vulnerable population in the immigration determination system. In order to effectively navigate this system, they must rapidly grasp and acclimate to the prevailing power dynamics that surround them. The results of this study and the literature demonstrate how these processes influence and shape the development of SOGI refugees' identities (Lewis, 2010; Murray, 2014).

This study aimed to contribute to the discussion of SOGI refugees in the UK due to the limited research addressing this process's psychological impact. To do so, I focused on the formal and informal processes that contribute to developing SOGI refugees' identities within the structure of the immigration and refugee system in the UK. The analysis shows that the UK migration system presents several shortcomings, similar to other Western countries, such as complex and lengthy asylum procedures (Dhoest, 2017). However, the results also demonstrate that the migration process has positive factors, such as access to a support network and community. These negative and positive processes shape how SOGI refugees develop their sexual, gender and refugee identities throughout their migration experience. The analysis also highlights that for SOGI refugees, the process of learning and developing their identities is intensified through migration due to the visible and public state scrutiny it involves. However, as Murray (2011) suggests, it is essential to note that this process is ever-changing due to the diverse shifting political, structural, cultural and economic forces that influence the language and meaning of the identities and processes explored in this study.

Overall, the interviews with the participants confirmed several elements of the literature review. The following section will describe more precisely how each category fits within the broader literary context whilst giving attention to social systems of power, oppression, and privilege that SOGI refugees experience throughout their migration to the UK. This is followed by a discussion on the research's strengths, limitations, and relevance to Counselling Psychology, and will conclude with a reflexive statement.

4.1 Category 1: Challenges of the Asylum System

The results demonstrated that SOGI refugees experience complex challenges within

multiple systemic structures, including asylum procedures. These challenges are confirmed in the academic literature that explores the intersections between systemic powers and queer migrations (Luibhéid, 2002; Manalansan, 2003; Luibhéid, 2005; Cantu, 2009; Middelkoop, 2013; Walker-Said, 2014). Some of these studies explore the concept of homonationalism within the discourse of queer migration and liberation (Puar, 2018; Haritaworn et al., 2014; Raboin, 2016). However, despite the importance of recognising the discourses of homonationalism when exploring queer migration, my analysis has focused on the participants' accounts of their identity development whilst recognising this context.

One of the distinctive procedural elements of SOGI asylum claims is that they face additional challenges as the adjudication relies on personal narratives, unlike other claims based on political, racial, national or religious factors that employ independent verification strategies (Murray, 2011). Therefore SOGI claims are judged on the presentation of intimate, sensitive, often unspoken aspects of one's sexual or gender identity. Thus, the state has the power to decide the validity of the applicant's sexuality or gender identity. This allows adjudicators to place their understanding of sexual and gender identity development in the decision-making process. This is challenging for claimants with a different understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity, as the state may require an explicit statement and proof of a particular understanding of sexual or gender identity formation to grant them refugee status. This allows for misinterpretations and accusations of false claims and may cause further challenges with late disclosures of one's SOGI identity because of shame or fear (Murray, 2011).

The analysis demonstrates that these asylum procedures and credibility assessments result in SOGI refugees often having to negotiate and advocate for their rights. This is supported by the literature exploring SOGI refugees in the West (Murray, 2014; Marnell et al., 2020). This research also supports Marnell et al.'s (2020) findings that SOGI refugees' engagement with the state often involves feelings of fear, frustration and hopelessness due to the constant sense of battle to receive support and advocate for themselves. The intersecting identities of SOGI refugees contribute to their vulnerability and weaken their ability to exercise their rights (Marnell et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the participant's narratives highlight their struggle to navigate the systemic structures, which often left them in a state of loss of control and uncertainty. Although many asylum applicants experience the lengthy, arduous nature of the asylum procedures and the difficulties in the credibility of past traumas within a context of mistrust and suspicion (Bohmer & Shuman, 2008), SOGI claimants have the unique struggle of narrating extremely private experiences (Hertoghs & Schinkel, 2018). This takes place within a system that does not merit

empathy; does not provide the claimants with resources or information about the different procedures, such as the interview questions; and provides minimal to no support, as shown in our study and others, such as Murray (2014). Additionally, the literature suggests that the lack of control over SOGI refugees' visibility management due to the asylum procedures can cause further distress, making it harder for them to return to their home country (Dhoset, 2017).

In addition to the challenges of the asylum procedures, the analysis indicates that SOGI refugees experience similar post-migration difficulties to other refugee populations, such as a lack of employment rights and difficulties with housing security and food (Krahn et al., 2000; Li et al., 2016; Porter & Haslam, 2005). Moreover, SOGI refugees experience further challenges due to minority stressors and their intersecting identities, resulting in their unique needs (Golember et al., 2020). For example, the need for safe housing that is LGBTQ+ or SOGI migrant inclusive to avoid potential discrimination. The lack of an adequate systemic supportive structure, communication, and assistance from the Home Office often leaves SOGI refugees turning to non-governmental organisations for help. The analysis shows that the overall experience with NGOs is positive. However, it also supports the literature in indicating that SOGI refugees may experience homophobia and racism and challenges in accessing adequate support. This was discussed in relation to non-intersectional organisations that did not understand or meet the unique needs of SOGI refugees (Munro et al., 2013; Golembe et al., 2020).

These systemic challenges, along with the lengthy, complex asylum procedures and minimal resources and communication between the Home Office and SOGI refugees, negatively impact the mental health of this population. Therefore, the sexuality and refugee identities that become more visible or emerge during the migration process to the UK render this population more vulnerable to various forms of systemic oppression in the UK.

4.2 Category 2: Migration Hardships

This category explores the challenges that SOGI refugees experience beyond asylum procedures. Correspondingly to other research, the analysis of this study showed that SOGI refugees share similar post-migration difficulties as the overall refugee population. This includes the lack of employment rights, housing difficulties, discrimination, the struggle to integrate and the resulting negative mental health outcome (Krahn et al., 2000; Li et al., 2016; Porter & Haslam, 2005). This analysis supports the broader literature in exploring the additional challenges that SOGI refugees face, which result from their intersecting identities

and minority stressors (Golembe et al., 2020). This research aligns with the literature on minority stress as it discusses SOGI refugees' experience of discrimination in both pre- and post-migration (Alessi et al., 2018; Gowin et al., 2017; Kahn, 2015). The broader literature suggests that SOGI refugees may experience homophobia and racism both on an institutional and individual level (Munro et al., 2013). However, the participants in this study mainly reported hostility and discrimination towards their race, migrant or refugee identity rather than their sexuality or gender identity. Only one participant referred to experiences of homophobia within the UK. Similarly to Marnell et al.'s (2020) research, the reports of discrimination and fear due to race, ethnicity and refugee identity in this study were combined with positive reflections on the UK's more inclusive and tolerant approach to LGBTQ+ rights and people. This supports the narrative of the 'happy migrant' who flees their 'uncivilised' and 'homophobic' society to arrive in a more 'civilised' and 'inclusive' one (Dhoest, 2017). The literature suggests that this narrative may be influenced by the script that the state considers acceptable during the credibility assessments (Murray, 2011). Learning to narrate one's story and behave in a way that fits the SOGI refugee migration to liberation narrative may be a pivotal tactic to a successful claim and more stability (Murray, 2014). Although I aim to recognise the hegemonic and homonationalist discourses, this study cannot verify how much the asylum procedure influences the participants' narrative. Despite this, the findings suggest that SOGI refugees initially flee their home country to escape discrimination and persecution but often find that their experience of violence and discrimination may persist in the UK. This is in line with the broader literature on discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals (Golembe et al., 2020), discrimination against refugees (Montgomery & Foldspang, 2007), and discrimination against SOGI refugees (Alessi et al., 2018; Gowin et al., 2017; Kahn, 2015).

One of the unique findings of this study is how the above-mentioned struggle for acceptance and inclusion contributes to the challenges in SOGI refugees' integration within their host country. The analysis of this research suggests that the persistence of discrimination, hostility and prejudices within the UK impacts the well-being of SOGI refugees and hinders their ability to integrate and settle in their host country. In addition, some participants expressed that language and cultural barriers further impede their integration process. The lack of resources and information provided to forced migrants leads to challenges in accessing services and comfortably navigating legal and social frameworks in their host country. This can contribute to isolation, frustration, and lack of integration. This finding is supported by research on the general refugee population's struggle with acculturation and integration (Phillimore, 2011).

Furthermore, the analysis suggests that these diverse and complex challenges may put SOGI refugees at a higher risk of developing mental health issues in comparison to heterosexual

refugees (Mustanski et al., 2016) or non-refugee LGBTQ+ individuals (Porter & Haslam, 2005). This finding is also supported by the minority stress framework, which shows that SOGI refugees' have a higher risk of developing mental health difficulties due to their intersecting identities and pre-and post-migration stressors and traumas (Valentine & Shipherd, 2018; Golembe et al., 2020). The participants in this study explained that their experiences of discrimination, violence and uncertainty throughout their migration experience contributed to symptoms of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress and substance use. This is similar to other studies exploring SOGI refugees in the West who reported high levels of mental health concerns associated with discrimination, socio-economic hardships and internalised stigma (Cerezo, 2016; Ogunbajo et al., 2018; Golembe et al., 2020). The literature suggests that SOGI refugees experience more distressing experiences than the general refugee or LGBTQ+ populations due to their intersecting marginalised identities (Golembe et al., 2020). Their intersecting identities result in unique minority stressors such as internalised stigma, diverse societal forms of discrimination and hostility towards their intersecting identities, and shame and concealment of their identities (Meyer 1995, 2003). Moreover, Hopkins et al.'s (2017) study found that SOGI refugees had a higher incidence of suicidal ideations than the general refugee population. This study, similar to Golembe et al.'s (2015) research, highlights that the experiences of discrimination, violence and hostility that SOGI refugees experience in their host country compound the mental health distress they experienced prior to their migration due to traumas resulting from persecution and discrimination in their home countries. Golembe et al. (2015) suggest that these challenges result in the subjective worsening of SOGI refugees' mental health throughout their migration. Therefore, the well-being of SOGI refugees' does not immediately improve but may worsen after resettlement (Alessi et al., 2018a)

Research on refugee complex trauma suggests that the trauma that refugees experience is long-lasting and negatively impactful on their inner and outer selves (Steel et al., 2006). Moreover, George (2010) suggests that it is crucial to acknowledge the context of such traumas by recognising the colonial policies and socio-political powers that contribute to the construction of refugees' traumatic experiences. In the case of SOGI refugees, it involves recognising the social, political, and historic structures that contribute to criminalising same-sex relations and gender diversity in certain countries. More specifically, in the UK, this also entails recognising the impact of colonial history on queer migration and the historicisation of queer culture (Murray, 2014). This may be especially relevant for SOGI refugees who originate from commonwealth countries that continue to criminalise consensual same-sex relationships and gender diversity. This is because these criminalising laws often stem from colonial ruling. Research shows that British colonies are more likely to enact laws that criminalise homosexual

conduct compared to other colonies or states (Han & O'Mahoney, 2014). Based on the analysis of this research, the oppression that SOGI refugees are subjected to expands beyond the UK asylum system as it is also embedded in the broader culture in the UK. Therefore, mental health providers must account for the complexity of the multiple unique factors within the migratory journey of SOGI refugees when addressing their mental health and well-being (George, 2010).

4.3 Category 3: Support

This study has found that SOGI refugees experience many complex stressors throughout their migration to the UK. This includes navigating asylum procedures, facing discrimination, social isolation, and unique mental health challenges. However, the findings also suggest that access to support tailored for SOGI refugees can mitigate some of these hardships. Minimal literature has explored support tailored explicitly to SOGI refugees. Therefore, this study expands on this research by suggesting that SOGI refugee-specific organisations and support may be essential for the mental health and well-being of SOGI refugees. This is because they often have limited family and community support, little contact with other SOGI/LGBTQ+ people, and experience intersecting forms of minority stress and marginalisation (Logie et al., 2016). The findings of this study indicate that community and mental health support, as well as the reciprocity of support, contribute to the improved mental health and well-being of SOGI refugees by effectively addressing their structural and intra/interpersonal needs.

Despite facing initial limitations and difficulties in accessing and becoming aware of SOGI refugee organisations and support networks, all participants described how their mental health and well-being improved after attending these groups. The participants explained that being a part of a group that felt safe and accepting gave them hope, a space to share their hardships and gain support, and a sense of community, which alleviated feelings of isolation. They also expressed that this gave them a sense of belonging to a community in the UK. Logie et al.'s (2016) research supports these findings by suggesting that having a space free from discrimination and judgement is essential for SOGI refugees to feel at ease in their intersecting identities. This study confirms the literature on the positive influence of support networks and SOGI refugee communities in fostering greater acceptance of their intersecting identities, specifically their SOGI identity (Reading & Rubin, 2011; Logie et al., 2016). This study suggests that feelings of belonging, safety, and openness, as well as learning about inclusion and unlearning internalised homophobia through community support, are connected to the increase in self-acceptance. Therefore, by increasing self-acceptance and self-realisation,

reducing isolation, and building a sense of belonging, SOGI refugee-specific organisations and groups influence inter and intrapersonal well-being.

Moreover, this study suggests that participants found it fulfilling to reciprocate the support they received by giving back and sharing their knowledge with others. This aligns with the literature that explores the cyclical relationship between receiving support to overcome migration challenges and the desire to offer support to others facing similar adversities (Logie et al., 2016). This study builds on this research by suggesting that the desire to give back may also be associated with the need for a sense of purpose. The lack of employment rights leads to a surplus of unoccupied time and isolation, prompting SOGI refugees to seek volunteer opportunities to give back and contribute to the well-being of others. It is important to note that the refugee identity that SOGI refugees obtain from their migration to the UK results in their lack of employment rights. Therefore, SOGI refugees need to navigate oppressive systems to find a sense of purpose.

This study also explored the importance of therapy in improving mental health and well-being among SOGI refugees. The literature suggests that the whole migration journey is fraught with mental health consequences, often leading to long-lasting trauma (George, 2010). Therefore, accessing mental health support that meets the unique intersecting needs of SOGI refugees is crucial for their well-being. Most of the participants accessed group therapy through SOGI refugee organisations. They expressed that group therapy helped them process and gain tools to better cope with their mental health challenges, such as anxiety, depression and substance use. In line with the literature, this study showed that group therapy facilitated the participant's sense of belonging and the development of a social support network, resulting in improved mental health (Beaudry, 2018; Logie et al., 2016). Research suggests that therapeutic support is particularly beneficial for this population as their family and community members are often involved in their persecution. This may lead to difficulties finding safe and trustworthy support systems, leading to worsened isolation (Herman, 1992; Shidlo & Ahola, 2013). Therefore, group therapy can help SOGI refugees establish a feeling of community and shared empowerment, a powerful resistance against the oppressive forces of hetero-cisnormativity they often encounter (Beaudry, 2018).

Furthermore, the participants in this study highlight the need for culturally competent, trauma-informed and affirmative approaches in therapy. This allowed them to feel better understood and more validated. It provided them with tailored tools to cope with external and internal factors, such as practical and emotional skills for managing asylum claim procedures. The literature suggests that a culturally competent, affirmative, trauma-informed framework can

support SOGI refugees' unique hardships throughout their asylum procedures (Alessi & Kahn, 2017). For example, the credibility assessments of SOGI claimants may put them at risk of re-traumatisation and a sense of loss of autonomy and control. A trauma-informed approach is, therefore, suitable as it ensures safety and avoids interventions and actions that could be re-traumatising (Alessi & Kahn, 2017). Despite the benefits of therapy, the participants also expressed that access to mental health services for SOGI refugees remains challenging and scant. Therefore, future research must explore how to facilitate better access to resources and mental health services within this population.

4.4 Category 4: Building Knowledge and Experience

This research found that a key part of the migration journey of SOGI refugees involves learning. The participants describe that upon their arrival in the UK, they begin their learning experience of how to be and what it means to be a SOGI refugee in the UK. This study demonstrates that SOGI refugees' support throughout their migration process facilitates their acquisition of new knowledge. The participants described that SOGI/ LGBTQ+ groups and organisations increased their knowledge and access to resources and opportunities. This highlights the importance of support and community in the migration experience of SOGI refugees. The participants expressed that the support they received helped them learn how to navigate better and understand their sexuality and gender identity within their new context. Moreover, the participants expressed a sense of community, belonging and safety within these groups, where they experienced an absence of judgment. The shared experiences among the group fostered a greater sense of self-acceptance and self-affirmation in the participants. The participants expressed that the groups provided support beyond learning about gender and sexuality. These groups facilitated the knowledge sharing and provision of strategies and information for better understanding and negotiation of legal, employment, housing and health-related issues. Therefore, this study confirms the findings of the broader literature, such as Logie et al.'s (2016) research, which demonstrated that the support that SOGI refugees receive provides social and structural benefits that may contribute to intra and inter-personal improvements such as a sense of belonging, self-realisation, and self-acceptance. Additionally, it highlights how knowledge acquisition provides SOGI refugees with the tools to resist better and navigate the oppressive systems they encounter throughout their migration to the UK.

The participant's narratives indicate that access to emotional and informational support about navigating the immigration process helped them feel more contained and in control. The participants expressed that the emotional support helped them better manage their mental

health and well-being by reducing stress and feelings of isolation. Moreover, access to practical support such as resources and legal aid through SOGI/LGBTQ+ refugee groups made the participants feel more prepared for the asylum procedures and helped them build a stronger claim. This helped the participants have a more likely chance of a successful claim and avoid the hardships of having to appeal their case. Moreover, the information provided by these groups allowed the participants to be better informed about their housing, healthcare and employment rights in the UK and the support they can access from the Home Office. This access to information gave participants a deeper understanding of their refugee identity and a sense of agency over engaging with this part of themselves. This was evident in the participants' work and education development in the UK. By understanding their employment rights, the participants were empowered to actively seek avenues that offered them a sense of purpose and fulfilment. This enabled them to engage in volunteer opportunities and effectively advocate for their employment rights. Moreover, they could access resources for developing their employability skills and education through different schemes and scholarships available to refugees and migrants in the UK. While previous literature has found that SOGI refugees have a sense of reciprocity with the support they receive and give back through volunteering (Logie et al., 2016), a distinct contribution of this study was that the migration experience of the SOGI refugees seemed to influence their career interests. Many participants expressed a desire to pursue further education and training in professions such as advocacy and support work which is focused on the SOGI refugee community. The participants explained that their experience of the migration process in the UK and their increased awareness of the gaps in the system and the hardships that this population face enhanced their desire to support and raise awareness about the needs and challenges faced by this community.

The participants expressed that access to SOGI/ LGBTQ+ refugee-specific groups and organisations helped increase their knowledge of what it means to be LGBTQ+ and of LGBTQ+ rights and inclusion in the UK. Similar to Logie et al.'s 2016 study, this research found that this increased awareness helped SOGI refugees feel a greater sense of self-acceptance and realisation. This was due to a sense of belonging, acceptance, non-judgement, de-stigmatisation and shared experience in the groups. Participants expressed that they could self-explore and be curious about their SOGI identity through these groups as they were a safe and non-judgemental space free of stigma and discrimination. The participants explained that this was crucial in unlearning the internalised stigma and shame they experienced in their past due to the discrimination they were subjected to and the criminalisation of their SOGI identity. Moreover, they expressed that this was also part of learning to be more open and feeling safer publicly sharing this part of their identity. This latter process is particularly complex

due to the credibility assessment, whereby SOGI refugees are required to publicly share their SOGI identity in a manner deemed acceptable by the state. However, this requirement can pose a significant challenge as SOGI refugees may not feel entirely ready, secure and comfortable doing so, given their tendency to conceal these aspects of their identity in their home country due to the risks of persecution and discrimination (Murray, 2011). Despite these challenges, Logie et al. (2016) found that the SOGI support groups helped SOGI refugees overcome past experiences of stigma and discrimination and feel more self-acceptance.

In this study, although the participants expressed not fully understanding the LGBTQ+ identity model upon their arrival in the UK, they all used Western terminology to refer to their sexual identity categories, such as 'gay', 'lesbian' and 'homosexual'. This suggests, similar to Lee and Brotman's (2011) conclusion, that SOGI refugees may identify and be aware of the Western LGBTQ+ identity model before they migrate to the West. However, all of the participants in this study had already familiarised themselves with the asylum procedure in the UK at the time of the interview. Therefore, unlike Dhoest's (2017) study, which includes undocumented migrants, this study cannot confirm the influence of the asylum procedure on the participants' self-identification with the Western identity models. The broader literature suggests that utilising the 'correct' terminology, identifying with the Western LGBTQ+ identity model, and providing a coherent narrative are decisive parts of the asylum procedure. Therefore, the literature suggests that SOGI refugees may internalise these identity narratives and models throughout their 'learning process' throughout their asylum procedures (Dhoest, 2017). Nevertheless, as the participants in this study had familiarised themselves with the asylum process, it cannot identify whether or how the participants may have refined their narrative or self-presentation while going through the asylum procedures. Additionally, since the LGBTQ+ identity model has now been globally spread, it may be less appropriate to name it as purely 'Western'. Despite this, the literature has criticised the imposition of Western conceptions of sexuality and gender in asylum procedures (Dhoest, 2017). The literature discusses this critically by highlighting the context of homonationalist, hegemonic and 'happy migrant' narratives, which arise throughout the asylum procedures, and enforce specific scripts built on homonormative and ethnocentric definitions of sexual orientation and gender identity (Luibhéid, 2008; Miller, 2005; Murray, 2014). Despite this, the positive narratives about being LGBTQ+ in the UK in this study should not be disregarded entirely as a reproduction of homonationalist and hegemonic discourses. I suggest that these narratives represent part of the lived realities of SOGI refugees in the UK within a broader international discourse of sexuality and gender. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the West may appropriate these narratives and utilise them to assert moral superiority, potentially overshadowing the problematic forces inherent in the asylum procedures.

4.5 Category 5: Developing an Identity

The core category of this study is the developing identities of SOGI refugees as a result of their migration to the UK. This study highlights how the multiple factors of migration and the asylum system render certain identities of SOGI refugees more visible. For instance, the credibility assessment and other asylum procedures focus on how sexual and gender identity can be considered a core element of an individual's sense of self. This is due to the asylum procedure's intention of bringing a person's sexual and gender identity into light and producing more concrete narratives and visual accounts of these identities. Additionally, the participants of this study highlight that they did not consider themselves a refugee before they arrived in the UK. Therefore, the identity of 'refugee' is a new identity for these individuals which is imposed or results from the migration process into the UK government's immigration structure. As Murray (2014) highlights, these multiple forces that shape and influence the identities of these individuals undermine the notion of a singular representation within the category of 'SOGI refugee'.

The intersectional theory highlights that SOGI refugees hold multiple intersecting identities, shaping their experience and sense of self in the UK. This study highlights that SOGI refugees must manage similar post-migration hardships to the general refugee population, such as housing, employment rights, and the arduous asylum process (Li et al., 2016; Porter & Haslam, 2005). In addition, SOGI refugees must face added challenges and inequalities due to their intersecting identities, such as minority stressors and discrimination towards their different identities (e.g. experiencing homophobia and/or racism when trying to access support services) (Golembe et al., 2020; Kahn, 2015). However, these narratives of hardship were interwoven with ones of survival, freedom, and empowerment. This sheds light on the complexity of the experiences of SOGI refugees, highlighting the link between privilege and disadvantage. The diverse power systems that SOGI refugees encounter in the UK shape their experiences of oppression and privilege in association to their sexual and refugee identities.

Similarly to Marnell et al.'s (2020) study, the interviews in this research highlight the participant's ability to claim their identities in powerful ways. Whilst participants expressed experiencing a sense of loss and adverse effects on their mental health because of their asylum process and migration with specific emphasis on their refugee identity, they concurrently expressed a sense of safety, self-acceptance, and self-realisation from their SOGI/ LGBTQ+ identity in the UK. This latter narrative was enforced by statements

highlighting the feelings of liberation, freedom, and safety in the UK due to state protection and the lack of ability to return to their home country due to a fear of persecution. Thus creating a clear distinction between a complicated past in their home country and an improved present in the UK. This narrative resonates strongly with the hegemonic narrative explored in the literature (Murray, 2014; Dhoest, 2017). Murray (2014) highlights the importance of exercising caution when engaging with narratives of queer migrants due to the risk of perpetuating the dominant narratives of "freedom" and "liberation" or reducing the complex experience of individuals with intricate experiences and identities to stereotypes. In the context of the UK, this risks reinscribing nationalist narratives of the UK as a land of superiority, democracy and freedom whilst erasing its colonial history as well as the racial, sexual, gender, language and cultural barriers that migrants confront (Luibhéid, 2005). Therefore, I intend to acknowledge that these hegemonic narratives may influence how the participants constructed and recounted their own life stories. I postulate that this might be due to the interviews being similar to the Home Office's and the participant's knowledge about the importance of replicating the homonationalist hegemonic narrative for a successful claim. SOGI refugees often become adept at shaping their narratives to conform to the expectations of the state, bureaucrats, and researchers (Marnell et al., 2020). This can be understood through Collin and Bilge's (2016) research on oppression, which addresses notions of power, inequality and social justice and recognises how inequality comes to exist through the more powerful oppressing the less powerful. Thus highlighting how SOGI refugees might adjust their self-presentation as a way of navigating and resisting these systems of oppression.

Moreover, it is essential to highlight the intentionality of SOGI refugee claimants pursuing the UK as their safe haven to move away from the hegemonic narrative of 'liberation to migration'. Although the participants expressed feelings of freedom and safety in the UK, they also expressed a lack of awareness of the policies, attitudes and laws in the UK, suggesting that they had no prior knowledge of how or whether they would experience freedom, safety and protection upon arrival. Therefore, migration to the UK constitutes a complexity of decisions, actions and movement.

Furthermore, although the oppressive asylum procedures serve as a lens through which SOGI refugees may come to understand and interpret their sexuality and gender identities, the support network and community that the participants forged in the UK contributed to the self-realisation and acceptance of their different intersecting identities. Golembe et al. (2020) suggest that self-acceptance and a support network may mitigate internalised stigma and negative thoughts about one's identities. Whilst I acknowledge the influence of hegemonic narratives, it is also essential to recognise that the participants highlight that their intersecting

identities are a key element in their lived reality of the migration process due to the conflicting sense of loss and gain they attain from their different identities. Similarly to Marnell et al.'s (2020) study, the conflicting experiences of liberation and hardship due to the intersecting identities of SOGI refugees highlight that their search for safety, security and freedom remains unfulfilled.

4.6 Strengths, Implications and Recommendations

This research sought to contribute to Counselling Psychology by exploring the migration journey of SOGI refugees in the UK. Specifically, it aimed to explore how their identities evolved during migration. The objective was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of SOGI refugees, focusing on their encounters with prejudice and oppression in their social environment, which shape their identity development. By exploring the mental health and identity development of SOGI refugees, I hoped to shed light on some of this population's social justice concerns and challenges to help raise awareness among mental health professionals and policymakers. For instance, shedding light on the implications of credibility assessments and the added challenges that SOGI refugees face during their asylum process due to their intersecting identities may lead to policy revisions and broader social change in the UK. Moreover, by better understanding how these individuals experience their SOGI identities, psychologists can begin to challenge the problematic elements of asylum procedures in the UK. Moreover, psychologists can contribute to the evolution of immigration systems that do not promote homonationalist and hegemonic narratives.

The findings from this study also assist mental health professionals in better understanding how the intersectional identities of SOGI refugees make them highly vulnerable. This research highlights how the different structural elements of the asylum procedure, discrimination, struggle with integration and unique mental health challenges that SOGI refugees face during their migration to the UK shape the development of their identities. This information can support service providers and mental health professionals in providing more cultural and trauma-informed practices that account for the unique minority stressors, experiences and needs of SOGI refugees. Moreover, mental health services and support groups can utilise the findings of this study to increase the accessibility of their services. Evidence from this study can also provide the basis for future research on need-oriented policy amendments, such as how to make resources more available to this population and how to account for their unique needs in allocating housing, employment rights, and access to services. The findings of this study also highlight the protective factors in developing the identities of SOGI refugees. This

information can be helpful for mental health professionals in acknowledging and reinforcing the strengths of this population to help them better cope and manage the hardships of the migration process. For example, the findings suggest that community and support networks help mitigate specific minority stressors. This could be facilitated using SOGI refugee-specific group counselling, as (Golembe et al., 2020) also suggest.

This study was the first in-depth psychology research on SOGI refugees' identity development experiences in the UK. Therefore, this study has the unique strength of exploring the personal narratives of identity development of SOGI refugees in the UK. Therefore, this study's findings offer valuable insights that can inform future research. It is essential to prioritise further research that emphasises the mental health needs of SOGI refugees. The mental health field should conduct more empirical research to enhance the understanding of how to effectively support SOGI refugees. This research needs to account for how the distinctive structural, institutional and systemic factors related to migration policies, healthcare systems and cultural and political contexts shape SOGI refugees' perception and navigation of their migration experiences. Additionally, more in-depth research is needed on how SOGI refugees undergo the process of self-acceptance in the post-migration phase whilst facing social and systemic discrimination and rejection. By gaining such insights, counselling psychologists and other mental health professionals can be better equipped to support SOGI refugees by tailoring their interventions to the specific contextual factors that influence their mental health and well-being.

4.7 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Despite this study's strengths and unique findings, it also has several limitations. Due to the practical restrictions of this study, it only included English-speaking participants. Considering the diversity of the SOGI refugee population, this linguistic barrier limited the inclusion of more diverse individuals who may experience the development of their identities differently. For example, the inclusion of individuals with less exposure to Western LGBTQ+ culture who may experience additional struggles with integration and navigation of the asylum procedures. Additionally, the exclusion criteria of high PhQ-9 scores eliminated the agency of individuals to choose to participate despite the potential mental health risks of the re-traumatisation of this study. Considering the intersecting vulnerabilities of this population, which results in their poor mental health and well-being, this criteria may have disregarded participants who may have experienced the development of their identities and the migration process differently. Moreover, this study included participants who have claimed asylum at least once in the UK.

Although it included participants who did not have a successful claim yet, it did not include undocumented migrants. Future studies should further explore the experience of undocumented SOGI migrants to understand better the influence of asylum procedures on developing the identities of SOGI refugees. This would deepen our understanding of the influence of asylum procedures on the replication of homonationalist and hegemonic narratives. Finally, the study sample mainly consisted of gay and lesbian cis-gender refugees. Neither bisexual nor gender queer individuals were part of this sample. This gap exists in the broader literature (Lee & Brotman, 2011; Tschalaer, 2020). Further research should address these within-group differences by specifically investigating these sub-groups and expanding the diversity of the sample. This may further our understanding of the complex and nuanced aspects of the SOGI refugee experience.

4.8 Concluding Reflexivity

Throughout this research, similarly to any narrative, I decided to incorporate or omit content, discuss topics, and remain silent. I was informed by queer migration scholarships and theory, which led me to question and reflect on the uniqueness and individuality of the experience of sexual orientation and gender identity as a refugee category. Unlike other groups of refugees who claim asylum on the basis of cultural, political and religious reasons, who may share a collective identity, the nature of SOGI refugees challenges the attempt at a neatly defined single category of sexual orientation and gender identity refugee. This is due to these identities' personal and intimate characteristics, which are not easily verifiable or always publicly visible. Queer migration scholarships framed my critiques and examinations of the homo- and heteronormative structures governing borders, movement, bodies and desires. This lens made me more aware of how these structures are perpetuated by bureaucratic institutions and reinforced by neoliberal, homonationalist, and capitalist discourses, as seen in mainstream media. This literature brought about different reflections and worries for me as I began to fear recreating the narrative of 'migration to liberation' in which the home country is represented as 'homophobic' and 'uncivilised' and the host country, the UK in this case, would be represented as 'civilised' and 'free'.

Moreover, utilising grounded theory as my research method brought about the worries of developing a fixed model or theory representing a 'straightforward' trajectory of identity development from 'closeted and repressed' to 'out and proud'. I found that I shared similar concerns to Jordan (2011), who reflected on:

How to write about persecution without othering cultures or countries as monolithically homophobic; how to write about the shifts and realignments in identity that occur with migration without reproducing a transnational version of the coming out story; how to ensure access to refugee protection for those facing homophobic or transphobic persecution, without reifying Western identity categories; how to represent the traumas that occur under persecution and precarious migration without fuelling a politics of rescue. (179–180)

My use of queer migration theory and research as a prism through which to explore the identity development of SOGI refugees was my effort to mitigate some of the challenges that arise from researching SOGI refugees from a Western perspective and within a Western institution. Despite this attempt, I still felt constrained by the practical limits of this research which restricted my ability to tangentially or more queerly explore the identity development of SOGI refugees. For example, I found that this research could not fully attend to the conflicting feelings that the participants had towards their country of origin and the life, family and friends they left behind. Not fully attending to such experiences risked contributing to the narrative of SOGI refugees purely being liberated and starting afresh in a free democratic nation, thus reinscribing a hegemonic colonial narrative. The varied experiences, motivations and identity shifts depicted in the few narratives explored in this research disrupt any attempt to define or represent the SOGI refugee within a singular framework. Although I have produced a model to make sense of the overall identity development of SOGI refugees, I recognise that I cannot explain the SOGI refugee experience simply, chronologically or linearly. The narratives of the participants that informed this model indicate that the migration experience in the UK encompasses a mixture of nuanced positive and negative factors that shape the identities of SOGI refugees. These narratives shaped my understanding of SOGI identity development which aligns with Ahmed et al. (2006), who highlighted that understanding processes of homing and migration necessitates acknowledging spatialised power dynamics that generate imbalanced differences of race, gender, sexuality and class, among other factors. I hope that this research can offer a distinct perspective that does justice to the participants, enabling a deeper understanding of the sexual, gender and refugee identity development of SOGI refugees in the UK.

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Appendices

- Advert for Participants
- Interview Schedule
- Follow-up Interview Schedule
- Information Sheet
- Consent Form
- Demographics Form
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Advert for Participants

Interview Schedule

- Can you tell me a bit about yourself and how you came to be an SOGI refugee in the UK?
    - *Could you describe to me your journey to this country?*
    - *How did you end up in the UK?*
    - *How long have you been in the UK?*
    - *At what stage of the asylum claim are you at?*
    - *How would you describe your experience of the different steps of the asylum claim?*
    - *How have you experienced receiving a decision on your status?*
    - *Were the reasons explained?*
    - *Has anything been strikingly positive or negative?*

- Can you tell me about your experience living in the UK as an SOGI refugee?
    - *How do you think your time in the UK has impacted you?*
    - *How do you think the asylum process impacted/changed you?*
    - *What are your thoughts on integrating into the society in UK?*
    - *Would you say you have built a network or community?*
    - *Do you see any differences in the way you see yourself/ live your life/ make sense of yourself and life since being in the UK?*

- Can you describe your experience of the asylum process and interview?
    - *Do you have any thoughts or feelings towards the way you experienced the interview or the questions you were asked?*
    - *Did you feel like you needed to change the language or the way you described yourself/experience to fit into the HO requirements?*
    - *Do you think any particular elements of your identity played a role in this decision?*

- Can you tell me how you experience and make sense of your LGBT/ SOGI refugee identity in the UK?
    - *How would you say your identity has developed or changed throughout the migration process as an LGBT individual?*
    - *How do you think your identity of refugee has played a role in your life in the UK?*
    - *How do you think your SOGI identity has played a role in your life in the UK?*

- o *How have you experienced the connection of these two parts of your identity?*
- o *Can you tell me how your experience in the UK differs from your experience in your country of origin?*
- o *Has the way you make sense of your identity changed throughout the migration process?*

- How would you define the identity label you identify with? Is it a big part of how you make sense of yourself? Has the language you've used or the way you make sense of this label changed over time and since being in the UK?

- Is there anything you wished went differently throughout your migration process?
  - o *Did you experience any particular difficulties or challenges throughout the migration process in the UK?*
  - o *Can you think of any sort of support you would benefit from throughout the migration process in the UK?*
  - o *Have you had any support from refugee or SOGI organisations?*

Follow-up Interview Schedule

- How have you experienced a sense of control or lack of throughout your migration process to the UK? (A sense of agency/ awareness of stages and steps of asylum claim/ time and waiting periods) How do you think this has impacted you?

- What relationships have you experienced power differences in? How do you make sense of the power differences you've experienced?

- What are the main things you've learnt throughout the migration process, and how do you think this changed you?
    - Can you describe the challenges in receiving support? What made it easier for you to gain support?

- How has your desire to support others changed throughout your migration process? What tools or knowledge have shaped your drive to support your community?

- What has contributed to your journey of self-exploration?

- What are your thoughts about your journey ahead in the UK as an LGBT refugee?
    - Anything you're looking forward to or worried about?

Information Sheet

How do the identities of Sexual Orientation and Gender Minority (SOGI) refugees develop as a result of the migration process in the UK?

Thank you for your interest in this research. Below you can find information regarding the study on SOGI refugees in the UK.

I am a Trainee Counselling Psychologist at London Metropolitan University and I am researching how SOGI refugees experience and make sense of the migration process in the UK. As there is little research on SOGI asylum claims in the UK, this research will allow for a better understanding of the lived experience of SOGI refugees in the UK. This gained insight will hopefully lead to social change and allow counselling psychologists to better support SOGI refugees.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You will take part in an interview during which you will be asked to share and explore your experience of the migration process in the UK. The interview will take approximately one hour and this will be audio recorded and strictly confidential.

In line with the Data Protection Act (1998) all electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer known and accessed only by the researcher and all hard paper data stored in a locked cabinet accessed only by the researcher. All data will be kept confidential and anonymised using pseudonyms and other identifying information removed from transcripts.

You have the right to leave the interview at any time and the opportunity to withdraw your data from the study until two weeks post-interview. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all data and information collected from you will be destroyed. If you wish to keep your data as part of the research, it will be kept securely for up to a maximum of 5 years in case of possible publication, after which it will be destroyed.

Please take the time in deciding whether or not you feel comfortable participating in this research as it involves exploring sensitive topics that may cause some difficult or distressing feelings in you. You will have the opportunity to discuss these feeling with the researcher after the interview. You will also be provided with a list of supportive organisations with their contact details.

Thank you for your time, if you have any further questions, you can contact me by email or mobile on: ZAS0325@my.londonmet.ac.uk.

If you have any further queries or concerns you can also contact my supervisor Dr Angela Loulopoulou at A.Loulopouloulondonmet.ac.uk

Consent Form

This form is designed to obtain your informed consent to take part in this research and that you have received satisfactory and sufficient information regarding the research

- I have read and fully understood the information sheet **(yes / no)**
- I have had the opportunity to discuss further questions related to the study and satisfied with the answers **(yes / no)**
- I understand that all information I reveal will be kept confidential **(yes / no)**
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study and at any time during the interview and up to two weeks following the interview **(yes / no)**
- I give consent for the researcher to record the interview and to use verbatim quotations from my interview in the writing up or publication of the study **(yes / no)**
- I understand that I will remain completely anonymous and my name and identity will not at any point be revealed and will be kept separate from the findings of the study **(yes / no)**
- I give my consent for the recording and transcript to be kept for up to a period of five years in case the study is published **(yes / no)**
- I agree to participate in the study as outlined to me **(yes / no)**

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read, understood and **circled yes to all the statements** outlined above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with information sheet.

Name of participant (print)　　　　　Date　　　　Signature of participant

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Name of researcher (print)　　　　　Date　　　　Signature of researcher

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Demographics Form

Age:

How would you describe your gender?

Do you have any preferred pronouns?

How would you describe your sexual orientation?

Do you have any preferred language to describe yourself, your gender or your sexual orientation? If yes, please describe below.

How would you describe your Ethnicity?

Country of origin:

Patient Health Questionnaire- 9 (PHq-9)

PATIENT HEALTH QUESTIONNAIRE - 9 (PHQ - 9)				
Over the last 2 weeks, on how many days have you been bothered by any of the following problems? *(Please circle your answer)*	Not at all	Several Days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
1 Little interest or pleasure in doing things	0	1	2	3
2 Feeling down, depressed or hopeless	0	1	2	3
3 Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much	0	1	2	3
4 Feeling tired or having little energy	0	1	2	3
5 Poor appetite or over-eating	0	1	2	3
6 Feeling bad about yourself – or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down	0	1	2	3
7 Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television	0	1	2	3
8 Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed, or the opposite – being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual	0	1	2	3
9 Thoughts that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way	0	1	2	3

FOR OFFICE CODING   (0) + (   ) + (   ) + (   )

Total = _____

If you have checked off any problems, how difficult have these problems made it for you to do your work, take care of things at home, or get along with other people?	Not difficult at all ☐	Somewhat difficult ☐	Very difficult ☐	Extremely difficult ☐

Debrief Form

I would like to thank you for taking part in my research which looks at how SOGI refugees develop their identities as a result of the migration process in the UK. In this study you were asked a number of questions about your asylum claim experience and SOGI refugee identity.

Having audio recorded this interview, I will now make a transcript of the recording and analyse it. This will hopefully further the understanding of the SOGI refugee experience of the migration process in the UK, allowing for the provision of better support to SOGI refugees, and the creation of social change.

You can find a list of SOGI support groups and organisations with their contact details at the bottom of this form.

If you have any further questions about the study or you wish to withdraw your data from the study, you may do so at any time over the following two weeks by contacting me on: ZAS0325@my.londonmet.ac.uk

If you have any further queries, concerns or complaints you can also contact my supervisor Dr. Angela Loulopoulou at: A.Loulopouloulondonmet.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my research.

<u>General Asylum Support and Advice</u>

Asylum Aid/ Migrants Resource Centre

Website: http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/

Telephone: (020) 7354 9264
Email: advice@migrants.org.uk

Forrest Medico-Legal Services

Website: http://forrestmls.org/

Telephone: +44 (0) 7930 363425

Email: mlrenquiries@gmail.com

Free Movement

Website: https://www.freemovement.org.uk/

Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRA)

Website: http://www.nicras.btck.co.uk

Location: Belfast
Telephone: 028 9024 6699
Email: info@nicras.org.uk

Scottish Refugee Council

Website: http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk

Location: Glasgow
Telephone: 0141 248 9799
Email: info@scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk

UKLGIG affiliated solicitors

Website: http://uklgig.org.uk/?page_id=100

LGBTI* Asylum Support

Lesbian Immigration Support Group (LISG)

Website: http://lesbianimmigrationsupportgroup.blogspot.co.uk/

Location: Manchester
Telephone: 07503 351922
Email: lisg.manchester@yahoo.co.uk;

Many Hands One Heart

Website: http://www.sahir.org.uk/partnership-projects/lgbt-asylum-many-hands-one-heart/

Location: Liverpool

Reach Out Leeds

Website: http://www.reachoutleeds.org/

Location: Leeds
Telephone: 07707809925
Email: jess.macintyre@reachoutleeds.org

Stonewall

Website: https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/asylum/support-lgbt-asylum-seekers

Online database containing LGBT friendly solicitors and other useful contacts Telephone: 08000 502020
Email: info@stonewall.org.uk

UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group (UKLGIG)

Website: http://uklgig.org.uk/

 Location: London (and Birmingham)

Telephone: 020 7922 7811
Email: admin@uklgig.org.uk

Organisations that provide (free) psychological counselling

Freedom from Torture

Website: https://www.freedomfromtorture.org/
Birmingham: 0121 314 6825; westmidlands@freedomfromtorture.org

Glasgow: 0141 420 3161; scotland@freedomfromtorture.org

London: 020 7697 7777
Manchester: 0161 236 5744; northwest@freedomfromtorture.org

Newcastle: 0191 261 5825; northeast@freedomfromtorture.org

Yorkshire and Humberside (based in Leeds); 01138879502

Helen Bamber Foundation

Website: http://www.helenbamber.org/

Location: London

Telephone: 020 3058 2020
Email: referrals@helenbamber.org

LGBT Foundation

Website: https://lgbt.foundation/get-support/lgf-intake-and-triage-service/

Location: Manchester

Telephone: 0345 3 30 30 30
Email: referrals@lgbt.foundation

London Friend

Website: http://londonfriend.org.uk/get-support/counselling/

Location: London

Telephone: 020 7833 1674
Email: office@londonfriend.org.uk

Metro Centre

Website: www.metrocentreonline.org/mental-health/counselling/

Locations: Ashford, Colchester, London
Telephone: 020 7160 0949
Email: heelah@metrocentreonline.org

Refugee Council

Website https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk
Location: Birmingham, Leeds, London, Luton

Telephone: 020 7346 6700

Email: birmingham.therapeutic@refugeecouncil.org.uk;

leeds.therapeutic@refugeecouncil.org.uk; london.therapeutic@refugeecouncil.org.uk;

luton.therapeutic@refugeecouncil.org.uk

Refugee Mental Health and Wellbeing Portal for Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Health and Social Care Professionals

Website: https://www.uel.ac.uk/schools/psychology/research/refugee-mental-health-and-wellbeing-portal

Refugee Therapy Centre

Website: http://www.refugeetherapy.org.uk

Location: London

Telephone: 07828 049 099

Email: info@refugeetherapy.org.uk

Distress Protocol

This protocol has been devised to deal with the possibility that some participants may become distressed and/or agitated during their involvement in the present research study on the experiences of the SOGI refugee migration process. Although participants do not necessarily belong to a clinical population, they might experience psychological distress due to the nature of the topics discussed in the interview.

The researcher is a trainee counselling psychologist at London Metropolitan University and has experience in managing situations where distress occurs because of her clinical training in counselling psychology. Below, a three-step protocol is devised, detailing signs of distress that the researcher will look out for with action to take at each stage. It is not expected that extreme distress will occur, or that the relevant action will become necessary.

Mild distress:

Signs to look out for:

1) Tearfulness
2) Difficulty speaking
3) Participant becomes distracted, restless or annoyed

Action to take:

1) Stop the interview and ask the participant if they are happy to continue
2) Offer them time to pause and compose themselves
3) Remind them they can stop at any time if they wish

Severe distress:

Signs to look out for:

1) Uncontrolled crying, incoherent speech
2) Panic (hyperventilation, shaking)
3) Severe agitation
4) Aggression and hostility (physical or verbal)
5) Intrusive thoughts of any traumatic event

Action to take:

1) The researcher will intervene to terminate the interview/experiment.
2) The research must begin the debrief

3) Relaxation techniques will be suggested to help regulate breathing and bodily tension.
4) The researcher will express understanding of the participants' distress and offer reassurance
5) The participant is given the option of a gentle guided discovery of their thoughts and feelings using the researcher's counselling psychology skills
6) The researcher will suggest that any unresolved should be discussed with mental health professionals
7) Details of counselling/therapeutic services available will be offered to participants
8) If the researcher has concerns for the participant's or others' safety, the participant is informed of the researcher's duty to breach confidentiality.
9) If immediate concern or danger arises, call 999.

Ethical Approval

Feedback from Ethics Review Panel

	Approved	*Feedback where further work required*
Section A	X	
Section B	X	
Section C	X	
Date of approval	17/12/2021	
NB: The Researcher should be notified of decision within <u>two </u>weeks of the submission of the application. A copy should be sent to the Research and Postgraduate Office.		
Signature of RERP chair	C Chandler 17Dec2021	

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UNIVERSITY

Zalfa Stevenson <zas0325@my.londonmet.ac.uk>

Fwd: Zalfa Stevenson Ethics Application form to review and approve

Angela Loulopoulou <A.Loulopoulou@londonmet.ac.uk>   17 December 2021 at 12:11
To: Zalfa Lauren Stevenson <ZAS0325@my.londonmet.ac.uk>

Hello Zalfa,

Please find attached your fully approved ethics form the University ethics review committee. Keep this email and the form as confirmation of ethical approval.

Best wishes for the holidays,

Angela

Dr Angela I. Loulopoulou , AFBPsS
HCPC Registered Psychologist

Principal Lecturer in Counselling Psychology
Programme Director DProf Counselling Psychology and MSc Psychological Therapies

PG Psychology Ethics Chair
PG Psychology SSB Chair

Office days: Tuesday- Thursday

Please email me if you need to contact me as I am not often at my desk.

Contact details:
TM1-65
London Metropolitan University
166-220 Holloway Road
N7 8DB
London
Tel: 0207 133 2667

Support Letter

[Date]

To whom it may concern,

This is to confirm that **[name]** participated in my research study titled: A Grounded Theory Analysis of How the Identities of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Minority Refugees (SOGI) Develop as a result of the Migration Process in the UK. This research aims to improve our understanding of the lived experience of SOGI refugees in the UK. This gained insight will hopefully allow counselling psychologists to better support SOGI refugees.

To participate in the study, it is a requirement for the individual to identify as LGBTQ+ and have gone through the asylum claim process in the UK on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. By participating in this piece of research **[name]** volunteered to partake in an hour long semi-structured interview which took place on **[date].** In this interview **[name]** was asked to share and reflect on their experience of the migration process in the UK and their LGBTQ+ identity. The data from this interview will be used as part of my Counselling Psychology Doctoral Thesis at London Metropolitan University. All data in this research will be anonymised with the use of pseudonyms and omission of identifying information for confidentiality purposes.

Please feel free to contact me if you should require any further information.

Sincerely,

Zalfa Stevenson
Trainee Counselling Psychologist
London Metropolitan University
zas0325@my.londonmet.ac.uk

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Example of Diagramming

Example Drafts of Model
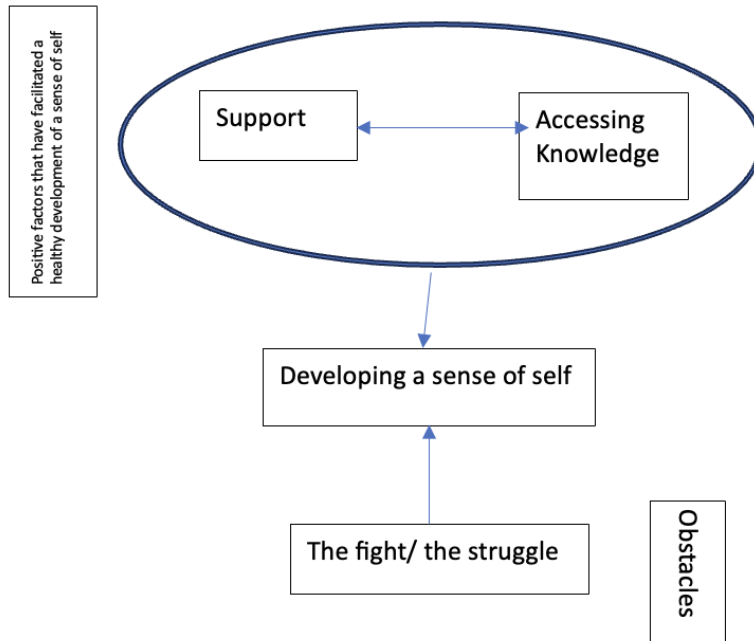
Examples of Developing Categories

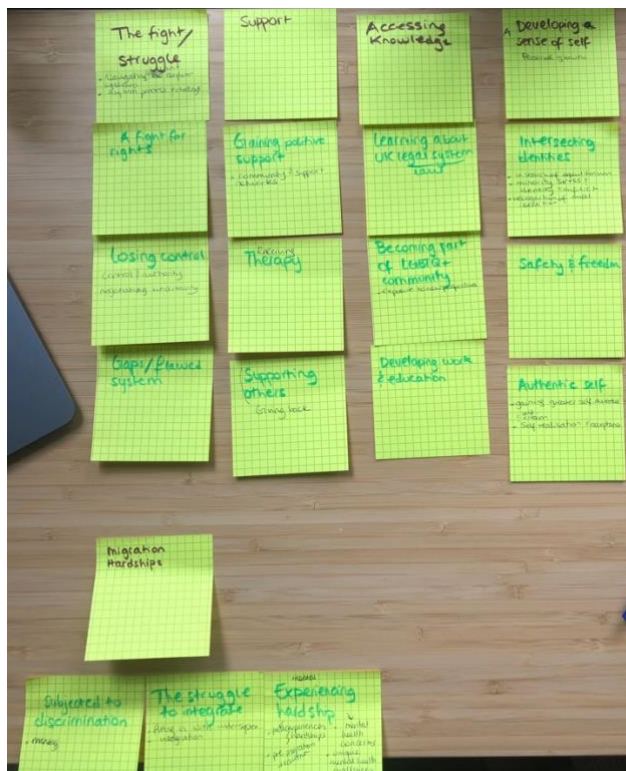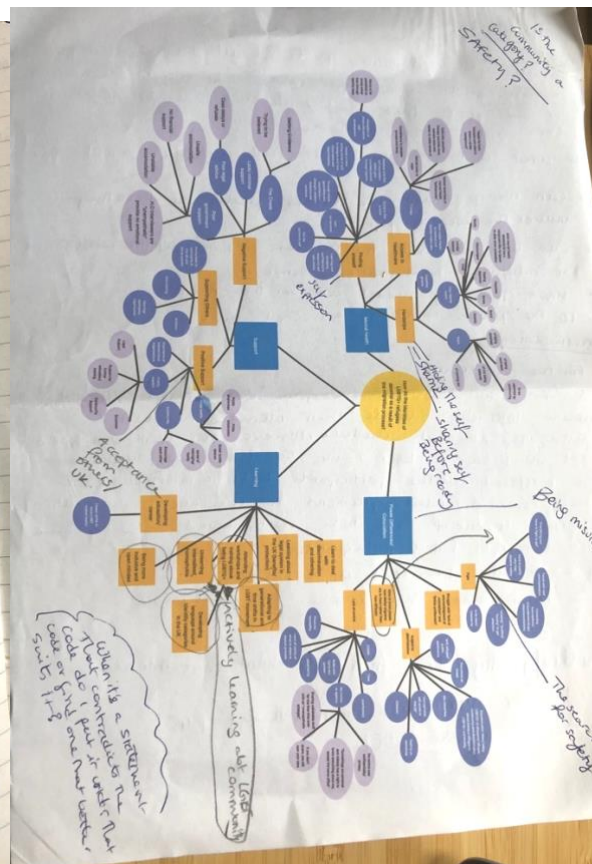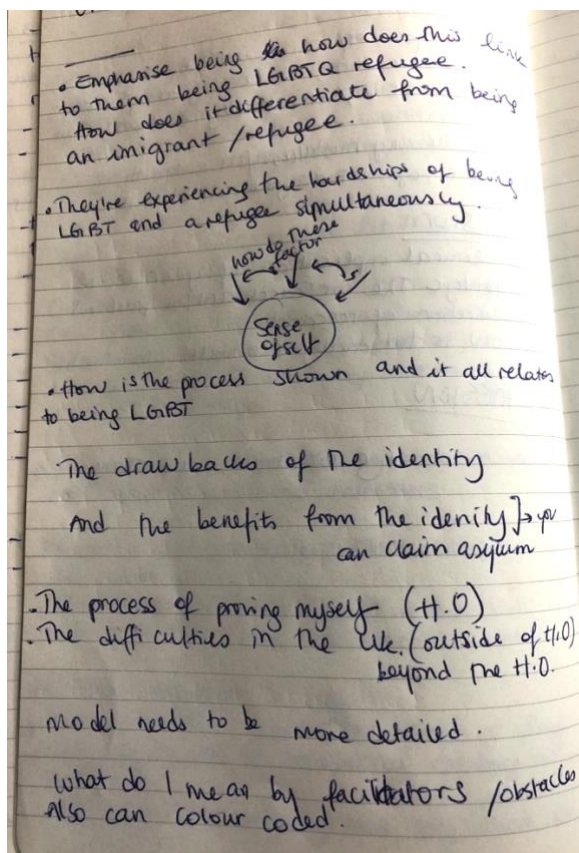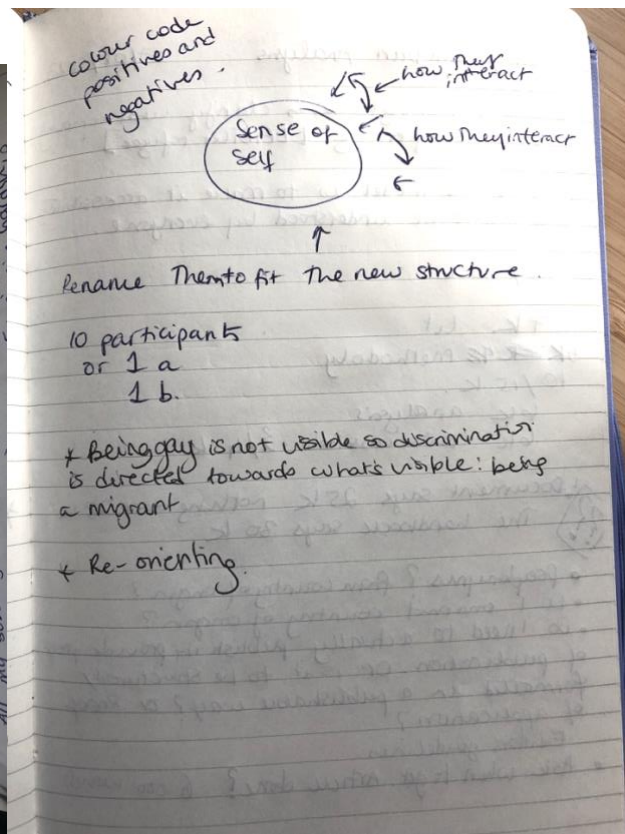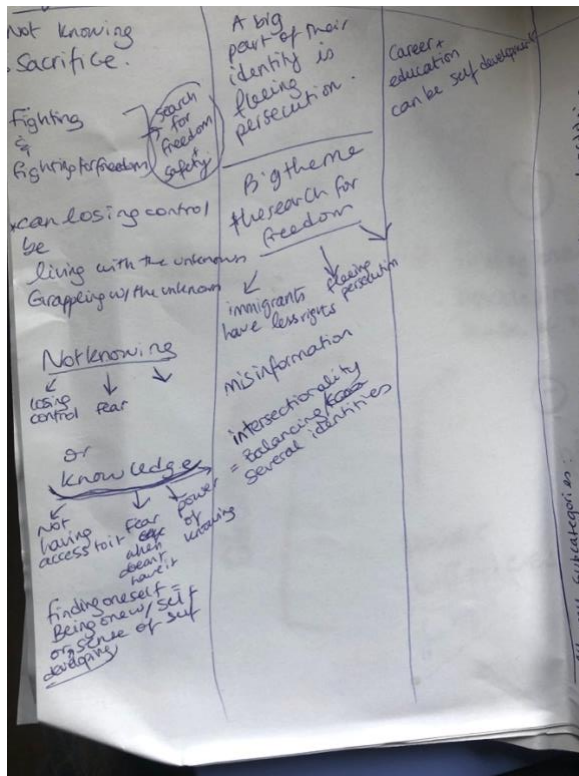|	How do the identities of LGBTQ+ refugees develop as a result of the migration process?					
Category	Subcategory	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
The fight/ struggle	A fight for rights		being an immigrant of a country is not easy. It comes with so many challenges. Yeah, because I cannot do what a British can do. I cannot do what somebody with who has all the rights to do	As a refugee, it's limited with the things you can do and the things you cannot do. I want to do something with my life, but rather than being able, it's telling me you can't do it […] I'm constantly stuck.	They had an interpreter, but I asked him to leave because I thought this is much uh, like more confidential I can do it	-so everything you have to fight to get for, ugh, its annoying, you have to fight to get anything in this country, even when you have no status, its like a punishment, cause nothing comes easy - but those deep things that you cant go into, they are personal and nobody has a right to know everything about me […], but I have to share it with the home office	I think in any in any asylum system one needs to find your own voice because everyone else's is shouting to get assistance so it's about the way how you go about finding your own platform
	Subjected to discrimination		I don't like the fact that government do take asylum seeker as non-human beings some of them		-so you feel that you are not welcome, and you feel that people are not looking at you as a human being they just they have their these stereotypes and they and just since you are refugee, that's it OK so you are in these category of people who are not welcome -even even when I become British I feel that since I'm originally not from here, that makes me, that make me less than the other people, if if that makes sense umm and I always have those fantasies or like negative thoughts sometimes that something will happen to me and like small mistake and because I'm a refugee like I have refugee history like they they will take out my passport -The environment is hostile and not welcoming people who are different, and this is something not healthy for the society in general and and I feel I'm part of this	if people can be more welcoming and accepting to especially the LGBT minorities or asylum seekers and refugees then the world would be a better place	they are other-ising, dehumanising and making enemies of people seeking asylum and forgetting the issues and problems that are going on in this country, he's putting it on asylum seekers and they're labelling it and making us the pariah and outcast
Accessing Knowledge	Learning about the UK legal system	I don't have to fear anything I know now my right	If what I knew today is what I knew before, I would have done it as soon as possible, but I didn't have that knowledge.		because I went through the process I under I got more knowledge about it, I mean the asylum process that give me more knowledge on how to support other people		-I say, move to a country where there are laws of protection for people of different sex, gender and such, use those opportunities, do not get do not get mentally locked that you're still in Namibia or you know Iran or Iraq or you know wherever you are those laws you don't have those protection laws, protection legislation laws, use the tools that you have, so it's also giving them socially aware, but mentally aware but culturally aware of the laws and integration
	Becoming part of LGBTQ+ community	In my life, I have been able to know more, to explore more about being LGBTQ, and I'm proud to be an LGBTQ person	-my knowledge about the LGBT community has changed very much. Because as I as I say it I don't take it like they're not human. I just take it as people who should be respected for who they are -even when I felt totally I was an LGBT I didn't think of other people who are like me, how they feel like or when I came to this country at least I have known the better word for them, because the other word back home was a very traumatising name		-I'm learning like I'm I consider myself in the learning process to how to be gay in this country. There's something new for me I was gay in Syria, but it's like completely different lives like hidden life and here you have the chance to be open, but you need to be sensitive like how to tell this? How approach this? -with time I started understanding that people could be whatever they want. Uh, and I started break all these barrier between that I built and all these stereotypes that I had before uh, to accept everyone like now I like I consider myself as a person who accept anyone, whatever their gender or sexual orientation or their behaviour like -I participated in a lot of like LGBTQ workshops to to have more understanding about these this language -It's really important at the same time to have all these pronouns and definitions, uh because I feel like OK now I can, I can define myself	in terms of language, like say gay lesbian is the most like sounding some people are like bisexual or transgender, people will always generalise, they are gay […] so in the way the west interprets those terminologies is kind of different from how they are perceived here	- I've adapted in […] how gender politics and gender mainstreaming has changed from my era into this era now that I'm still in -And I think that to me has been a great quality process for me expanding my quality spectrum on people and not having a spectrum on, on or just a thought of 1-dimensional thought on an individual, I have more spectrums thought on people because there are so many different layers to a person
	Developing work and education		-I haven't started working since I've	Through the group I managed to join like	-when I first wanted to study psychology	I applied, and then for scholarship and then I

How do the identities of LGBTQ+ refugees develop as a result of the migration process?		
Focused Code/ Category	**Subcategory**	**Raw Data**
Grappling with Power differences	Subjected to discrimination/ violence/ being treated as lesser	• I'm worried about the way they are fighting us back at home, it's a challenge man.
	Grappling with the Unknown	• Not knowing what is happening here. • Don't know what is happening in between the lines. • Yeah, I'm not informed now • (wishes) How the home office will communicate to you, giving you the feedback and telling you so you know what is happening here
Learning	Learning about being a part of LGBTQ community	• I'm learning more knowing people, yeah. • In my life, I have been able to to know more, to explore more about being LGBTQ, and I'm proud to be an LGBTQ person
	Developing education and career	• Being here, if I was given a chance, I'll go back to school.
	Learning about UK legal system	• The first time I was I was fearing to call them. I was fearing to call them. If they pick up the phone and then they tell me to come there and then they lock me up and never see, and I never come out again. So but I, I I made that I figured it out and I was able to call them. There's not anything like that so I called them, yeah. • I don't have to fear anything I know now my right
Support	Positive/ gaining support	• Feel so good yeah meeting them and hearing their experience, giving support, sharing words of encouragement • you are on the same boat they are, so you give each other encouragement. • We don't feel loneliness. • they have given me the, the right to know who I am and the motivation, the encouragement.

Examples of Memoing

Not knowing. Sacrifice.

Fighting & fighting for freedom

can losing control be

Grappling w/ the unknown

living with the unknowns

Not knowing
↓   ↓
losing   fear
control

or
knowledge
↓
not having to it   fear of   power of
access to it   when   winning
                    doesn't
                    have it

Finding oneself =
Being a new/self
or sense of self
developing

search for freedom/safety

A big part of their identity is fleeing persecution.

Big theme the search for freedom

immigrants fleeing persecution have less rights

misinformation

intersectionality = Balancing/keeping several identities

Career + education can be self development

All my subcategories

---

colour code positives and negatives.

Sense of self   ← how they interact
                 → how they interact

Rename them to fit the new structure.

10 participants
or 1 a
    1 b.

* Being gay is not visible so discrimination is directed towards what's visible: being a migrant

* Re-orienting.

• Emphasise being to how does this link to them being LGBTQ refugee. How does it differentiate from being an immigrant/refugee.

• They're experiencing the hardships of being LGBT and a refugee simultaneously.

how do these factor

Sense of self

• How is the process shown and it all relates to being LGBT

The drawbacks of the identity

And the benefits from the identity so you can claim asylum

• The process of proving myself (H.O)
• The difficulties in the UK (outside of H.O) beyond the H.O.

Model needs to be more detailed.

What do I mean by facilitators/obstacles. Also can colour coded.

Examples of Extracts from Transcribed Interviews

Sample from Participant 4a:

Interviewer: Uhm, OK, can you tell me a little bit about your experience living in the UK as an LGBT refugee?

Participant 4a: As a as an LGBT it is great (laughs). Uh, to be honest, like it's it's, uh. Before I came to the UK I would never think that uh, I would stay in the UK. I thought I would be back to Syria. Uhm, but now I'm I'm so happy here as as a gay man. Uh, because I feel like I'm I'm more myself here. Uh, I can express uh, my sexuality uh, uh in within my friends, colleagues at work with neighbours, so I feel like I I can be myself here as a gay person uh, in the UK I'm not saying that it's so easy, I've I've been exposed to a lot of problems because I'm gay, man, I've I've been attacked by a person when I was in when I was in London just because I was handling my my partners hand so then someone came and attacked me, but I would say overall I think I feel myself here I can I can express my thoughts and emotion as an LGBT person and and I feel that I have the sense of belonging to this group of people. So in Manchester I live near [name of the neighbourhood] I go there a lot uh, uh uhm, during pride like we could just talk about this later more in depth. So like I feel like the whole city could support you as a person from this group uh, during pride we could discuss this later, but like in overall I feel like I'm really happy here. Uh, I can I can be myself, which is more really important.

interviewer: Yeah, of course. So you feel like you can be yourself and that you feel supported in Manchester. What about the refugee side of things?

Participant 4a: Well, it's it's complicated, uh, because uh, I don't think it's easy to to be a refugee in in a country like the UK, especially after, uh 2012 I think when they when the government did use the hostile environment policies, it like became more and more difficult. And sometimes, like even though I feel like I'm so welcome here as a refugee, especially at work like I work with [name of employer] and I feel like I am welcome here. However, sometimes you feel like no, you're not welcome, uh.

When you when you hear the news when you see people people talking about refugees in the media uh, even within my work like when we have, let's say in hotel for asylum seekers you see far right uh, right ah, what's it called far, far right people trying to attack asylum seekers or protest against them just because they they don't want them in this country because they believe that taking we are taking their jobs, money, etc and we are rapists and we are thieves and murderers and criminals so you feel that you are, uhm, not welcome, and you feel that people are not looking at you as a human being they just they have their these stereotypes and they and just since you are refugee, that's it OK so you are in these category of people who are not welcome.

Interviewer: So from the sound of it, it sounds like very contrasting experiences in terms of on the LGBT side of things there's a sense of relief, a sense of being able to be who you are, but then on the refugee side of things, even though in some aspects of it, you feel welcome and you feel supported, for example at work, there are other parts and other areas in society where you feel like it's quite a hostile environment.

Participant 4a: Yeah, and I think we could discuss this later, but like I remember before I come, I come I I started having like my relationship with my partner like when I used to use grinder and all these dating app. When people used to know that I'm from Syria or I am a refugee they used to block me or just stop talking. So also within the gay community, you have those people who are against you as a as a migrant or refugee or asylum seeker, yeah.

Interviewer: That is going to be my my next question about the intersection of both. So how do you experience being both LGBT and a refugee in terms of kind of within the Syrian community in the UK, how whether it's received, whether you feel like you can be open about being gay and whether in the gay community in the UK you you feel open about being a refugee. Do you see where I'm going with that?

Participant 4a: Yeah, yeah. So uhm, OK. Before I answered the question can I ask you if if there is something I you didn't understand from my language or my expression, please let me know so I can repeat it.

Interviewer: Yeah yeah I will

Participant 4a: So and if I didn't answer the question, please repeat it to me, but maybe I misunderstood it. So regarding this, uh, this question, so I would start with the example that I just gave you, uh, so some some people discriminate against you just because you are a migrant or refugee, and this is what happened to me. I told you like people used to block me when when they knew that I am from Syria on the other side there are a lot of gay men who are who were really interested to to know me just because I'm from Syria. So we I used to meet with a lot of gay men in [name of UK neighbourhood] because they are excited to learn more about what's happening in Syria, how do you live as how did you live as a gay in Syria? Uh, like they have all these questions for you, and so like some people are, they could discriminate against you some people are not. Uh, if I'm if I want to talk about, like, uh the refugee community in in Manchester for example there is a big Syrian community in Manchester, uh, and there is a [name of group] society which is, like, uh, they call it in Arabic [name of group], I used to go a lot to their events I've I've never told them that I'm gay.

Interviewer: OK.

Participant 4a: And and I have really, really good relationship with them, like with the with the director and all the staff they work there like I know them all and I like I go to their events, I help them with some of their their events, my close friends volunteer with them like every year. Uhm, but I've never I had the courage to like express myself as a gay man to them 'cause I feel like this is not acceptable. Yeah, yeah is that what, uh, what yeah?

Interviewer: That's yeah. Expand a little bit on, if you feel comfortable, why you feel it's not acceptable or what? What words would you put on how you predict their their reaction would be?

Participant 4a: Well, uhm ironically, I think if I came out to the Director of [name of organisation] and the team they worked there, I don't think they would have problem. Because I know them, I go to their houses I know their wives, their children like we have really good relationship. However, I can't be my like I can't express this to them because I think they are all Muslim conservative. I'm not saying they are are uhm

Islamist, they are conservative and I respect that I'm I'm I'm I'm like my family are Christian I'm I'm non-religion so I don't believe in all these things. But I do respect like if I feel like it, it will be difficult for them to to accept me, I don't know. It's it's really complicated. Like my friends encouraged me to to came out to this group of people because they believe that if I did this a lot of other gay Syrians will have the courage to do the same. But at the same time I feel like it's really difficult because when I used to talk on like let's say Facebook group and have discussions about various topics when it's come to LGBT, I know how close-minded they are. I'm sorry to say that, but this is reality. They don't accept LGBT people. And they just throw it because of on God or on the religion. And I'm not saying because they are Muslims they've doing this like Christians will do the same. Like if I I didn't came out to my parents to my family and they are Christian so it's like the same. I think religion is the problem where like could be barrier for someone to come out to others.

Interviewer: Yeah, do you feel like on a personal level also the fact that they might not accept or they might not be as open-minded will impact you in terms of the potential rejection that comes from it or are there any fears? I don't want to put words in your mouth.

Participant 4a: Umm I don't know if it's about um fear, umm, I'm I'm sure they won't like hurt me. I don't know, I don't know. I'm predicting, but umm by the way, I think it's it's difficult also for me to come out to to people because I started this process recently, like when I when I started coming out to my friends and my closest family member like only my sister knew about this but I feel it's also difficult for me to share this information sometimes I feel like this is personal it's not their business to to know umm but yeah, I would say fear could be one of the reasons like prevent me to do to do that.

Sample from Participant 5

Interviewer: And since you've moved to the UK how have you experienced being an LGBT refugee? Have you found it relatively easy or difficult to integrate into the society?

Participant 5: It's both easy and hard but hard is also like.. first easy because I am safe but it's hard because of the emotional journey you have to go through when you think of turning in yourself to the home office what you're going to share with them what they're going to ask, it's really fearful.

Interviewer: Mmm

Participant: Because you think like you've escaped torture then you come here and you're still scared of being sent back, not being believed.. yeah and making friends..is ok..because of the LGBT communities I go to but like it's hard to make friends like when you go to other LGBT places that have like people of other races it's kind of difficult to penetrate through because yeah.. personally I find it challenging yeah when I am with other LGBT organisations for asylum seekers it's easy because you know, you know like they are on the same page as you, they're underprivileged but when you go with the other privileged people you will wonder what to start telling them what how you're going to start telling them ohh yeah I flee my country because of my sexuality because some people don't know that these things exist

Interviewer: Yeah… yeah

Participant 5: Yeah so yeah and then the mental health part of it makes it really hard, living in constant fear that you're going to be sent back, the isolation, then.. and even when you meet a person, I am a black woman, it's hard to confide in people who are from the same country as mine if they are not asylum seekers saying it's about my sexuality. Because my sexuality here is free, they're still homophobic because you hear people, they've been here a long time but the words they speak, you're like oh god how can I even start telling them I am this.. yeah…

Interviewer: Yeah…

Participant 5: Yeah

Interviewer: So it's difficult on both sides then feeling like the LGBT communities in the UK who aren't for LGBT refugees or migrants are very privileged and don't share

similar cultures and understandings but then also within the migrant community you risk also being ostracised or experiencing homophobia or shame in relation to the LGBT side of things

Participant 5: Yeah…

Interviewer: Yeah umm so in terms of your experience with the home office can you describe how that journey has been for you in terms of the asylum process, the interviews, did you find that difficult? What did you find?

Participant 5: That like.. (chuckles) That is the worst thing ever... I remember.. even when you read on the website, oh you are trying to seek asylum you do this you do that, people tell you to do this so you wonder where to start from. I remember on the phone call, I kept hiding myself in the room like the whole day until I made the phone call oh god what are they going to ask bla bla bla I was worried but I had all my details, I gave them everything, they said they were going to call me back. I waited for the call for, they called me like after two weeks.. that was horrendous…

Interviewer: Mmm..

Participant 5: I am like when are they calling me back?! So they called me back they asked me more questions on the phone and yeah and then they had to go for the inter… the asylum screening and I was in London at the time but because we were in the thickest times of covid.. the first lockdown had just started, they couldn't send me to [Home Office location], they sent me to [Home Office location outside London]

Interviewer: Mmm

Participant 5: I didn't have money, I didn't have whatsoever and imagine, it's a lot of money, like you're not working and everything, to travel from London to [Home Office location outside London] but I did, I went to [Home Office location outside London], I was scared.. it was scary (exhales) the whole journey in the train getting the money, you know what am I going to do

Interviewer: Mmm

Participant 5: Yeah so when I reached there, I reached there so early and the lady the gate person, the security lady she said no we cannot start the interviews now bla bla bla you're.. then I crossed the road and I went.. I didn't know where to go I am in a new place, I was stranded and before I knew it she was calling me [Participant name] come come then I went and then they interviewed me even before the time.

Interviewer: Okay

Participant 5: and that was good but it.. was.. you know, they ask you questions and then your heart will skip a beat, you don't know, are they going to detain me

Interviewer: Yeah…

Participant 5: So it's really horrific it's scary when you're starting and then having to wait for my asylum interview for about two years two and a half years cause I just got my interview just like two weeks ago, like two or three weeks ago. So it is fresh, you can imagine.

Interviewer: Yeah…

Article

A Grounded Theory Analysis of How the Identities (Refugee/ Sexual/ Gender) of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Minority Refugees Develop as a Result of the Migration Process in the UK.

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Abstract

This research aims to address how sexual and gender minority (SOGI) refugees develop their identities as a result of the migration process in the UK. This research was conducted in the UK within a British academic institution, and the data was collected between 2021 and 2023. This study employs intersectionality as a theoretical framework to examine how SOGI refugees experience oppression and prejudice due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, refugee status, race, ethnicity and class. Thus exploring how the distinct structural systems in the UK render the SOGI refugee experience in the UK unique and worthy of research. This study employs a qualitative constructivist grounded theory method to conduct semi-structured interviews and analyse the data. The findings suggest that the unique aspects of the UK migration process contribute to the identity development of SOGI refugees.

Keywords: sexuality, gender, mental health, refugee, forced migration, intersectionality.

Introduction

The last few decades have seen a global increase in migration, particularly forced migration. Although forced migrants share common challenges and needs, such as housing, food and security (Gillespie et al., 2016), they also have different difficulties, including discrimination and persecution (Dhoest, 2017). Refugees are a group of forced migrants defined by the United Nations as a person who must flee their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of religion, nationality, race, gender, sexual orientation, political opinion or membership of any other social group (UNHCR, 2020).

The specific group of refugees that this research focuses on is Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Minority (SOGI) refugees, who can claim asylum based on the fear of persecution due to legal traditions or customs arising from an applicant's gender or sexual orientation (Nilsson et al., 2021). Although refugees, as a whole, share similar challenges and needs, the key element that distinguishes SOGI refugees is the credibility of their sexual orientation or gender identity and their persecution (Dhoest, 2017). The asylum process varies depending on the country's migration regulations; however, it usually requires refugees to prove their SOGI identity and fear of persecution due to public and visible threats (Lee et al., 2020). This particular asylum claim is distinctive because the way in which its facticity is established relies on the idea that sexual orientation and gender identity are perceived as fixed traits and, sometimes, invisible identities which can only be confirmed in the live interactions during the asylum process, for example, through interviews. The applicant is, therefore, required to share what is assumed to be their profoundly internal and personal sense of self-identification (Hertoghs & Schinkel, 2018). The process of having to make credible one's experience of sexuality, gender and persecution renders an acceptable definition of sexuality, gender and persecution to be a legal procedure which is determined by the state. Therefore, this type of asylum claim is distinguished from other forms because its validity is determined by the credibility and persuasiveness of the applicant's narrative and their ability to establish trustworthiness (Hertoghs & Schinkel, 2018).

Theoretical Framework: Intersectionality

This article employs an intersectional theoretical framework to account for the unique complexity of SOGI refugees' identities. This framework recognises how systems of power cannot be understood in isolation as they intersect and co-produce one another, which leads to distinctive social and mental health experiences (Frankfurt et al., 2016; Grzanka, 2016). Intersectionality provides the mindset and language for examining the interconnections and

interdependencies between the social systems and categories that play a role in the SOGI refugee experience. This framework will provide an appropriate lens for this research to meet its aim of contributing to Counselling Psychology's social justice movement.

Literature review

Global Queer Refugees and Asylum Seekers

While the last decade has seen significant advances towards the recognition of legal rights, support and protection of SOGI marginalised individuals, 66 countries continue to criminalise private, same-sex, consensual sexual activities, 32 of which are Commonwealth, and 12 of which can or do impose the death penalty for same-sex intimacy (Human Dignity Trust, 2023). Violence against LGBTQ+ people surpasses other types of hate crimes. It involves the perpetration by state actors, religious leaders, communities, and families (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2015). Being a part of multiple minority groups, these individuals face an elevated risk of social exclusion, violence and discrimination in their countries of origin, transit or asylum (ORAM, 2012).

Moreover, the distinctive SOGI asylum procedures may be troubling to this population, and can have severe psychological consequences (Kahn & Alessi, 2017). The asylum procedures often require the discussion of private, vulnerable and often traumatising issues in front of strangers (Dhoest, 2017). These expectations are challenging as many SOGI refugees come from cultures where sexuality and gender diversity are stigmatised or criminalised, resulting in a preference to be discreet or to not act on non-hetero-cisnormative desires (Dhoest, 2017).

SOGI refugees in the UK

To contextualise the asylum process of SOGI refugees in the UK, statistics provided by the Home Office will be introduced. The Home Office reports experimental statistics on asylum claims based on sexual orientation but not on gender identity. In 2021, the Home Office data shows that the total number of asylum claims in the UK was 48,540, and those based on sexual orientation were 415, approximately 1% of the total (Sturge, 2023). SOGI NGOs in the UK, such as Rainbow Migration, are urging the HO to improve their statistics on asylum claims based on sexual orientation to no longer be 'experimental' and to include the statics on asylum claims based on gender identity.

Research on SOGI refugees in the UK has started to grow, resulting in positive changes in the policies that protect and support SOGI refugees throughout their migration process (UKLGIG, 2018). This attention has led to vocal condemnations of some of the Home Office (HO) practices and resulted in the readiness of the government to improve the SOGI asylum process (UKLGIG, 2018). This is evident through the decrease in persistent questioning directed at sexual practices and increasing evidence of good practice by the interviewers (UKLGIG, 2018). Despite the improvements in the HO, SOGI refugees in the UK continue to experience problematic credibility assessments, the downplaying of risks encountered in countries of origin, the use of immigration detention, and insufficient safeguarding regarding the provision of accommodation and access to services such as healthcare and mental health services (Bennett, 2013; UKLGIG, 2018).

The Historicization of Queer Migration

Scholars have addressed the intersectional structural barriers SOGI refugees face within and outside the refugee determination system (Luibhéid, 2008). This often involves interrogating how homonationalism and settler colonial discourses and practices are interwoven through immigration procedures (Awondo, 2010). This historicisation situates queer migrations from the Global South to the Global North within Western colonial empire-building histories (Lee, 2018). The SOGI refugee 'migration to liberation' adds additional complexity to Ahmed's (2006) concept of the 'happy migrant' wherein the 'empire' assumes that being a SOGI refugee entails arriving in a nation where sexual and gender diversity is considered a feature of a 'civilised' society as opposed to the 'uncivilised' Global South which is characterised by 'homophobia and transphobia' (Murray, 2014). This influences SOGI asylum procedures wherein utilising the 'right' terminology, identifying with Western sexuality and gender categories, and utilising the 'liberation nation' narrative is essential to a successful claim (Dhoest, 2017). This historicisation challenges the current framing of the global LGBTQ+ human rights agenda and renders visible the histories of colonial violence (Lee, 2018). However, it is also essential to recognise that the conceptualisation of the LGBTQ+ identity model is no longer purely Western.

Mental Health of SOGI Refugees

Research shows that refugees are severely affected by trauma caused by their pre and post-migration experiences (George, 2010). Lee & Brotman's (2011) and Kahn & Alessi's (2018) studies suggested that elements of the SOGI asylum-seeking process may lead to the re-traumatisation of SOGI claimants. Their findings indicate that the rushed deadlines, the

premature and mandatory need to disclose a history of abuse publicly, and the need to prove one's SOGI identity could contribute to mental health issues. Another stressor of migration is the distance from family and community (Kahn, 2015; Lee & Brotman, 2011). This may be exacerbated by the potential need to publicly 'come out' during the asylum claim process, which risks further alienation from the diaspora community. This loss of a social network can lead to a lack of support and, in turn, poor well-being and social integration (Hynie et al., 2011; Alessi & Kahn, 2017). As a result, studies show that SOGI refugees frequently contend with depression, substance abuse, PTSD, anxiety, and suicidal ideation and attempts (Lee et al., 2020). Piwowarczyk, Fernandez, and Sharma's (2017) and Gowin et al.'s (2017) studies indicate that the rates of psychological symptoms are conspicuous and notably high among SOGI refugees. They are also significantly higher than those in studies looking at cis or heterosexual forced migrant populations (White et al., 2019).

Mental Health Interventions for SOGI Refugees

Scholars have begun identifying best practices regarding mental health provision for SOGI refugees. These studies show that group therapy helps SOGI refugees process mental health challenges (Beaudry, 2018). This modality facilitates the creation of social support groups and the implementation of psychoeducation, which results in improved mental health, reduced stigma and the building of resilience (Beaudry, 2018; Logie et al., 2016; Nerses et al., 2015). Group therapy can bring together SOGI refugees and form a sense of community and collective empowerment (Beaudry, 2018).

Building on concepts of complex trauma (Courtois, 2004; Herman, 1997), minority stress (Meyer, 2003), integration (Ager & Strang, 2008), and resilience (Luthar et al., 2000); Kahn and Alessi (2017) highlight the relevance of using culturally- and trauma-informed frameworks with SOGI refugees. This involves supporting this population in building trust, establishing safety, promoting practical and emotional skills for managing the asylum process, building a support network, and developing a sense of purpose. These frameworks ensure a sense of physical and psychological safety, avoid actions that could be re-traumatising and restore a sense of control. Furthermore, Lee and Brotman (2013) highlight the importance of making the structural dimensions that contribute to the oppression visible; this, in turn, will allow for constructing a narrative of resistance.

Methodology

Design

135

This study utilises a qualitative method, specifically Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT), to explore the identity development of SOGI refugees throughout their UK migration process. CGT was chosen as it is suitable for exploring individual processes, interpersonal relations and the individual within a larger social context (Charmaz, 2006). CGT adopts an open-ended, inductive, comparative approach whilst challenging the assumption of an an impartial external reality, a passive observer or constricted empiricism (Charmaz, 2006). This approach allows for an examination of contexts, meanings, and actions whilst acknowledging the impact of power, oppression, and prejudices on individuals, which may advance our understanding of social justice issues (Charmaz, 2006).

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants who could comprehensively judge the phenomena explored in this study. This sample was composed of 6 SOGI refugees in the UK. Participants were recruited via advertisements posted on the platform of support groups and forums in the UK for SOGI migrants. All participants provided informed consent and conducted the interviews remotely via video call.

To take part in this study, participants had to be SOGI refugees in the UK with first-hand experience with the SOGI migration process, which included claiming asylum in the UK at least once. Participants did not need to have a successful claim to qualify for participation. The participants had to be verbally fluent in English and based in the UK when the study was conducted. Fluency in English was essential to ensure that the participants could understand screening tools and comfortably participate in an in-depth interview, thereby increasing the study's validity.

The exclusion criteria included any clinical presentations on the PhQ-9 and scores above 10, 'moderate', or above 0 on question 9 to mitigate risk and re-traumatisation. If an individual scored above ten or above zero on question 9 during the screening process, their scores were explained, and they were signposted to appropriate services.

Sampling composition

Six participants expressed interest in the study and met the criteria. Whilst this research aims to deal with the broader group of SOGI refugees in the UK and will use that inclusive umbrella term, it is important to note that the participants in this study expressed fleeing their country of

origin because of their sexual orientation, and none invoked gender identity as a reason for migration. Therefore, the key focus of this paper will be on sexual orientation, although gender identity is an element of the SOGI procedure. It is important not to conflate sexual orientation and gender identity as transgender and non-binary people may experience unique challenges related to their gender identity, such as gender dysphoria (Jordan, 2009), which this research cannot account for.

Table 1

Demographics of the study sample

Participant Number	Age	Gender	Preferred Pronouns	Sexual Orientation	Asylum Status at the time of the interview	Country of Origin	Re-interview
1	20-30	Male	He/him	Gay	Asylum claimant (awaiting substantiative interview)	Kenya	Yes
2	30-40	Female	She/her	Lesbian	Asylum claimant (awaiting substantiative interview)	Kenya	No
3	20-30	Male	He/him	Gay	Asylum claimant (awaiting substantiative interview)	Kenya	Yes
4	30-40	Male	He/him	Gay	Refugee (indefinite leave to remain)	Syria	Yes
5	20-30	Female	She/Her	Lesbian	Asylum claimant (awaiting substantiative interview)	Uganda	No
6	50-60	Male	He/him	Gay	Asylum claimant (appealing)	Trinidad & Tobago	Yes

The process of developing the interview schedule

This study employed semi-structured interviews. This interview format acted as a guide, allowing the participants and researcher to address whatever was organically perceived as important while avoiding overly directing the participant (Charmaz, 2010). As the interviews progressed, the questions were adjusted to enhance the development of the theory (Charmaz, 2006).

Principles of Analysis

The interviews conducted for this research were transcribed into data and analysed using a constructivist grounded theory framework (Charmaz, 2006). The first step of the analysis began with initial coding. Coding permits the researcher to capture what is in the data and understand how the participants make sense of their experience of the phenomena under investigation (Charmaz, 2006). This was followed by focused coding, where the researcher moved through interviews and observations, comparing participants' experiences and interpretations to amalgamate data segments and determine the significance of the initial codes. The focused coding condensed these data portions into themes describing the explored phenomena. Theoretical coding then allowed for the grouping of substantive codes into abstract categories. The constant comparison method was used to move backwards and forwards through the data to look at similarities and differences between the emerging categories. As Willig (2008) suggests, this allowed for the understanding and capture of all the variations in the data through the emerging theory.

Theoretical sampling was then conducted by collecting additional data to further the exploration of meaning, refine the codes, and gain more specific data to support or explain a category (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2011). This involved using an amended interview schedule informed by the categories that had begun to emerge in the analysis. All of the participants were invited for re-interviews, four of whom agreed to partake. Throughout the coding process, the researcher partook in memo writing and diagramming as a record of the theory development and her active engagement with the data and to facilitate sorting, merging and refining categories to build theory (Charmaz, 2012). Theoretical sufficiency was claimed once no new patterns, developments or relationships emerged in the data. This research defines sufficiency as conceptual density achieved by addressing processes and generating categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Results

Analysis Introduction

Data analysis resulted in 5 main categories, each with three subcategories resulting in 15 subcategories, all of which emerged from the participants' narratives (Table 2). The links and interactions of these categories are presented in the model below (Figure 1).

Table 2

Categories, Subcategories and Participants Involved

Categories	Subcategories	Participants
Challenges of the asylum system	Negotiating one's rights	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
	Control & authority	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
	Gaps in the system	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
Migration Hardships	Subjected to discrimination	P2, P4, P5, P6
	The struggle to integrate	P4, P6
	Unique mental health challenges	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
Support	Community and support network	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
	Receiving therapy	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
	Giving back	P1, P3, P4, P5, P6
Building Knowledge & Experience	Learning about the UK legal system	P1, P2, P4, P6
	Exposure to LGBTQ+ culture in the UK	P1, P2, P4, P5, P6
	Developing work and education	P2, P3, P4, P5
Developing an identity	Intersecting identities	P2, P3, P4, P5
	Safety and freedom	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5
	Self-realisation and acceptance	P1, P2, P3, P4, P6

The Model

Figure 1

The theoretical model of the identity development of SOGI refugees as a result of the migration process in the UK
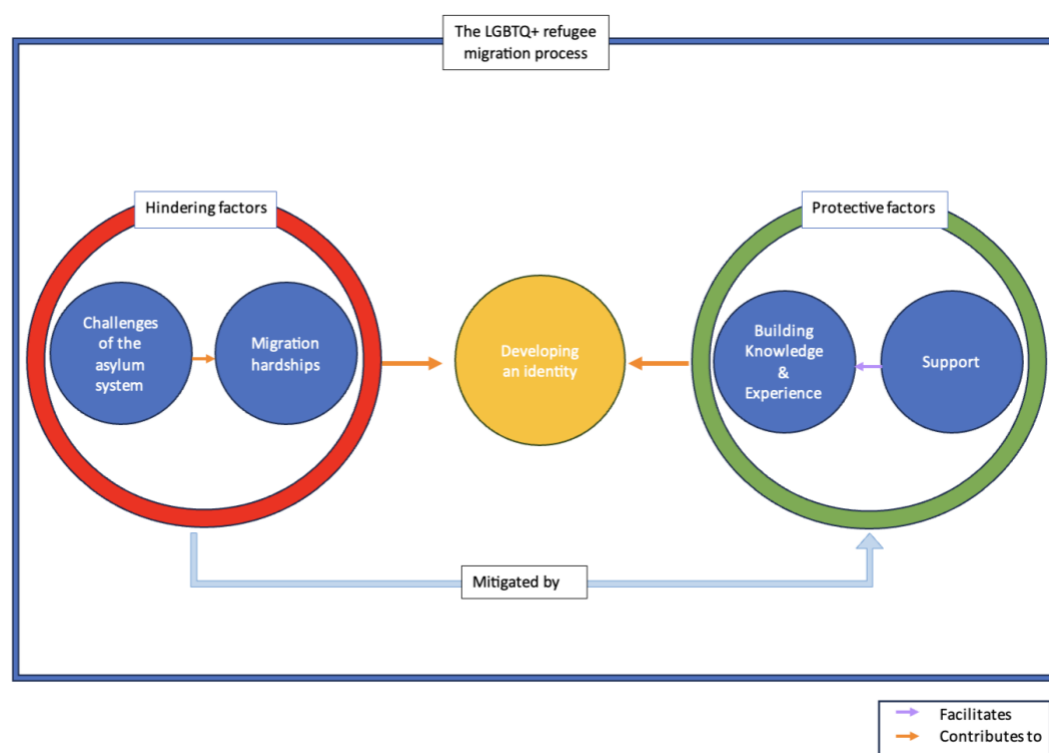
Category 1: Challenges of the asylum system

This first category has three sub-categories that describe the different types of systemic challenges that contribute to developing the identities of SOGI refugees. The first challenge that the participants describe involves negotiating their rights due to the lack of an adequate framework which recognises and understands the specific experience, needs and

vulnerabilities of the SOGI refugee population. For example, negotiating their rights regarding the sensitive and personal disclosures they make during their credibility assessment.

> *Participant 5: Those deep things that you can't go into, they are personal, and nobody has a right to know everything about me […], but I have to share it with the home office.*

Other challenges they expressed are the loss of control and power dynamics due to the lack of available information for SOGI migrants about the asylum system and procedures. This can cause significant stress and uncertainty. The participants explain that the lack of communication from the HO exacerbates this. The sense of lack of control and uncertainty resulting from the asylum procedures may worsen the vulnerabilities of SOGI refugees, leading to mental health concerns such as aggravated trauma and high-stress levels.

> *Participant 2: So, in the process of waiting, it's been very difficult for me because I want to know what my status is so that I can move my life ahead. So my life is at the moment it's at a standstill.*

Furthermore, another challenge was the system's gaps due to the limited knowledge and understanding of SOGI-related issues among government representatives, the HO and supporting organisations. For instance, the participants expressed disappointment with the lack of support from the HO, including inadequate housing for SOGI individuals, limited financial assistance, and a lack of help in accessing community and support. Participants explained that they have turned to charities for support due to the flawed governmental support. While they generally expressed positivity towards SOGI refugee organisations, they also faced challenges with them due to high demand and insufficient funding. Additionally, they explained that organisations that do not specifically cater to the intersectional SOGI refugee population often lack the knowledge and resources to address their needs adequately. The participants, therefore, highlight the need for intersectional support that meets the unique needs of SOGI refugees, whether governmental or not.

Category 2: Migration Hardships

Participants explain that these systemic challenges contribute to their broader migration hardships. These broader difficulties include the hostility and discrimination SOGI refugees experience in the UK primarily due to their ethnicity, race or refugee status. They explained that this discrimination is linked to government policies which have induced a social and political narrative of hostility towards refugees in the UK. Moreover, one participant described

experiencing discrimination towards his intersecting identity as gay and a refugee. The participants reflect on how this discrimination negatively influences their refugee and SOGI identities and highlight that their experience would be much more positive without it. Additionally, the participants express that integration is challenging due to this current climate of hostility in the UK and practical challenges such as the language barrier. The need for integration is crucial for these participants as it represents a sense of stability and settlement in their host country.

> *Participant 6b: They are other-ising, dehumanising and making enemies of people seeking asylum and forgetting the issues and problems that are going on in this country, [the UK government is] putting it on asylum seekers, and they're labelling it and making us the pariah and outcast.*

Moreover, the participants experienced unique mental health challenges, including their pre-migration stresses, such as persecution of their SOGI identity, trauma and displacement. These compound the mental health implications of the post-migration stressors in the UK. They expressed feelings of depression, anxiety and worry due to multiple post-migration hardships and minority stress. This includes the unknown of their future, the lack of stability in their legal status in the UK, the fear of being deported or not being believed, feelings of isolation and loneliness, and the challenges of having to disclose intimate and personal information during the asylum interviews.

> *Participant 4b: [Being kicked out of the UK] this is something really like scares me and I'm so I'm so emotional person, so I keep thinking about those negative thoughts all the time I feel like sometimes they're dominating my thoughts and feelings and behaviour*

Category 3: Support

The participants explained that they experienced protective factors throughout their migration that may mitigate some negative experiences. The participants highlighted the importance of the charity sector in accessing support and a community. They reflect on how access to a community of people with similar intersectional identities has allowed them to gain self-acceptance, encouragement, perspective, validation and a space where they feel less alone.

> *Participant 5: The support from the NGOs, which are none governmental, is incredible because, without the community, I don't know how I would've made it through […] I think it's what we need because the home office does not offer that.*

Moreover, the participants found that accessing therapy during their migration was highly valuable for processing their experiences and gaining self-understanding. Several participants expressed receiving therapy through a SOGI refugee organisation which offered group therapy in a trauma-informed and culturally sensitive manner. Sharing with the group allowed the participants to gain perspective on their experiences, a more profound self-understanding and acceptance, and tools to better cope with their mental health. The participants emphasised the importance of shared intersectional identities and cultural sensitivity within the group, ensuring their unique contexts were acknowledged and the therapy content resonated with their experiences. However, the participants also describe the challenge of accessing mental health services due to the long waiting lists and delays between when the care is needed and when it is provided.

Furthermore, the participants discuss that the hardship and the positive experiences they have had throughout their migration have ignited a desire to give back to their community. This desire may be influenced by asylum seekers' lack of employment rights in the UK. The participants explain having much time on their hands and, at points, a need for more sense of purpose. The participants explain that volunteering and giving back to their community gives them a sense of purpose. They also express that it is a way in which they can disseminate their knowledge and experience of their SOGI migration experience to support and facilitate the journey of others.

Category 4: Building Knowledge & Experience

The participants explained that the support they gained throughout their migration process in the UK facilitated their acquisition of knowledge and experience. They expressed that support from the SOGI migrant community and engagement in activism and advocacy allowed them to learn from others, gain access to resources, and participate in workshops to enhance their understanding of the LGBTQ+ community, law and human rights in the UK. This experience is enhanced by unlearning the shame and fear resulting from their home country's persecutory laws. Accessing and internalising the laws and human rights that protect LGBTQ+ individuals in the UK is an essential part of the participants' experiences of beginning to feel safe in their identity and being able to express the SOGI diverse parts of themselves openly.

The participants expressed learning more about the LGBTQ+ identity model in the UK throughout their migration through advocacy organisations focused on LGBTQ+ rights and refugee support. These organisations gave them access to awareness and training programs which enhanced their understanding of LGBTQ+ rights and inclusion in the UK and encouraged them to do their research. This learning process impacted the internal experience of these participants and how they make sense of themselves as SOGI-diverse individuals within a larger community. The participants expressed feelings of self-acceptance and understanding and a greater sense of inclusion and understanding of other members of the LGBTQ+ community.

> *Participant 4b: With time I started understanding that people could be whatever they want. Uh, and I started break all these barrier between that I built and all these stereotypes that I had before uh, to accept everyone like now I like I consider myself as a person who accept anyone, whatever their gender or sexual orientation or their behaviour.*

For some of the participants, this gained knowledge and access to resources inspired them to develop their careers and education. Participants accessed schemes, programs and scholarships supporting refugees' career development. Additionally, all participants explained that their limited working rights led them to devote their time to supporting other SOGI asylum seekers and giving back to their community. Some participants explained how this experience shifted their interest to wanting to develop their career towards supporting SOGI refugees beyond volunteering.

Category 5: Developing an identity

The participants reflected on how the migration process's multiple complex hindering and protective factors in the UK shaped their intersecting identities. It is important to note that each participant's journey was unique due to the multifaceted processes at play. The participants expressed becoming more aware of their new 'refugee' identity through their migration process. Support networks and a protective legal system also helped them feel safer and freer to explore their SOGI identity. The participants also began to experience the intersections of their identities. They explained that by being considered LGBTQ+ in the UK, they gained privilege (safety and freedom). In contrast, by becoming a refugee in the UK, they lost privilege (loss and hardships of migration). Moreover, the participants highlight that this contrast in society's perception of their identities contributes to the importance of having specific intersectional SOGI migrant communities and organisations. They explain that this allows

them to avoid being discriminated against for being a refugee in LGBTQ+-only groups and being discriminated against for being SOGI diverse in refugee and migrant groups. Having intersecting communities allowed them to feel safer, more understood, and able to access relevant information and resources for their specific experience. This, in turn, contributed to their self-realisation and acceptance.

> *Participant 4b: These dissonances. So I don't know how it affects someone's mental health, but yeah, because one part of you is unwelcomed and your other half, your other half, is like not only welcome but it's celebrated, so how do I introduce myself to the community as a refugee or as a… as a gay person? There's one part, one part of me is is fine for the local community, and the the other one is not. But I'm I'm I'm both so, I don't wanna lie for… this is me.*

The participants describe that the migration process to the UK provided them with a sense of freedom and safety as members of the LGBTQ+ community in the UK. This contrasts with their experience in their home country, where they experienced fears, trauma and shame due to SOGI-related persecution and discrimination in their home country. They explained that they often had to conceal their SOGI identity to stay safe, which resulted in feelings of restriction, deprivation and a lack of congruence. The participants explained that their migration to the UK has resulted in feeling free and safe to express themselves, having the burden of hiding oneself lifted, and not fearing persecution for being LGBTQ+. This enhanced feelings of belonging, self-realisation, acceptance and a more congruent sense of self. However, the participants also highlighted that their refugee identity continues to pose challenges due to the lack of security and the challenges it entails.

> *Participant 1a: It has impacted in me in building my confidence and keeping up my spirit […] knowing who you are can't fear anybody because of who you are. You stand by your ground I am who I am.*

Discussion

This study contributes to the discussion of SOGI refugees in the UK by focusing on the formal and informal processes that shape the identity development of this population throughout their migration. As Murray (2011) suggests, It is essential to note that this process is ever-changing due to the diverse shifting political, structural, cultural and economic forces that influence the language and meaning of the identities and processes explored in this study.

Category 1: Challenges of the asylum system

Similarly to other studies on SOGI refugees (Murray, 2014; Marnell et al., 2020), this analysis demonstrates that this population faces multiple systemic challenges throughout their migration that contribute to developing their identities. For example, the asylum procedures and credibility assessments result in SOGI refugees often having to negotiate and advocate for their rights. Marnell et al.'s (2020) suggest that SOGI refugees' engagement with the state often involves fear, frustration and hopelessness due to the constant battle for support. Additionally, their intersecting identities exacerbate their vulnerability and weaken their ability to exercise their rights (Marnell et al., 2020).

Moreover, SOGI refugees experience similar post-migration challenges to other refugee populations, such as a lack of employment rights and difficulties with housing security and food (Krahn et al., 2000; Li et al., 2016; Porter & Haslam, 2005). According to the minority stress model, SOGI refugees' intersecting identities result in their unique needs, such as inclusive housing for LGBTQ+/SOGI migrants to avoid potential discrimination (Golember et al., 2020). These systemic challenges, along with the lengthy, complex asylum procedures and minimal resources and communication from the HO, negatively impact the mental health of this population and contribute to developing their identities. An intersectional approach among systemic and non-governmental support is essential in meeting the unique needs of this population.

Category 2: Migration Hardships

This category explores the challenges that SOGI refugees experience beyond asylum procedures. This research aligns with the literature on minority stress as it discusses SOGI refugees' experiences of discrimination (Gowin et al., 2017; Kahn, 2015). The broader literature suggests that SOGI refugees may experience homophobia and racism both on an institutional and individual level (Munro et al., 2013). The participants in this study mainly reported hostility and discrimination towards their race or refugee identity rather than their SOGI identity. The findings thus suggest that SOGI refugees initially flee their home country to escape discrimination and persecution but often find that their experience of this violence may continue in the UK. This is in line with the broader literature on SOGI refugee discrimination (Gowin et al., 2017; Kahn, 2015), refugee discrimination (Montgomery & Foldspang, 2007), and LGBTQ+ discrimination (Golembe et al., 2020). This research builds on the literature by suggesting that the persistence of discrimination within the UK and cultural and language barriers hinder the ability of SOGI refugees to integrate and settle in their host

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country. This can contribute to isolation, frustration, and poor mental health. Despite this, similar to Marnell et al.'s (2020) research, the reports of racial discrimination in this study were combined with positive reflections on the UK's inclusive approach to LGBTQ+ rights and people. The literature suggests that this narrative may be influenced by the 'liberation nation' script that the state considers acceptable during the credibility assessments (Murray, 2011).

Furthermore, the results suggest that these challenges may put SOGI refugees at an increased risk of developing mental health issues compared to heterosexual refugees (Mustanski et al., 2016) or non-refugee LGBTQ+ individuals (Porter & Haslam, 2005). This is supported by the minority stress framework, which suggests that SOGI refugees' have a higher risk of developing mental health difficulties due to their intersecting identities and pre- and post-migration stressors and traumas (Valentine & Shipherd, 2018; Golembe et al., 2020). Their intersecting identities result in unique minority stressors such as internalised stigma, diverse societal forms of discrimination and hostility towards their intersecting identities, and shame and concealment of their identities (Meyer, 2003). The participants explained that their experiences of discrimination, violence and uncertainty throughout their migration contributed to symptoms of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress. This is similar to other studies exploring SOGI refugees, which reported mental health distress associated with discrimination, socio-economic hardships and internalised stigma (Ogunbajo et al., 2018; Golembe et al., 2020). This study, similar to Golembe et al.'s (2015) research, highlights that the post-migration hardships compound the mental health distress SOGI refugees experienced pre-migration. Therefore, the well-being of SOGI refugees' does not immediately improve but may decrease after resettlement (Alessi et al., 2018).

Category 3: Support

This study has found that access to support tailored for SOGI refugees can mitigate some of these hardships. The participants explained that being a part of a group that felt safe and accepting gave them hope, a space to share and gain support, and a sense of community, alleviating feelings of isolation. This confirms the literature on the positive influence of support in fostering greater acceptance and a sense of belonging (Reading & Rubin, 2011; Logie et al., 2016). Logie et al.'s (2016) research support these findings by suggesting that having a space free from discrimination and judgement is essential for SOGI refugees to feel at ease in their intersecting identities.

This study also suggests that accessing trauma and culturally informed therapy is crucial for the well-being of SOGI refugees. It provided them with tailored tools to cope with external and

internal factors, such as practical and emotional skills for managing asylum claim procedures. The literature suggests that a culturally competent, affirmative, trauma-informed framework can support SOGI refugees' unique hardships throughout their asylum procedures (Alessi & Kahn, 2017). In line with the literature, the findings showed that group therapy facilitated the participant's sense of belonging and the development of a social support network, resulting in improved mental health (Beaudry, 2018; Logie et al., 2016). Research suggests that therapeutic support is particularly beneficial for this population as their family and community members are often involved in their persecution. This may lead to difficulties in finding safe and trustworthy support systems, increasing isolation (Shidlo & Ahola, 2013). Therefore, group therapy can help SOGI refugees build a sense of community and collective empowerment, a powerful resistance against the oppressive forces of hetero-cisnormativity they often encounter (Beaudry, 2018). However, the participants also reported that access to mental health services for SOGI refugees remains challenging and scant. Therefore, future research must explore how to facilitate better access to resources and mental health services within this population.

Furthermore, participants found it fulfilling to reciprocate the support by giving back and sharing their knowledge with others. This aligns with the literature that suggests a cyclical relationship between receiving support to overcome migration challenges and offering support to others facing similar adversities (Logie et al., 2016). This study builds on this research by suggesting that the desire to give back may also be associated with the need for a sense of purpose. The lack of employment rights leads to a surplus of unoccupied time and isolation, prompting SOGI refugees to seek volunteer opportunities to give back and contribute to the well-being of others. It is important to note that the refugee identity that SOGI refugees obtain from their migration to the UK results in their lack of employment rights. Therefore, SOGI refugees need to navigate oppressive systems to find a sense of purpose.

Category 4: Building Knowledge and Experience

This study demonstrates that the support SOGI refugees receive throughout their migration facilitates their acquisition of new knowledge. The SOGI refugee groups also provided strategies and information to understand better and negotiate legal, employment, housing and health-related issues. Access to practical support, such as resources and legal aid through SOGI refugee groups, made the participants feel more prepared for the asylum procedures and helped them build a stronger claim. This helped the participants have a more likely chance of a successful claim and avoid the hardships of having to appeal their case. This study supports previous research, like Logie et al.'s (2016), showing that support for SOGI refugees

contributes to intra and inter-personal improvements such as a sense of belonging, self-realisation, and self-acceptance.

Moreover, by understanding their employment and educational rights, participants were empowered to seek avenues that provided purpose and fulfilment. They accessed resources for developing employability skills and education through different schemes and scholarships for refugees and migrants in the UK. This study found that the migration experience of the SOGI refugees influences their career interests. Participants expressed wanting to pursue further education and training in advocacy and support work for the SOGI refugee community. Their experience of the migration process in the UK and their increased awareness of the gaps in the system and the community's needs motivated them to provide support and raise awareness.

In this study, although the participants expressed not fully understanding the LGBTQ+ identity model upon their arrival in the UK, they all used Western LGBTQ+ terminology, such as 'gay' and 'lesbian'. This suggests that SOGI refugees might already know the Western LGBTQ+ identity model before migration, aligning with Lee and Brotman's (2011) findings. The broader literature suggests that utilising the 'correct' terminology, identifying with the Western LGBTQ+ identity model, and providing a coherent narrative are decisive parts of the asylum procedure. Therefore, the literature suggests that SOGI refugees may internalise these narratives throughout their asylum procedures (Dhoest, 2017). The literature discusses this critically by highlighting the context of homonationalist, hegemonic and 'liberation nation' narratives, which arise throughout the asylum procedures, and enforce specific scripts built on homonormative and ethnocentric definitions of sexual orientation and gender identity (Luibhéid, 2008; Miller, 2005; Murray, 2014). Despite this, the positive narratives in this study about being LGBTQ+ in the UK should not be dismissed entirely as a reproduction of hegemonic and homonationalist discourses. This study suggests that these narratives represent part of the lived realities of SOGI refugees in the UK within a broader international discourse of sexuality and gender.

Category 5: Developing an Identity

This study found that participants' narratives of hardship were interwoven with ones of survival, freedom and empowerment. Similarly to Marnell et al.'s (2020) study, participants expressed experiencing adversities as a consequence of their asylum process and refugee identity whilst concurrently expressing a sense of safety and self-realisation from their SOGI identity in the UK. Murray (2014) highlights the importance of exercising caution when engaging with narratives of queer migration due to the risk of perpetuating the dominant narratives of

'freedom' and 'liberation' or reducing the complex experience of individuals with intricate experiences and identities to stereotypes. In this study's context, this risks reinscribing nationalist narratives of the UK as a land of superiority, freedom and democracy whilst erasing its colonial history and the racial, sexual, gender, language and cultural barriers that migrants confront (Luibhéid, 2005). To move away from the liberation narrative, addressing the intentionality of SOGI refugees seeking out the UK as their safe haven is essential. Although the participants felt free and safe in the UK, they also expressed a lack of awareness of the country's policies, attitudes and laws, suggesting they had no prior knowledge of what to expect in terms of freedom, safety and protection upon arrival. Therefore, migration to the UK constitutes a complexity of decisions, actions and movement.

Limitations

Despite this study's strengths and unique findings, it has several limitations. Due to practical limitations, this study only included English-speaking participants. However, this linguistic barrier restricted the representation of more diverse individuals within the SOGI refugee population who may have less exposure to English/ Western LGBTQ+ culture and may experience their identities differently. Additionally, the exclusion criteria of high PhQ-9 scores limited individuals' agency to participate, overlooking diverse experiences of identity development and migration. Finally, the study sample mainly consisted of gay and lesbian cis-gender refugees. Further research should address within-group differences by investigating sub-groups and expanding the diversity of the sample. This may further our understanding of the complex and nuanced aspects of the SOGI refugee experience.

Conclusion

This research sought to contribute to Counselling Psychology by exploring the migration journey and identity development of SOGI refugees in the UK. It also hoped to shed light on some of this population's social justice concerns and challenges to help raise awareness among mental health professionals and policymakers. The study's findings can support service providers and mental health professionals in providing more accessible, cultural and trauma-informed practices that account for the unique experiences of SOGI refugees. Evidence from this study can also provide the basis for future research on need-oriented policy amendments.

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