# University of Southampton

**Faculty of Environmental and Life Science**

**<u>School of Psychology</u>**

**"If you're not yourself, who are you going to be?" An Exploration of Gender and Sexuality Diverse Pupils Experiences of Visibility Management in School : A Systematic Literature Review and School Factors that Predict Post-Traumatic Growth in Young People that Have Experienced Bullying at Secondary School Attributed to Their Open Identification as Gender and Sexuality Diverse**

by

**Cleo Timney**

**Thesis for the degree of <u>Doctorate in Educational Psychology</u>**

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# <u>Abstract</u>

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Gender and sexuality diverse (GSD) young people (YP) frequently spend their youth exploring and discovering their identities. At this time, they often begin to think about how and when to disclose their GSD identity to others in a variety of contexts; this dynamic and ongoing process can be termed visibility management (VM). At school, GSD YP actively test social reactions, interpret attitudes, and assess safety; ultimately, seeking to be an authentic self and to find acceptance and community. This systematic review explored findings from 16 qualitative studies capturing GSD YP's experiences of managing visibility in schools internationally. Data was thematically synthesised and seven themes were constructed:  *We need to explore, discover and accept who we are before we can be our authentic selves, Visibility management is a constant negotiation and a fluid process, We are influenced and oppressed by norms; our visibility breaks norms and changes culture, We are acutely aware and often fearful of social reactions to the visibility of GSD people and to disclosure, We need school staff to do more to support us*, *We need a visible community to feel safe and experience belonging* and *We fight for our right to be visible*. Implications for practice are discussed.

   GSD YP transgress social and gender norms and are at an elevated risk for bullying in secondary school. In the UK, GSD identity-based bullying is pervasive and colours the lives of many GSD YP. It constitutes trauma and often results in negative mental health outcomes. Posttraumatic Growth (PTG) is the perception of positive psychological growth following trauma and has been recorded following various traumata, including interpersonal trauma. In adults and YP, several predictors of PTG have been identified. However, little is currently known about its antecedents in GSD YP. This study aimed to address this gap in the field. Survey data was collected from 173 participants (aged 16-25 years) who self-identified as GSD. Independent variables included social acceptance and support from secondary school friends, social support from school

staff, engagement in activism, GSD school culture and sense of school belonging. Data was analysed using multiple regression. Results demonstrate the model was statistically significantly predictive of PTG in this population, with social support and acceptance from school friends being the strongest predictors. The study concluded that multiple facets of social support and acceptance promote positive outcomes following GSD identity-based bullying and that the support and acceptance of friends is particularly critical.

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# Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Cleo Timney

Title of thesis: "If you're not yourself, who are you going to be?" An Exploration of Gender and Sexuality Diverse Pupils Experiences of Visibility Management in School: A Systematic Literature Review and School Factors that Predict Post-Traumatic Growth in Young People that Have Experienced Bullying at Secondary School Attributed to Their Open Identification as Gender and Sexuality Diverse

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

I confirm that:

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

Signature:                          Date: 03/06/2022

# Acknowledgements

# Definitions and Abbreviations

YP ........................................ Young person

GSD...................................... Gender and sexuality diverse

LGBTQ+ ............................... Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, plus any other sexuality or gender identity outside the heterosexual and man/woman binary

VM ...................................... Visibility management

EP ........................................ Educational Psychologist

Asexual................................ A person who is not interested or does not desire sexual activity

Bisexual ............................... A person who is attracted to women and men

Cisgender ............................ Someone whose assigned birth gender matches their gender identity

Gay ...................................... A man who is attracted to other men. Some girls and women prefer to refer to themselves as gay women rather than lesbian.

Gender fluid ........................ Having an indefinite line between gender identity, having two or more genders, having no gender, or moving between genders

Gender non-conforming ...... A term used by people whose gender expression is different from stereotypical expectations of 'man' and 'woman'. Not all gender non-conforming people are transgender.

Homosexual ........................ A person who is attracted to people of the same sex. Nowadays this term is rarely used by members of the GSD community

Intersex ............................... A person who is born with sexual anatomy, reproductive organs and/or chromosome patterns that do not fit into the typical definition of male or female.

Lesbian ................................ A woman who is attracted to other women.

Non-binary ........................... A gender that is neither exclusively male nor female

Pansexual ............................ A person who is attracted to others regardless of their biological sex, gender identity, or expression

Queer ................................... A person who does not want to have their sexual identity reduced to an either/or term but who is gender and/or sexuality diverse

Questioning.......................... A person exploring their identity, whose identity is not established

Trans .................................. An umbrella term which covers the trans community, encompassing anyone whose gender identity does not match the gender they were given at birth with and/or people who identify as gender variant with regards to gender identity and expression.

Transgender ......................... Often refers to someone who is transitioning (or who has transitioned) from one binary gender to the other, for example, someone who was assigned man at birth but identifies as a woman, or vice versa.

Transman ............................ A person who has been brought up as girl/woman, whose gender identity is a man

Transwoman ........................ A person who has been brought up as a boy/man, whose gender identity is a woman

# Chapter 1    School Experiences of Gender and Sexuality Diverse Young People: Managing Visibility and Growth After Bullying

## 1.1    Introduction

Individuals who are gender and sexuality diverse (GSD) include lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, transgender, queer, asexual, intersex, gender non-conforming, and a spectrum of other identities that fall outside of the heterosexual, cis-normative gender binary. Gender and sexuality are independent of one another; information about a person's gender does not necessarily indicate their sexuality and vice versa and it is possible to be a broad combination of gender identities and sexualities. Within this paper, the term GSD is used for convenience and clarity and is intended to be inclusive and reflective of the diversity within this group. However, individuals may prefer alternative terms to refer to their own identities. The acronym LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, plus) and variations on this is adopted where it features in cited studies. Those who are GSD often become aware of this in childhood and, increasingly, young people are disclosing GSD identities in secondary and sometimes primary school (Bradlow et al., 2017). While a GSD identity is only an aspect of an individual's complete identity, it is an aspect of high importance in society and to individuals.

GSD people are a diverse group but they are united by their transgressions of traditional sexuality and gender norms; they transgress these norms in a variety of ways, including, not falling within the frame of binary gender, not having a fixed gender, having non-heterosexual romantic and sexual relationships and dressing, and behaving in ways that are not associated with their prescribed gender. Traditional societal norms privilege heterosexuality as typical and expected and are reinforced by the *heteronormative* practices and processes of social institutions (Allen, 2015). Similarly, *cis-normativity* refers to a systematic privileging of those whose gender falls within the gender binary and the exclusion of those whose do not (Boe et al., 2020). Those individuals who transgress the established norms are positioned as deviant and are marginalised and excluded by these institutions (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008).
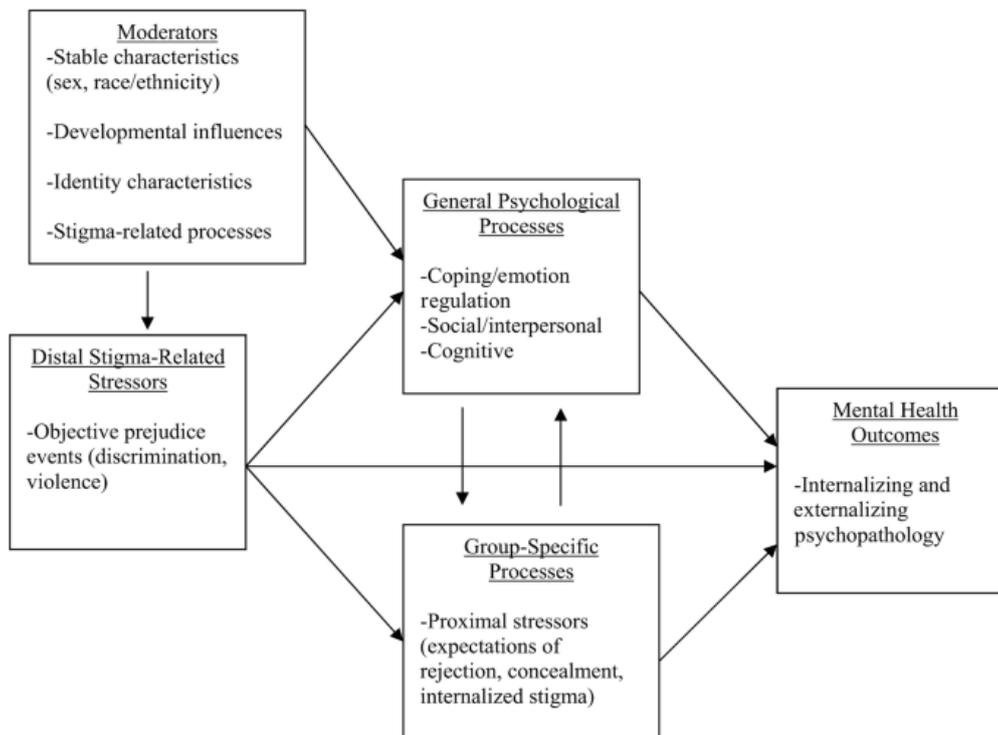
**Figure 1** Integrative mediation framework of minority stress process (Hatzenbuehler, 2009)

Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 1995) describes the tension that exists between minoritised groups and dominant social norms and proposes that the social processes that result from this tension lead to a greater risk of experiencing unique minority stressors and associated negative health outcomes. These stressors are broadly divided into *distal* and *proximal* stressors; *distal* stressors reflect external events and conditions associated with belonging to a minoritised group, including, experiences of discrimination, prejudice (including subtle forms such as "microaggressions"; Nadal et al., 2016) and bullying. *Proximal* stressors are internal and refer to cognitive processes, self-concepts and behaviours that contribute to distress and these include internalised stigma, fear of rejection, fear of bullying and distress related to managing the visibility of one's GSD identity (Timmins et al., 2020). Proximal and distal stressors interact, for example, experiences of rejection might trigger the internalisation of prejudicial attitudes in society and lead to greater motivation to conceal one's identity from others (see Figure 1).

These processes and stressful experiences then contribute to negative mental and physical health outcomes (Meyer, 2003a). Interestingly within adult GSD populations, hate-crime bullying and prejudicial discrimination are uniquely related to negative mental health outcome severity but this relationship is strongest for prejudicial discrimination (Bandermann & Szymanski, 2014) and prejudicial discrimination has been linked to depression and anxiety (Szymanski et al., 2021; Szymanski & Balsam, 2011).

GSD young people experience similarly elevated negative mental health to GSD adults (Bradlow et al., 2017; D'augelli, 2003; Hatchel et al., 2019; Hill et al., 2021; Holmes & Cahill, 2013; Kosciw et al., 2013, 2019) and this, too, can be viewed through the lens of Minority Stress (Goldbach & Gibbs, 2017). There are, however, some important contextual differences; perhaps the most significant of which is that GSD young people are required to attend school. Education contexts in the UK reflect wider societal norms where cis-heteronormativity is replicated (DePalma & Jennett, 2010; Llewellyn & Reynolds, 2020; Pollitt et al., 2019). For GSD young people, navigating school is therefore a risky business (Bosson et al., 2012). Sadly, and perhaps unsurprisingly, GSD pupils are more likely to be victimised than non-GSD peers (Abreu et al., 2021; Camodeca et al., 2018; Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012; Vega et al., 2012). Correspondingly, it appears that the greater and more obvious the transgression of cis-heteronormative rules, the greater the likelihood of bullying (Van Lisdonk et al., 2015).

Given that prejudicial bullying on the basis of gender and sexuality is pervasive in UK schools and currently remains a priority for the government (DfE, 2017; Mitchell, Gray, & Beninger, 2014), there is a legal imperative for schools to address GSD-based bullying and its aftermath (Equalities Act, 2010). Indeed in recent decades, the UK government has made addressing GSD-based bullying a priority (Mitchell et al., 2014a), commissioning research (Mitchell et al., 2014b) and allocating funding (DfE, 2014). Despite this, there has only been a slight reduction in bullying since the previous survey (Bradlow et al., 2017; Guasp, 2012) and bullying, prejudice, and harassment remain a common part of the school experience for GSD YP in the UK (Bradlow et al., 2017). The focus on a reduction of bullying and the associated negative outcomes has evidently been largely ineffective. Where intervention has focused on the avoidance of negative outcomes, there has been a lack of focus on the facilitation of positive outcomes which may help GSD YP to, not only survive, but thrive at school.

The Minority Stress model and the mental health outcomes for GSD adolescents highlight the importance of facilitating positive outcomes following stress and trauma and there is currently a dearth of research investigating protective factors and the facilitation of positive outcomes following bullying (Delozier et al., 2020). Within my empirical paper, I seek to explore the consequences of these bullying experiences through a positive psychology lens via experiences of posttraumatic growth (PTG). Posttraumatic growth refers to the perception of psychological growth following trauma, and occurs within five domains, *greater appreciation for life*, *improved and more meaningful interpersonal relationships,* increased sense of *personal strength* and wisdom, a greater sense of *new possibilities* and *spiritual change* (Joseph et al., 2012; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). PTG has been distinguished from *coping*, which refers to an attempt to adapt to stress, and from *resilience*, referring to successful adaption to stress and

powerful distress often appears alongside or may even precipitate PTG development (Ratcliff et al., 2020). Within the empirical paper, the researchers operate from an interactionalist perspective (Cline et al., 2015) and, therefore, we focus on school-based, contextual predictors of PTG within this population.

An additional area of the Minority Stress model where adolescent experiences differ from adults is in the area of identity development. Adolescence is a critical period of identity development for most; however, this may be particularly true for GSD young people who may be exploring their divergent gender and sexual identities in depth and sharing these for the first time (Kosciw et al., 2018; Mustanski et al., 2013). The ongoing process of managing the visibility of one's GSD identity can be termed *visibility management* (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003). The stress of managing visibility is perhaps most acutely felt by GSD individuals during adolescence and young adulthood and whilst in the school context. Why and how GSD young people manage their visibility in the school context is the subject of my systematic literature review, which is a narrative synthesis of the qualitative research in this area. Meyer (2003b) points out that sexual and gender minorities may experience stress associated with hiding their identities, with the anticipation of rejection and discrimination and through sharing their identity with actual rejection and discrimination which might be experienced after disclosure. Within my review paper I aim to explore research that has illuminated why GSD young people are constantly negotiating their social environment, how they are weighing risks and benefits of disclosures and managing their visibility, both explicitly and through more subtle, non-verbal means, such as, clothing choices (Lasser & Wicker, 2007). This review explores positive and negative outcomes associated with concealment and with open disclosure. This review also challenges the idea of a certainty and finality to one's identity, which is often far from accurate for most GSD young people, as identities appear, in fact, to shift and change over time.

Within this work, two central aspects of the GSD school experience were examined in greater detail, visibility management and the aftermath of GSD-based bullying; however, these are situated in the wider context and the social processes outlined within Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 2003a) and should be considered only fragments of the story of GSD young people. In addition, their GSD identity makes only one part of their whole identity and I have tried, within both papers, to adopt an intersectional approach to the research (Bauer, 2014). Within the systematic literature review, I have captured and brought to the fore, the demographic characteristics of the various sample populations and highlighted that they are predominantly able-bodied and white. Within the empirical paper, I consciously sought participation from people from a range of ethnicities by targeting community groups and non-profits that support GSD people of colour for recruitment. I also collected data on disability status and various other

characteristics so that I could be explicit about the detailed demographics of my sample. In addition, I have highlighted the further challenges faced by GSD pupils that also belong to other socially minoritised groups when thinking about access to support.

## 1.2    Ontology and epistemology

The ontological and epistemological approach of my work as a whole is one of pragmatism, that humans and human experience is infinitely complex and that reality is difficult to define but that research should aim to contribute to our practical understanding and offer positive applications to practice (Pratt, 2016). Useful study in any psychological field and of any phenomenon may include research of varying methodologies. Quantitative research that works hard to use representative samples allows psychologists to make tentative broad generalisations, meaning we can illuminate cause and effect relationships and study patterns. These findings must be viewed in conjunction with findings from qualitative research that provide nuance and descriptive information and facilitate the development of theory (Verhoef & Casebeer, 1997).

Within my systematic literature review, I held an interpretivist and social constructivist position. Social constructivism refers to the idea that knowledge is socially and historically constructed within interactions between people through a process of meaning making and is influenced and interpreted through their context and previous experiences (Amineh & Asl, 2015). I chose to complete a qualitative narrative synthesis of the phenomenon *visibility management*. My aim was to explore *why* and *how* GSD young people manage their visibility at school and to situate themes from the review within existing or emerging theory. I was also interested in the meaning that young people applied to their experiences of visibility management. As such the papers I included in my review predominantly utilised interview or focus group data collection methods, which are ideally suited to this epistemological position as they facilitate the construction of knowledge between participants and researchers (Madill et al., 2000). An essential component of my narrative synthesis was the interpretation of data, including participant quotes and the themes and interpretations formed by the authors. It was also essential, to consider my own construction of the review data as a secondary interpretation. As part of this, my influence as a co-constructer of the findings (Madill et al., 2000; Willig, 2013) was acknowledged and the implications of this were explored. The benefit of this approach is that is allows researchers to explore multiple facets of dynamic, and complex phenomenon that reflects the diversity of human experience that exist.  As such, the aim is not generalisability, as it is acknowledged that the work is inextricable from its context, rather the aim is to explore whether findings might be transferred to other contexts and to contribute to emerging theory.

For the empirical paper, a more post-positivist ontology is adopted, that of modified objectivism and a critical realist epistemology. This position assumes that knowledge or truth exists and can be measured but that our ability to measure it is fallible and susceptible to bias and that statistical probability allows to accept current knowledge based on our findings (Corbetta, 2003). The aim of this research is to allow generalisability and so attempts are made throughout to reduce the risk of bias. This includes the defining of clear measurable hypotheses and aims and attempts to objectively measure study factors through use of scales that operationalise variables. I have also reported probabilistic measures of reliability and validity, where appropriate. Finally, I have acknowledged the limitations of the work and the essential further research required to strengthen, or indeed challenge, my conclusions. Given the difficult experiences that GSD young people described in much of the qualitative literature that I read and the process of meaning making that they described following these experiences, I felt PTG was likely to be an interesting phenomenon to explore in this population. Using a quantitative methodology allowed me to establish the existence of PTG in a large, diverse sample of GSD young people and to identify some school factors that predicted its development and gives me greater power to generalise my findings (Barker et al., 2016). These findings offer an impetus for further qualitative exploration of PTG narratives in GSD pupils. I aimed to ensure that my work was transparent and rigorous within both papers and, importantly, I indicated valuable practical applications for educational professionals, families, and young people themselves.

## 1.3 Reflexivity, axiology, and ethics

I chose to focus my thesis on the school experiences of GSD young people. There are numerous subjects that I could have chosen but when I started doing some initial reading I recognised that this was the field to which I needed to contribute. I once was a GSD young person at a UK secondary school and many facets of this experience were difficult. The experiences I had as a young person have obviously shaped who I am now in ways that I am only just realising and, probably, in ways I am yet to realise, some feel positive and some feel detrimental. Many of the stories and emerging theories have given me words for the experiences I had and this has been quite profound. I want to share this work with GSD young people so that they might have words for and earlier insight into their experiences and so that the educational professionals that they encounter can understand, support and champion them confidently. I think the general public have an impression that we have made such progress for GSD people that their school experiences are broadly in line with their peers. I have been doubtful about this for a long time. The progress is real but cis-heterosexism is alive and well in schools. Statistics and research that reveals common experiences of bullying, rejection, prejudicial language, limited understanding or

support from adults and the unsurprising mental health outcomes and negative impact on academic achievement and school engagement was difficult to read but not unexpected . However, I have been deeply impressed by the young people that feature in much of this work. Throughout the reading for my qualitative systematic literature review, the GSD young people that participated demonstrate incredible resourcefulness, resilience, and conviction for their rights to be their authentic selves. They unintentionally deviate from the norm simply because they exist, and they consciously deviate from the norm so that they and others *can* exist. The participants in my empirical study have shown that they can take control of the narrative so that they do not remain 'victims' and they fight for others' rights so that they do not have to be victims. This is incredible, heartening, and important to capture in research and I feel immensely privileged that I am able to be a little part of it. These young people are fighting for themselves and supporting each other in the face of significant challenge and education professionals must catch up and bolster them. This interest in the work fits within a broader believe that schools must strive to be inclusive places and facilitate belonging and acceptance for all pupils.

As each paper is operating from different epistemological and ontological positions, the way that my values and perspective as an individual impacts on my work was examined differently. Due to the interpretative nature of my review, it was important that I reflect on how my experiences may have shaped and influenced my findings. I believe that my experience and knowledge is advantageous to interpretation as I am able to understand the experiences and language of participants and interpret the data as a GSD individual myself (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015; Holmes & Darwin, 2020). Regarding my empirical paper, I attempted to reduce my influence over the findings. This included being transparent throughout the process and in my writing, utilising thesis supervision opportunities to discuss my positionality and influence and implementing several aforementioned actions to reduce bias.

One anticipated ethical issue within the empirical paper arose due to the use of an online survey to gather data. Participants were GSD young people (16-25) who had had experiences of bullying whilst at secondary school. They were therefore likely to recall traumatic experiences during participation and as there was no in-person interaction between the researchers and the participants, there was no opportunity to directly support participants if they found participation distressing. In an effort to assuage this potential issue, there were clear content warnings offered prior to participation and the debrief included signposting to support services, should they be required. These actions were deemed adequate in terms of ethical approval. During the course of writing the empirical paper, I became aware that some PTG literature characterised PTG as

coming from *within* the individual. This characterisation risks implying that those who have experienced trauma and do not experience PTG are lacking in some way. This does not match my interactionist view (Cline et al., 2015) and negates the many contextual factors at play when it comes to subjective wellbeing. I therefore ensured that my writing highlighted contextual factors throughout the paper. The predictors I included were predominantly school context based also.

## 1.4     Dissemination plan

The two research papers I have written within this thesis are intended for publication in peer reviewed journals. They have been written in a style suitable for this purpose. The journal that I intend to submit the review to is the Journal of Homosexuality. This is an international peer-reviewed journal with a focus on publishing interdisciplinary research employing a range of methodologies and from a variety of perspectives in order to shape knowledge in the area of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) studies and queer studies. Appropriately, the studies included in my review are international and the implications have broad application across schools internationally. I intend to publish the empirical paper within Educational Psychology in Practice (EPIP). This is a peer reviewed journal that aims to publish research articles that are of relevance to educational psychologists working in the UK. This is an appropriate journal as the study was conducted with those who attended UK secondary schools and because the implications are particularly relevant to educational psychologists working in UK schools. The work will also be shared via Twitter and several other local opportunities, including through local educational psychology colleagues, appropriate training for local schools and via research conferences.

# Chapter 2 "If you're not yourself, who are you going to be?" An Exploration of Gender and Sexuality Diverse Pupils Experiences of Visibility Management in School: A Systematic Literature Review

## 2.1 Introduction

### 2.1.1 Social norms, gender norms and GSD youths

*Social norms* are often tacit, socially-constructed rules and roles recognised by members of a group that direct and/or restrict members' social behaviour without force or laws and form part of the identity of the group (Nolan, 2017). Norms exist as collectively shared beliefs about what others typically do and what is expected or appropriate for others to do. Social norms are generally maintained by social approval and/or disapproval and these social consequences create pressure on individuals to conform (Ajzen, 1991). Cis-heteronormativity refers to specific social norms around gender that privilege heterosexuality and binary gender and dictate what is typical and appropriate behaviour for men and women (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020). The presence of cis-heteronormativity in schools is recognised by pupils (Kjaran & Jóhannesson, 2013; Mishna et al., 2009) and teaching staff (Edwards et al., 2016; Vega et al., 2012) and evident within policies, pedagogies and practices that endorse gender norms (Allen, 2015; Boe et al., 2020; Enson, 2015; Ferfolja, 2007; Herz & Johansson, 2015; McNeill, 2013; Steck & Perry, 2018; Toomey et al., 2012). Pupils who identify as gender and sexuality diverse (GSD) are a diverse group, however, they are united by their transgressions against cis-heteronormativity. This group includes those whose gender falls outside the biologically defined binary of woman/man or whose gender deviates from that which they were assigned at birth and those whose sexuality is described as anything other than heterosexual. These individuals transgress cis-heteronormativity simply by being open about their GSD identity. This identity represents a range of norm transgressions, including, having non-heterosexual romantic relationships, behaving or dressing in ways not associated with one's prescribed gender or not fitting into binary categories for gender (McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2017). Those individuals who transgress the established norms are positioned as different and face social consequences as a result (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). In UK schools, 45% of GSD pupils report directly experiencing bullying related to being GSD and many report hearing prejudicial remarks being

made 'frequently' or 'often' (52% report hearing homophobic remarks, 36% hearing biphobic remarks and 46% hearing transphobic language; Bradlow et al., 2017). These experiences along with other aspects of *minority stress*, including concealment motivation, as captured within the Minority Stress Model (Baams et al., 2015; Meyer, 1995, 2003b), are believed to contribute to the disproportionately poor mental and physical health outcomes for this population compared to a typical population of YP (Bradlow et al., 2017; D'augelli, 2003; Hatchel et al., 2019; Hill et al., 2021; Holmes & Cahill, 2013; Kosciw et al., 2013, 2019). Congruently, a large-scale UK survey of LGBT YP found that 58% had planned or attempted suicide (McDermott et al., 2016).

Sexuality Diverse people represent 6.3% of the UK population in 2019 with younger people (16-24) most likely to report being LGB (6.6%; ONS, 2021). There is currently no national measure of gender diversity in the UK. GSD young people (YP) have become increasingly visible in recent years, with large scale national surveys in Europe, Australia, and the US demonstrating an international trend of increasing GSD visibility in secondary school (Bradlow et al., 2017; Hill et al., 2021; Kosciw et al., 2018, 2019). 'Coming out' at school, or making oneself known as GSD, inevitably challenges school norms. GSD pupils face significant challenges in managing the process of 'coming out' and many choose to limit their visibility at school, for example, while 95.5% of 6,418 Australian YP surveyed were out to friends, only 70.3% were out to classmates and 36% to school staff (Hill et al., 2021). Trans and gender diverse pupils are more likely to have made a disclosure at school to classmates and staff (Hill et al., 2021) compared to bisexual and gender/sexuality questioning pupils (Kosciw et al., 2018). Researchers are beginning to illuminate the complex and dynamic process of managing visibility at school; exploring why YP might choose to disclose directly and indirectly, why they might choose to conceal and what happens when their identity becomes known to others at school.

### 2.1.2    Visibility management

'Coming out' refers to the act of disclosing one's GSD identity. Though commonly used within popular discourse, this term implies a singular, linear event with a before/after. This conceptualisation of visibility is criticised as too rigid and reductive to accurately describe the experiences of GSD YP and for mischaracterising the process of disclosure (Klein et al., 2015).

Lasser & Tharinger's (2003) Theory of Visibility Management (VM) refers to an ongoing, dynamic process by which GSD individuals actively regulate their visibility over time. Whilst disclosures can be significant events, GSD individuals engage in a fluid process of restricting or disclosing their identities throughout their lives, within various contexts and as their identities evolve (Ruberg & Ruelos, 2020). VM can be viewed as a continuum from most to least restrictive

and, though visibility fluctuates, the overarching trend is from most to least restrictive over time (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003; Lasser, 2005). In addition, VM refers to a constant negotiation that is managed via numerous methods, including direct, explicit disclosure, and indirect, non-verbal acts that transgress gender norms, such as wearing certain clothing (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Lasser & Wicker, 2007). This process, where individuals are both influencers of and influenced by their environment, is an example of *reciprocal determinism* (Bandura, 1978). Research thus far predominantly concerns sexuality diverse YP (Lasser, 2005). For gender diverse YP, VM is notably different and there is a paucity of research exploring this. For many, the process of realising gender identity in school diminishes opportunities to adopt more restrictive visibility as the act of transitioning is a public, social process (Jones et al., 2016). Binary-trans YP who are viewed as 'passing' may experience invisibility differently as their gender identity is assimilated by others into the normative gender binary (Catalano, 2015). More research that explores visibility management by gender diverse YP is needed.

### 2.1.3      GSD school experiences & minority stress

Transgression of cis-heterosexuality, like most norm transgression, attracts social disapproval. Congruently, GSD YP report a variety of school experiences that reflect this, including experiencing or witnessing GSD-based bullying, discrimination and social rejection (Abreu et al., 2021; Bradlow et al., 2017; GEO, 2018; Hill et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2016; Kosciw et al., 2019; Truong et al., 2020; Zeeman et al., 2017). For example, in UK schools, 45% of GSD pupils report directly experiencing bullying related to being GSD and many report hearing prejudicial remarks being made 'frequently' or 'often' (52% report hearing homophobic remarks, 36% hearing biphobic remarks and 46% hearing transphobic language; Bradlow et al., 2017). Certain subgroups within the GSD umbrella are more or less likely to experience bullying. Across national surveys, trans and gender nonconforming pupils were more likely to have experienced bullying (Bradlow et al., 2017; Hill et al., 2021; Kosciw et al., 2019), perhaps reflecting the extent to which they norm-break. Interestingly, 'same-sex-attracted' secondary pupils in one Dutch study were more likely to have perceived experiences of bullying if they reported more gender nonconformity (Van Lisdonk et al., 2015). Similarly, GSD pupils who also hold multiple minoritised identities are more likely to experience GSD-based bullying, for example, disabled pupils (Bradlow et al., 2017) and pupils of colour (Zongrone et al., 2020; Truong et al., 2020).

The Minority Stress Model offers a conceptual framework for cumulative stress experienced by GSD individuals (Meyer, 1995, 2003b). Meyer (1995) proposes difficult social situations experienced regularly by GSD individuals contribute cumulatively to high stress and poor health outcomes. The model highlights the anticipation of rejection/discrimination, actual

experiences of rejection/discrimination and internalisation of prejudicial attitudes. GSD individuals who are managing visibility may experience stress through hiding their identity and through sharing it (Meyer, 2003a). The stressful management of conflicting or ambiguous truths that VM represents is likened by Dziengel (2015) to *Ambiguous Loss* (Theory; Boss, 2009), where an individual might be physically present in social relationships but aspects of their identity are psychologically absent, or where social-self and self-perception are incongruent. GSD youth certainly experience high stress during disclosure (Charbonnier & Graziani, 2016).

Though there is a clear risk of bullying related to disclosure, Charbonnier & Graziani (2016) found participants were most concerned with fears around damaging relationships with loved ones and having limited resources to cope. Consistently, GSD YP are more likely than their peers to experience psychological distress, suicidal ideation and other negative mental health outcomes (Bradlow et al., 2017; D'augelli, 2003; Hatchel et al., 2019; Hill et al., 2021; Holmes & Cahill, 2013; Kosciw et al., 2013, 2019). Disabled GSD YP and/or those from a minoritised ethnicity report an even higher incidence of negative mental health outcomes (Zongrone et al., 2020; Holmes & Cahill, 2013; Kosciw et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2019; Truong et al., 2020). In addition, GSD-based bullying at school is associated with decreased sense of belonging and increased absence (Abreu et al., 2021) and with lower self-esteem (Kosciw et al., 2013). Numerous studies have found associated greater negative mental health outcomes with greater minority stress in diverse, young GSD populations (Fulginiti et al., 2020; Hunter et al., 2019; Kelleher, 2009; Schmitz et al., 2020)

### 2.1.4      Visibility management and wellbeing in school

GSD pupils are balancing internal and external stressors while they manage visibility. Dziengel (2015) proposes that disclosure risk assessments must balance the possibility of social rejection with the potential for new friends and greater closeness; incongruent self-perception with acceptance and authenticity; and discrimination and bullying with access to protective policies and opportunities for activism/advocacy. Open visibility strategies are associated with greater wellbeing in GSD adults (Kranz & Pierrard, 2018; Savin-Williams & Cohen, 2015); for example, in a study of GSD adults, greater 'outness' was associated with greater self-esteem and lower distress (Rosario et al., 2001).

YP are aware of their GSD identity for a number of years before making a disclosure (D'augelli, 2003); though many adopt restrictive VM strategies in school, it is also clear that many choose, at some point, to make disclosures. The implications of open VM in school appears complex. Various studies that have associated improved wellbeing following disclosure at school

have also found moderating factors, such as, supportive friends and family (Shilo & Savaya, 2011) and access to staff support (Romijnders et al., 2017). Kosciw et al. (2015) surveyed over 7800 LGBT secondary students and measured self-esteem, depression and 'outness', finding that greater outness was associated with higher self-esteem and lower depression; however, outness was also linked to higher bullying. Similarly, Watson et al. (2015) sampled 1031 LGB high-school students and measured 'outness', academic achievement and harassment at school, with greater outness significantly associated with greater harassment. Watson et al. found that participants who were more likely to be out to no-one reported the highest grades and lowest harassment, but participants who were more likely to be out to everyone reported the next highest grades and next lowest harassment. Authors suggest selective visibility means a greater burden of management in different contexts, with those at the extreme poles, who are out to all or no-one, having a simpler strategy.

Survey data in New Zealand suggested an association between disclosure at older ages and higher educational attainment and proposed that earlier and prolonged experiences of bullying might explain this (Henrickson, 2008). Congruently, GSD-based bullying is associated with lower academic attainment (Kosciw et al., 2019) and school attendance (Pearson et al., 2007). Legate et al. (2012) used the frame of *Self-Determination Theory* (Deci & Ryan, 2012) to contrast outness and wellbeing in environments that were perceived as 'autonomy-supportive', where participants felt supported for being authentically themselves and given choice and able to pursue their interests and values, with environments perceived as 'controlling', where individuals felt pressure to conform and controlled by how others wish them to be. Here, lower anger and depression and higher self-esteem were related to greater outness but were dependent on autonomy-supportive contexts, including in school. Participants were also significantly more likely to be more 'out' in autonomy-supportive contexts. For transgender YP, chosen name use at school is associated with significantly lower negative mental health outcomes and relatively smaller improvements in positive mental health outcomes (Pollitt et al., 2021). Interestingly, authors suggested outcomes for chosen name use were indicative of wider gender-affirming school cultures.

An open VM strategy in school can be wellbeing supportive but not always. The social environment and support offered by peers, staff and wider school community plays a significant role in the outcome. Whilst open VM is risky due to threats to physical wellbeing, transgressing cis-heteronormative expectations, perhaps more significantly represents a threat to sense of belonging. Belonging refers to the fundamental human need to feel approved of, respected and appreciated by a group or community and is central to wellbeing (Allen et al., 2021; Mcmillan & Chavis, 1986). Importantly, the group norms are central to membership of the group and those who deviate from these norms significant may find themselves rejected and ostracised from the

group (Mcmillan & Chavis, 1986). Congruently, GSD pupils report lower sense of school belonging, associated with GSD-based bullying (Hatchel et al., 2019; Heck et al., 2014), and with a hostile school climate (Sansone, 2019) and greater sense of school belonging where school environments are GSD supportive (Hatchel et al., 2019).

In summary, within most Euro-American cultures, GSD YP are making disclosures of their GSD identities in greater numbers and at younger ages than previously (Bradlow et al., 2017; Hill et al., 2021; Kosciw et al., 2018). Many GSD YP are 'out' to some extent during their time at school. The process of disclosing or withholding a GSD identity can be characterised as Visibility Management (VM; Lasser & Tharinger, 2003). This refers to the ongoing and dynamic process of making oneself more or less visible as GSD in different contexts. GSD YP manage visibility through direct disclosures but also through more subtle transgressions of gender norms. Social norms that exist around gender are present and reenforced in schools through social sanctions and disapproval (Boe et al., 2020). GSD YP transgress these norms when they are visible in these spaces. Unsurprisingly therefore, GSD YP also report numerous negative experiences at school, with high numbers experiencing or witnessing GSD-based bullying, prejudicial remarks, discrimination, and social rejection (Bradlow et al., 2017; Hill et al., 2021; Kosciw et al., 2018). GSD pupils, correspondingly, are more likely to experience negative mental health outcomes. The internalisation of gender norms, experiences of social reprisals and the management of visibility are captured within the Minority Stress Model (Meyer, 2003a) and represent the unique combination of stressful factors facing GSD YP. Managing visibility represents a risk assessment, where YP must balance risk of bullying and rejection, which represent threats to sense of belonging (Hatchel et al., 2019), with the need to live an authentic existence (Dziengel, 2015). While open VM strategies in adulthood are associated with improvements in wellbeing, implications of disclosures in school are more complex. Whilst there are some reported wellbeing gains, studies also consistently show an associated increase in bullying and rejection (Kosciw et al., 2015; Watson et al., 2015). GSD pupils appear resilient in the face of significant adversity. Qualitative research that explores these experiences in greater depth and describes the meaning that YP make of these VM experiences during their time in school is therefore highly valuable and will helpfully inform education professionals who are responsible for supporting these YP during this complicated time. As the experiences of those who exist within the GSD umbrella vary, it is clearly also important to recognise the sample characteristics within this field. The research questions that this systematic literature review therefore seeks to answer are:

*Research question 1:* Why do pupils who identify as gender and sexuality diverse manage their identity at school?

*Research question 2:* How do pupils who identify as gender and sexuality diverse manage their visibility at school?*

 *Research question 3:* What have been the population sample characteristics across studies in this field (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability)?

*Research question two was added during analysis as it became clear that this could be explored within the same themes and was an intrinsic and distinct part of VM.

## 2.2     Method

This review used a Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis approach (PRISMA; Moher et al., 2009; see Figure 2) to identify articles. Data extraction, analysis and synthesis were conducted using an inductive and interpretative Thematic Synthesis approach, as described in Thomas & Harden (2008). This review is concerned with producing higher-order interpretation of GSD YP's experiences of managing visibility in school by using the primary data and author findings to generate concepts and develop hypotheses that link these together (Cherry & Dickson, 2017; Thomas & Harden, 2008).

### 2.2.1       Electronic search strategy

Initial scoping searches were conducted using SCOPUS, PsycInfo and ERIC on 1 November 2020 and additionally using Google Scholar on 6 November 2020 to identify possible terms for the systematic search. Early scoping searches and an adapted PICoS (Population, Phenomenon of Interest, Context, Study type; table 2) table were used to identify final search terms (Stern et al., 2014). The initial systematic literature search was conducted on 24th and 26th February 2021 and included three databases: PsycInfo, Web of Science and ERIC. Iterative final search terms were then agreed with project supervisors, truncated (see Table 1) and a final search was conducted on 27 February 2021. Search filters were applied within each database (Appendix A). Additional papers were added through identification as relevant through earlier scoping searches and through snowballing via references of the papers produced by the systematic search (Greenhalgh & Peacock, 2005).

**Table 1** Search Terms

| Search Items | Syntax used for APA PsycInfo, ERIC and Web of Science |
| --- | --- |

| | |
|---|---|
| Population (1) | "YP" OR children OR youth OR adolescen* OR pupils OR  students OR "young adults" OR teenagers OR teens |
| Population (2) | LGB* OR queer OR "sexual minority" OR "gender minority" OR "gender non*" OR "same-sex attracted" OR "gender question*" OR TGNB OR "two-spirit*" OR lesbian OR gay OR bisexual OR trans OR transgender OR pansexual OR SSAGQ OR sexuality OR homosexual |
| Phenomenon | "coming out" OR "being out" OR "authentic sel*" OR "sharing identity" OR "visibility management" OR closet* OR disclosure OR openness |
| Context | school OR education OR college |
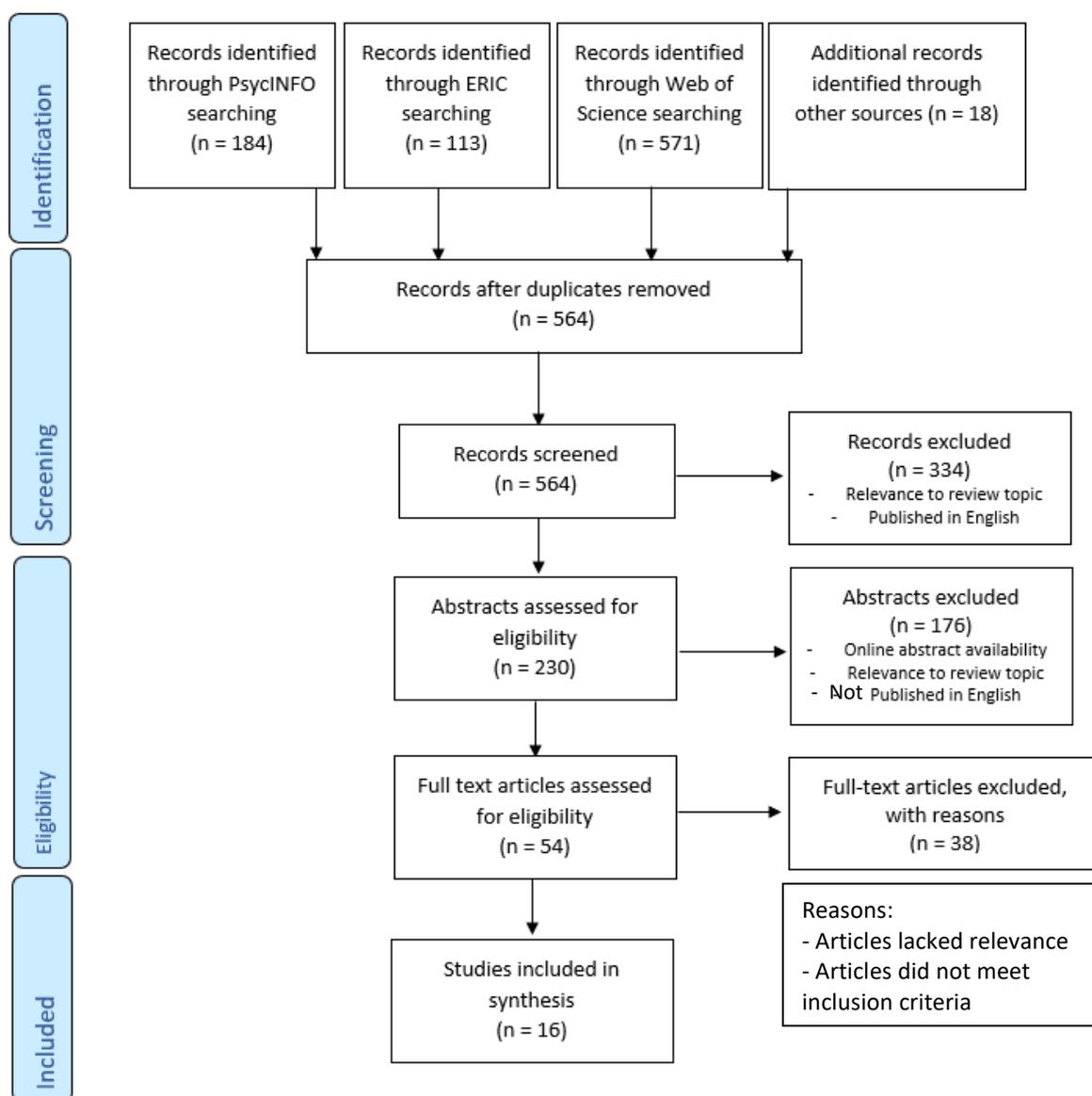
**Figure 2** PRISMA Diagram demonstrating the systematic search process

## 2.2.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were initially to include all methodologies; however, during screening these criteria were refined to include only qualitative and mixed methods methodology, based on the research questions: (1) How do YP who identify as gender and sexuality diverse manage their visibility at school? (2) Why do YP who identity as gender and sexuality diverse manage their identity at school? The papers collected through systematic literature search were screened based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria included in Table 2. Studies published prior to 2000 were excluded to ensure included data remained relevant.

**Table 2** Final Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

| PICoS Item | Inclusion | Exclusion |
|---|---|---|
| Population | Participants mean age within 0-18 years old and with an upper age limit of 25 years To include all school years across countries where children are within this age range e.g., UK up to yr. 12.<br><br>To include studies that collect data retrospectively where data is focused within the specified age range | All studies where the mean ages of the participants are outside of the 0-18 age bracket. |
| Population | Participant identity to include any queer identity variant, including any minoritised gender identities and sexualities | Participants that are both cisgender and heterosexual |
| Phenomenon of interest | Studies that include any exploration related to coming out/being out or the experience of managing the visibility of a GSD identity | Studies that do not concern visibility management |
| Context | Studies that focus on the experience of managing queer visibility within an education context: inclusive of all stages of education up to age 18 e.g., Year 12 in the UK | Any context outside of school |
| Study Design | Qualitative research exploring experiences of managing a GSD visibility in an education context | Studies that have not been peer-reviewed<br>Conference papers<br>Quantitative research |
| Other | Research in all countries, including participants from different cultures<br>Studies that are published after 2000 | Not written in English<br>Published before 2000 |

### 2.2.3    Selection Procedure

The final systematic literature search yielded 886 results (PyscInfo: 184, ERIC: 113, Web of Science 571; Other sources: 18), which were imported into Mendeley reference management software (mendeley.com) and 322 duplications were removed to result in 564 papers. Titles were screened for relevance and English language; 334 records were excluded. The resulting 230 papers were abstract-screened to further exclude papers lacking relevance, not published in English and to ensure full-text availability. Fifty-four full-text papers were assessed for eligibility

and 38 were excluded with reasons (see Appendix B). This resulted in the selection of 16 final papers to be included in this review.

### 2.2.4        Quality assessment

All 16 final papers included in this review were quality assessed using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2018) qualitative checklist (see Appendix C). The CASP checklist is designed for use within qualitative systematic review to assess trustworthiness, relevance, and results of qualitative papers (see https://casp-uk.net/). This checklist was used to appraise one included mixed-method study as only data from the qualitative element was included in review. The checklist appraises studies in three sections intended to assess validity (Section A), rigour and clarity of results (Section B) and usefulness of results (Section C). Each item is rated using *Yes, No* or *Can't Tell* classifications; however, this was adapted into a spreadsheet to allow more in-depth consideration of each study (see Appendix C). The CASP quality assessment was incorporated in this review in the form of a summary of the strengths, weaknesses, and general quality of each included study. There is no established threshold for inclusion or exclusion of low quality qualitative research. Therefore, the quality assessment process did not result in the exclusion of any study; rather contributed to confidence assessments of each study and allowed the inclusion of all novel findings (Carroll & Booth, 2015).

### 2.2.5        Researcher's positionality

Researcher positionality can influence all aspects of the research process (Holmes & Darwin, 2020). The main researcher is an educational psychology doctoral student, studying at Southampton University. All coding and analysis was conducted by the main researcher, with the oversight of two project supervisors. The project supervisors are both Psychology Senior Teaching Fellows at Southampton University . The main researcher identifies as a white-British, cisgender, queer woman. The main researcher's membership of the GSD community and personal experiences of being queer in a British school are acknowledged and the influence of this on this review and particularly on the analysis is advantageous in that it allows the researcher to deeply understand the experiences and language of participants and produce rich description within analysis (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015; Holmes & Darwin, 2020).

### 2.2.6        Data extraction

All data related to GSD YPs' experiences of managing visibility in school was extracted. All data deemed relevant to the study phenomenon were extracted. This predominantly included

verbatim data from results, but also data within the wider text, as described in Thomas & Harden (2008). All data was transferred to an MS Excel spreadsheet under the headings; (1) author and year; (2) summary of key experience and (3) example quotation. In addition, study characteristics and population demographics were recorded in separate spreadsheets. Study characteristics spreadsheet included headings; (1) authors and year; (2) title; (3) research topics; (4) location; (5) sampling approach; (6) inclusion/exclusion criteria; (7) data collection strategy and (8) analysis. Participant demographics spreadsheet included the headings; (1) authors and year; (2) sample size; (3) age; (4) gender; (5) sexual orientation; (6) ethnicity and (7) disability (see Table 3). Data extraction was iterative and papers were read and reread multiple times to ensure all relevant data was extracted, in accordance with Thomas & Harden (2008).

### 2.2.7      Data synthesis

Data synthesis was inductive and line-by-line coding was repeated and checked to ensure all relevant codes had been ascribed. Data synthesis followed the thematic synthesis approach: (1) line-by-line coding; (2) construction of descriptive themes and (3) development of analytical themes (as described in Thomas & Harden, 2008), which are detailed in Figure 3. During the first stage of thematic synthesis, 91 codes were generated. These original codes were checked and a small number of similar codes were subsumed into 84 final codes. The second stage involved examining codes and drawing similarities and differences between them. Codes were grouped and regrouped, in discussion with project supervisors until final codes were grouped into 24 descriptive themes. The final stage involved finding similarities and differences in descriptive themes, drawing meaning, and grouping into seven final analytical themes (see Appendix D for a visual map of codes by descriptive and analytical themes). This process ensured the final analytical themes were reflected in the data and logs of all decisions and changes were kept and were also discussed with the project supervisors at each stage.

**1. Primary data extraction and line-by-line inductive coding:**

Aiming to capture meaning and content of each sentence

Interpretations remain close to meaning within the text – descriptive themes are data-driven

**2. Construction of descriptive themes:**

Reviewer identifies similarities and differences and begins to group and subsume codes into descriptive themes

**3. Development of analytical themes:**

Further grouping and subsuming of themes and 'third order', new interpretation of data to infer answers to research questions

Interpretations beyond the meaning within the text – analytical themes are preliminary synthesis of the data

**Figure 3** Visual of the process of coding as described in Harden & Thomas (2008)

## 2.3    Results

### 2.3.1    Study characteristics

Characteristics of included studies vary by year, ranging from 2003 to 2021, and by location, including UK ($n$ = 7), US ($n$ = 5), Australia ($n$ = 1), Iceland ($n$ = 1), Portugal ($n$ = 1) and Belgium ($n$ = 1). The focus of the articles spanned a variety of topics but always included some exploration of GSD YP's VM experiences in school. The majority of studies used individual interviews as the primary method of generating data ($n$ = 13). The remaining studies used open-ended survey ($n$ = 3) and some studies used additional data generation methods, including focus groups ($n$ = 4) and workshops ($n$ = 1). Additional study characteristics can be found in Table 3.

**Table 3** Study Characteristics

| Authors | Title | Research Topics | Location | Sampling Approach | Inclusion/exclusion | Data Collection | Analysis |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Anderson et al. 2016 | *Sixth form girls and bisexual burden* | Bisexuality; bisexual burden; biphobia; female; youth; sexuality | UK | Purposive sampling | Inclusion: Openly Bisexual Female 16-17 years old | Telephone interview (1:1) | Thematic Analysis |
| Bower-Brown et al. 2021 | *Binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning adolescents' experiences in UK schools* | Gender diverse; internet: qualitative study; resilience; transgender; youth | UK | Random stratified sampling | Exclusion: Cis 11-12/18-19 Answered less than half of the questions | Open-ended survey responses | Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) |
| Dewaele et al. 2013 | *From Coming Out to Visibility Management—A New Perspective on Coping with Minority Stressors in LGB Youth in Flanders* | Discrimination, coping, minority stress, sexual minorities | Flanders, Belgium | Purposive and snowball sampling | | 1:1 in-person interview | Phenomenological Life World Approach (Manen, 1997) |
| Gato et al. 2020 | *"The worst part was coming back home and feeling like crying": Experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans students in Portuguese schools* | School climate (or environment), discrimination, bullying, LGBTI | Portugal | Convenience sampling | Inclusion: LGBT+ 14+ Attending high school | Open-ended survey responses | Thematic Analysis |
| Higa et al. 2015 | *Negative and Positive Factors Associated with the Well-Being of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Youth* | Gay, lesbian, well-being, youth | Washington, US | Purposive Sampling | Inclusion: 14-19 Spoke English GLBTQ+ 'Straight allies' (N=4) | Focus groups (n=63) 1:1 interview (n=5) | Consensual Methods Approach (Hill, Thompson & Williams, 1997) |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jones et al., 2016 | *School experiences of transgender and gender diverse students in Australia* | Transgender; gender; sex; diversity; students; Australia | Australia | Random sampling | Inclusion: 14-25 Gender diverse | Survey (N=212) 1:1 Instant message Interviews (N=16) | Grounded Theory |
| Kjaran & Jóhannesson, 2013 | *Manifestations of Heterosexism in Icelandic Upper Secondary Schools and the Responses of LGBT Students* | Agency, discourse, heterosexism, LGBT students, queer theory, secondary schools | Reykjavik, Iceland | Purposive sampling | Inclusion: Under 25 Have attended secondary school for at least two years Attended school in Iceland | 1:1 in-person interview | Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) |
| Lasser & Tharinger, 2003 | *Visibility management in school and beyond: A qualitative study of gay, lesbian, bisexual youth* | Gay; lesbian; bisexual; GLB; youth; visibility management; school | Texas, US | Purposive sampling and snowball | Inclusion: Under 18 Self-identified GLB and questioning | 1:1 in-person interview | Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) |
| Lasser & Wicker, 2008 | *Visibility Management and the Body: How Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Youth Regulate Visibility Nonverbally* | Gay; lesbian; bisexual; GLB; youth; visibility management; school; body | Texas, US | Purposive sampling and snowball | Inclusion: Under 18 Self-identified GLB and questioning | 1:1 in-person interview | Grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) |
| Morris et al. 2014 | *The changing experiences of bisexual male adolescents* | Biphobia; bisexuality; coming out; homophobia; inclusion; sixth form | UK | Purposive sampling | Inclusion: Openly Bisexual Female 16-17 years old | 1:1 telephone interview | Thematic Analysis |
| Robinson 2010 | *A study of young lesbian and gay people's school experiences* | Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA); young lesbian and gay people | North-west England | Purposive sampling | | 1:1 in-person interview (n=6), Focus groups (n=11) | Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Roe, 2015 | *Examining the Role of Peer Relationships in the Lives of Gay and Bisexual Adolescents* | Adolescents; gay–straight alliances; LGBT issues; peer support | US | Purposive and snowball sampling | | 1:1 in-person interview | Phenomenological Approach |
| Schimmel-Bristow, 2018 | *Youth and Caregiver Experiences of Gender Identity Transition: A Qualitative Study* | Social transition, transgender, gender identity, mental health | Seattle, US | Purposive sampling | Inclusion: Gender non-conforming 14-22 English language fluency | 1:1 interview (n=6) Focus groups (n=9) | Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) |
| Sheriff et al. 2011 | *"What do you say to them?" Investigating and supporting the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and questioning (LGBTQ) young people* | Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and questioning; LGBTQ; youth; supporting | Sussex, UK | Purposive sampling and snowball | Inclusion: 11 and 30 years identified as being LGBTQ Understand and speak English | 1:1 in-person interview | Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) |
| Taylor & Cuthburt, 2019 | *Queer religious youth in faith and community schools* | Sexuality; religion; education; youth; queer | England | Purposive sampling | Inclusion: Under 25 Attended English schools after repeal of sec 28 (2003) Religious | 1:1 in-person interview | Thematic Analysis |
| Toft, 2020 | *Identity Management and Community Belonging: The Coming Out Careers of Young Disabled LGBT+ Persons* | Sexuality; disability; identity; coming out; community | Central England | Purposive sampling | LGBT+ Disabled Under 25 | 1:1 interview (n= 13) Interactive workshops (n=5) Focus groups (n=8, n=10) (6 same interviews/ workshops) | Intersectional storytelling or narrative driven intersectional analysis (Toft et al. 2019b and Orne, 2011) |

**Table 4** Participant Demographics

| Authors | Sample | Age | Gender | Sexuality | Ethnicity | Disability |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Anderson et al. 2016 | Total = 15 | 16-17 | Female | Bisexual | Not reported | Not reported |
| Bower-Brown et al. 2021 | Total = 74 | 13-17 | 25 binary trans, 25 non-binary, 24 gender questioning | Not reported | Not reported | Not reported |
| Dewaele et al. 2013 | Total = 24 | 16-18 | 12 males, 12 female | LGB and not heterosexual | Not reported | Not reported |
| Gato et al. 2020 | Total = 146 | 15-20 M=17.01, SD=1.42 | 54.1 = female, 38.6% = male 7.8% = Trans, 5.5% = non-binary, //81.5% cisgender | 34 = gay, 33 = lesbian, 42 = bisexual, 17 = pansexual, 7 = queer, 6 = hetero, 2 = demisexual, 2 = asexual | 87% white/Caucasian/ European | Not reported |
| Higa et al. 2015 | Total = 68 | 14-24 ~50% 16-17 25% 19+ | 50% female, 47% male, 3% trans | 64 = LGBTQ 4 = 'straight allies | 42% White, 35% multiracial, 6% African American, 6% Latino/a | Not reported |
| Jones et al., 2016 | Total = 16 | 14-25 (M=19) | 72.5% assigned female at birth 26.5% assigned male, 2 not assigned. 50% non-binary | 50% queer | 84% Aus, 5% Eng, 3% N.Zealand, 8% Other, <5% Aboriginal/ Islander | Not reported |
| Kjaran & Jóhannesson, 2013 | Total = 6 | Under 25 | 4 = male, 1 = female, 1 = transwoman | 4 = gay, 1 = Bisexual, 1 = no ascribed sexuality | Not reported | Not reported |
| Lasser & Tharinger, 2003 | Total = 20 | <18, M = 17.1 | 8 = male, 12 = female | GLB | 6 = Hispanic 14 = Caucasian | Not reported |

| Lasser & Wicker, 2008 | Total = 20 | Under 18, M = 17.1 | 8 = male, 12 = female | GLB | 6 = Hispanic, 14 = Caucasian | Not reported |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Morris et al. 2014 | Total = 15 | 16-18 | Male | Bisexual | 14 white, 1 mixed race | Not reported |
| Robinson 2010 | Total = 17 | 16-21 | 12 = male, 5 = female | LGBT | All white | Not reported |
| Roe, 2015 | Total = 7 | 16-18, 2 = 15, 3 = 17, 2 = 18 | 6 = male 1 = female | LGBT | All white | Not reported |
| Schimmel-Bristow, 2018 | Total = 15 | 14-22 M=18 | Trans-fem = 3, Trans-masc = 7 Other = 5 | Not reported | 10 white, 1 Native American 1 Hispanic, 3 Mixed | Not reported |
| Sheriff et al. 2011 | Total = 11 | 13-26 | 4 = male, 7 = female | L = 5, G = 3, B = 2, T = 1 | White British | 1 = Asperger's, 2 = dyslexia, |
| Taylor & Cuthburt, 2019 | Total = 13 | Under 25 | 6 = male, 5 = female, 1 = trans man, 1 = trans + gender queer | G = 6, L = 3, B = 1, Q = 1 , Pan/queer = 1, Queer/gay = 1 | White | Not reported |
| Toft, 2020 | Total = 30 | 16-25 | Not reported | LGBT+ (LGBT, gender fluid, non-binary, queer and asexual) | Not reported | 30= disabled* |

*Including autism, learning disability, physical disability, and mental health problems

### 2.3.2    Sample characteristics

Sample sizes ranged from 6-146, with a total of 497 participants across all studies. Participants were between 13-26 years old. Refer to Table 4 for more detailed information about sample characteristics. Most studies included only participants who were GSD ($n$ = 15), with one including four 'straight allies'. Gender was reported differently across studies, with some including only cisgender participants ($n$ = 7) and others including a wider range of specific gender identities ($n$ = 8). One did not report gender or sexual orientation but identified participants as belonging to the *LGBT+* community. Where sexual orientation was not reported (n = 2), all participants were identified as gender diverse. Many studies reported participant sexual orientation as *LGB+* ($n$ = 8) and the remaining studies ($n$ = 5) reported specific sexual orientations. See figures 4 and 5 for the reported sexual orientation and gender of the total sample. Participant ethnicity was not reported in five studies. Some only included white/Caucasian participants ($n$ = 4) and some did not report ethnicity ($n$ = 5). See Figure 6 for reported ethnicity of the total sample. Two studies included participants who described themselves as disabled and the remaining studies did not report this information ($n$ = 14).
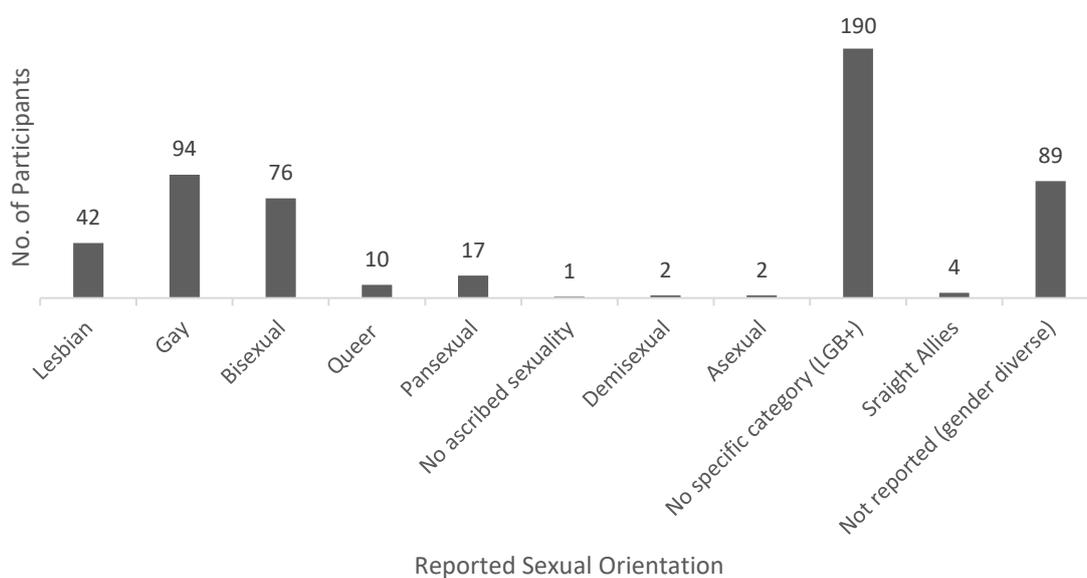


**Figure 4** Reported sexual orientation by participant
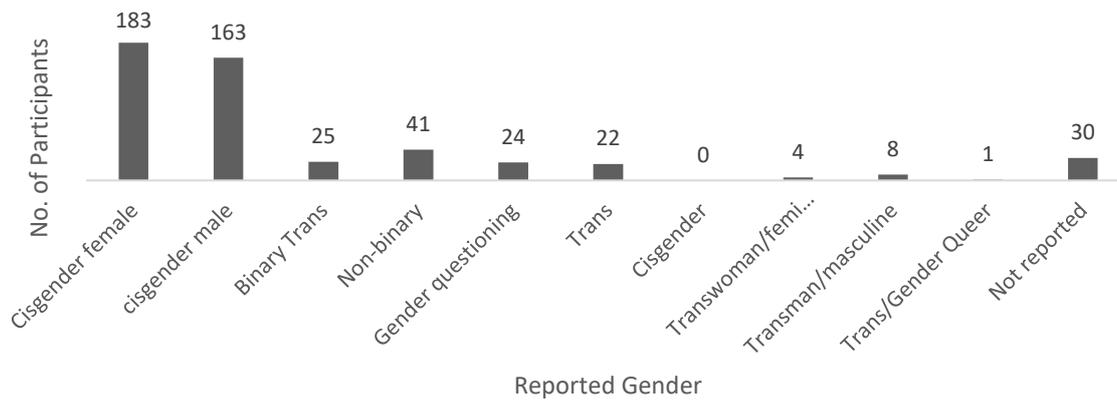
**Figure 5** Reported gender by participant
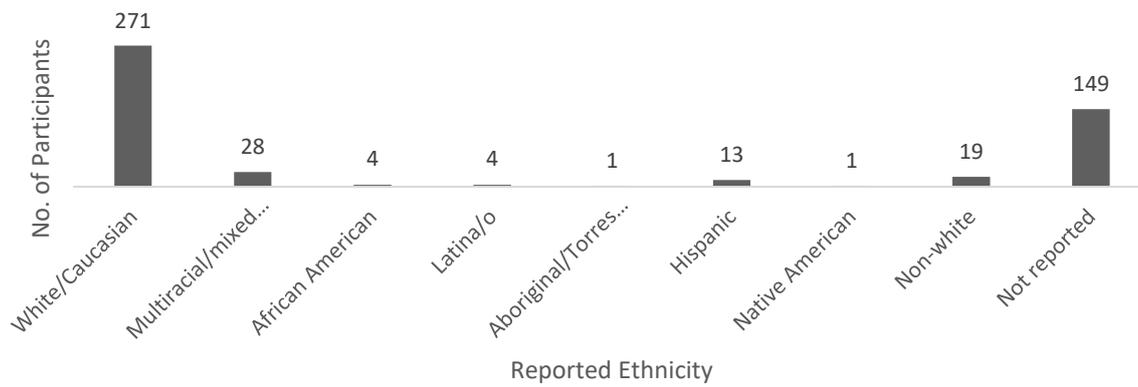


**Figure 6** Reported ethnicity by participant

### 2.3.3 Quality appraisal

Quality assessment using the Qualitative CASP (2018) indicated that all included studies addressed the research questions. All studies included a clear statement of aims, were appropriate for qualitative methodology, were appropriately designed to address the aims, collected data in an appropriate way and included a clear statement of findings. Some papers (5, 7, 12, 15) did not include consideration of ethical issues. Though ethical approval was granted, the wellbeing of participants was not discussed. Consideration of researcher-participant relationship was not reported in a number of studies (1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 13, 15, 16). Further details from the CASP quality appraisal are reported in Appendix C.

### 2.3.4 Synthesis findings

Synthesis was principally completed by the main researcher; however, there was collaboration with project supervisors throughout, including regular discussion of findings with clarity and transparency throughout. At each stage, the research team attempted to ensure transparency and accurate interpretation of the data. Seven analytical themes were developed; (1) We need to explore, discover and accept who we are before we can be our authentic selves; (2) Visibility management is a constant negotiation and a fluid process, (3) We are influenced and oppressed by norms; our visibility breaks norms and changes culture, (4) We are acutely aware and often fearful of social reactions to the visibility of GSD people and to disclosure, (5) We need school staff to do more to support us, (6) We need a visible community to feel safe and experience belonging and (7) We fight for our right to be visible. Refer to table 5 for details of which themes were derived from each study.

**Table 5** Analytical themes by study

| | Author(s), Year | Analytical Themes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *1* | *2* | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 1 | Anderson et al. 2016 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| 2 | Bower-Brown et al. 2021 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 3 | Dewaele et al. 2013 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| 4 | Gato et al., 2020 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 5 | Higa et al. 2015 | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 6 | Jones et al. 2016 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | Kjaran & Jóhannesson, 2013 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 8 | Lasser & Tharinger, 2003 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 9 | Lasser & Wicker, 2008 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 10 | Morris et al. 2014 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 11 | Robinson 2010 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 12 | Roe, 2015 | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 13 | Schimmel-Bristow, 2018 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 14 | Sheriff et al. 2011 | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 15 | Taylor & Cuthburt, 2019 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 16 | Toft, 2020 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Total: | 13 | 12 | 13 | 16 | 12 | 10 | 9 |

## 2.4    Findings

### 2.4.1    Theme one:  We need to explore, discover, and accept who we are before we can be our authentic selves



**Figure 7** Analytical Theme one with descriptive subthemes

Theme one refers to experiences related to identity and featured in most studies (see Table 5). Participants described an internal journey of exploration, discovery and ultimately acceptance of their identities that usually took place before any disclosure. For many, this journey started in uncertainty (2), where they lacked language and understanding required to explore gender and/or sexuality (13). Some participants noted schools were not safe, supportive, or information-rich spaces for exploration and that seeking information on the internet was the only option, "I thank God for the Internet…I heard LGBT keep going around and I had no idea what it stood for…" (12, p.120).

In school, gender diverse pupils experience a great deal of uncertainty around their gender experiences, needing to learn about and explore their identities to make sense of them, "almost all of the youth participants described lacking the language and knowledge to accurately describe their initial sense of their gender identity" (13, p.276). A clear understanding of their experiences and the language to describe them is difficult for gender diverse young people to develop, and sometimes takes a long time, "So it was a slow, over about two years, going from thinking I was cis-gender to being, "Yeah, I'm a dude."" (13, p. 276). Their identities themselves evolve as they resonate with the gender diverse identities they explore, "For the most part, initially, there is the first coming out where it's like "I'm a gay female," "wait no, that's not right," and then kind of transitioning through that process again…" (13, p. 276). Exploring one's identity is preoccupying and can even take precedence over other priorities in the lives of gender diverse young people, "These were my exploration years and I neglected much of my schoolwork" (3, p.107). Of course, even exploration can itself be an act of transgression and gender diverse young people can't easily explore their identities without making an indirect disclosure, "I find it impossible to experiment with my gender identity (dressing and acting like a girl, using a female name etc.) without coming out" (2, p.8).

For some pupils, this journey elicited feelings of shame (8, 11, 15, 16). Shame was characterised as resulting from an internalisation of negative attitudes, as Lasser & Tharinger (2003) put it, "Individuals who are continually exposed to hostile attitudes toward homosexuality may be more likely to develop their own negative feelings and beliefs about GLB orientations. This internalization impacts self-acceptance, particularly when environmental attitudes are strong." (p. 240). Internalised stigma meant some participants demonstrated prejudicial attitudes towards other GSD pupils, "I think we sometimes cause our own discrimination…If these guys get beaten up…then it's just their own fault" (3, p.697). Some participants wished to separate themselves from other GSD pupils that, in their view, fulfilled negative stereotypes. For others, the journey of exploration and discovery is characterised by feelings of personal growth (3, 5, 11), reaching self-acceptance through the development of internal strength, "Be who you want to be, don't be

loved to be somebody you're not, I'd rather be hated for someone I am, rather than loved for somebody I am not." (11, p.342). They noted disclosure can result in further self-acceptance regardless of social reactions, "The things I experienced because I'm gay have made me more optimistic; it makes you stronger. Of course, that's a cliché but...You learn to stick up for yourselves...you learn to tackle new problems..." (3, p.702).

The primary, *internal* motivating factor for visibility was desire to live 'authentically' without effort (2, 3, 8, 9, 16). Participants highlighted the energy required to maintain duel 'selves', ''it's hard because you know that it's not you…I think that the way (being in the closet) affects school is that you're on such guard and stuff that you're not really who you are.'' (8, p. 240). Stress associated with concealing one's authentic self was detrimental to wellbeing and living authentically was essential to good mental health, "I came out to save my life" (16, p. 1904). They acknowledged that being themselves can also be stressful but is ultimately the only viable option,

> "It's kinda my fault; I could have stayed quiet and none of this would have happened,
> but because I learned to be yourself, and if you're not yourself, who are you going to
> be? That's the way of life, you're gonna always come into confrontation and you're
> going to learn to deal with it" (9, p.113)

Interestingly, some participants who did not disclose at school, did not follow this journey, but suggested that disclosure was not required in order to experience wellbeing at school (7, 15). These participants enjoyed their time in education "I had the time of my life, it was a girls' school erm and there wasn't any pressure" (15, p.392). Study authors suggest these participants possessed good economic/social resources and sources of wellbeing that might have mitigated the need to achieve coherence in their identity (Taylor & Cuthbert, 2019).

**2.4.2      Theme two: We constantly negotiate and manage our visibility; it is a fluid process**
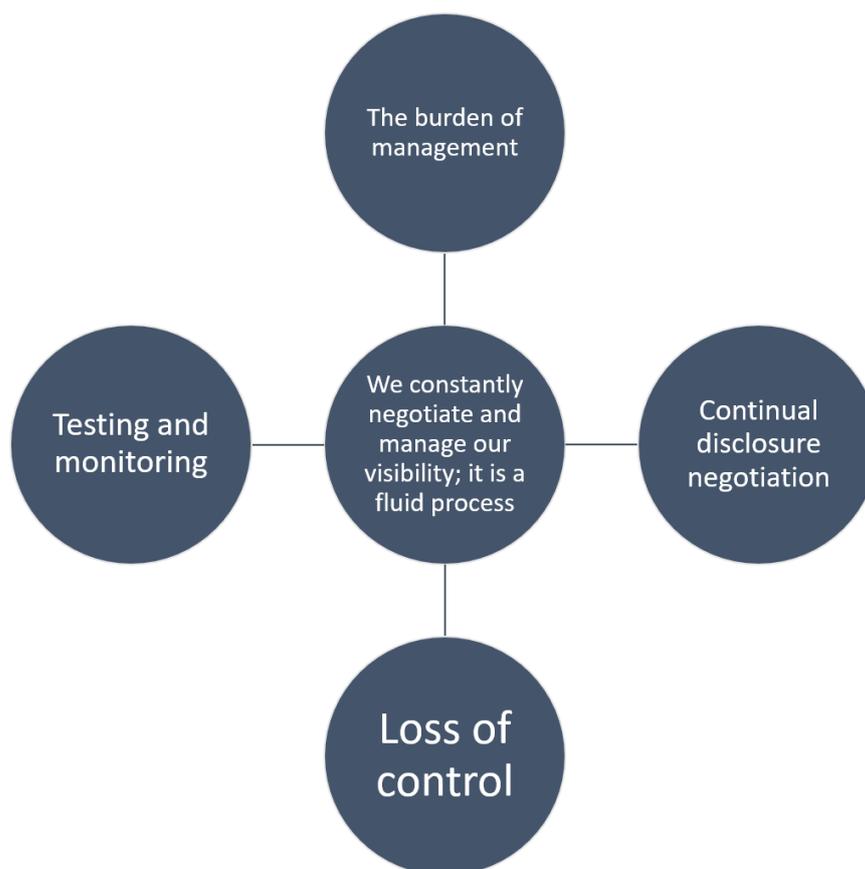


**Figure 8** Analytical Theme two with descriptive subthemes

Theme two appeared in most studies (see Table 5). This theme refers **to** visibility management (VM); participants described this as an ongoing, fluid negotiation. They are continually, dynamically assessing whether and how to disclose in various school contexts. Participants described 'coming out' multiple times and in multiple ways while at school and, in accordance with theory (Lasser & Wicker, 2007; Lasser & Tharinger, 2003; Lasser, 2005), do not recognise an 'in or out' dichotomy (2, 3, 8, 14). Lasser & Tharinger (2003) note that GSD YP constantly risk assess their environment by managing visibility subtly to test social reactions. Indeed, this is described by many participants (2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16),

> "For example, a lesbian who had not yet disclosed her sexual orientation to her teacher might make a reference to a gay-themed movie and then observe the teacher's reaction. Or a gay boy might tell a homophobic joke at lunch and watch to see how his friends respond. April, a 17-year old lesbian, was not ready to come out to her friends until she ''got a reading'' on their attitudes. ''I didn't tell any of my friends last year. I made some remarks that would hint at them, like I would tell them about all of my gay friends. I'd tell them about gay culture and see how they feel.'' (8, p.239)

Over time, information about the social environment is assimilated into a continually changing view of the world in relation to their GSD identity and informs future visibility strategies, "They receive and send out specific signals that determine this evaluation and that lead to a more open or closed visibility management strategy." (3, p.699). Participants recognise this process as a burden; it requires ongoing cognitive effort and is stressful (1, 3, 9, 10, 12). Many participants discussed a balancing of stressors, "A visibility management strategy is related to protection from external stressors, such as discrimination, and coping with internal stressors, such as anxiety." (3, p.701). This constant conflict between being more or less visible can be confusing and conflicting for participants who sometimes expressed contradictory statements about visibility,

> "I don't see why it's (sexual orientation) anyone's business at school. I mean high school can be a really tough time, for a lot of kids. And I don't think someone's sexual preference is anyone's business but them. That's just me personally. I don't think it's healthy to keep it bottled in for your whole life, but I think that the people you want to tell you should tell." (8, p.238)

Participants also talked about the dissonance of managing beliefs that their identity is acceptable with internalised stigmas that pervade their school environment,

> "I've been holding on too long to be an image of being straight to everybody, living up to girls and boys together, not girls and girls, but had real deep feelings for her [a new girlfriend] from just that one week of time and felt that it was wrong not to be gay, but to keep it inside." (9, p.113).

Numerous pupils spoke about relinquishing VM burden via strategic disclosure (1, 3, 10, 12). For many, using social media reduced the number of disclosures as the information was available to all and spread quickly throughout social networks, "[a participant] came out to her peers through Facebook. She did so by changing her 'interested in' status from 'likes men' to 'likes men and women'. Tamara said, 'I just wanted to get it over and done with" (1, p.30). Indirect disclosure via social media also reduced VM burden as there was no interaction to manage, "I wanted to get it out to everyone; so that I wouldn't have to keep answering the same questions to everyone I came out to." (1, p.30). Similarly, some participants spoke about strategically disclosing to a particular peer, "my group of friends includes one of the biggest gossips ever, so she sort of came out for me, which is what I wanted." (10, p.404). Conversely, for some participants, control over disclosure was very important (2, 4, 8, 15). They expressed fears around the loss of this control, an experience sometimes known as 'outing' or 'being outed', "Prior to disclosing one's sexual orientation, [GSD] youth must mentally map their social networks to determine whether disclosure to a safe person might result in an unsafe person discovering a [GSD identity]". (8,

p.239). In some cases, participants spoke about experiences of 'being outed' (2, 4, 15). For some, this was not due to malicious intent on behalf of the person making the disclosure,

> "And they [teachers] put up Stonewall posters when I came out, which to be honest, wasn't that helpful (laughter). Because everyone knew why they did it… I think positive publicity is a good thing but when it's…just suddenly be put up because of one person and everyone's like, "Yeah, yeah, we know"." (15, p.390)

For other participants the impact was more negative, "Without my permission, a school janitor (till this day I don't know who) informed my parents about my alleged sexual orientation." (4, p.6) Participants control over the narrative around their identity within the school community is something that causes many of them a great deal of stress. However, it is also clear that some GSD pupils use strategic disclosure to their advantage.

### 2.4.3 Theme three: We are influenced and oppressed by norms; our visibility breaks norms and changes culture
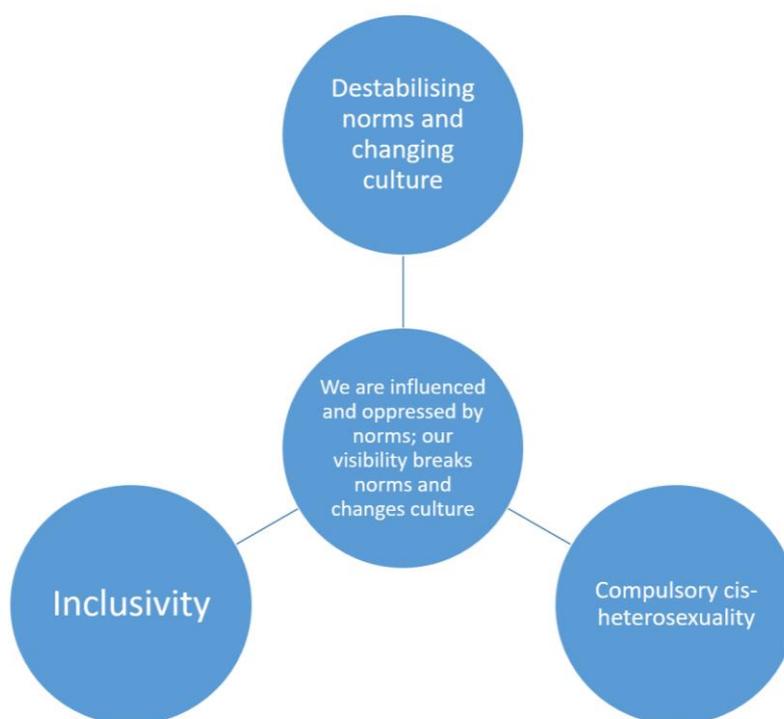


**Figure 9** Analytical Theme three with descriptive subthemes

Theme three refers to the bidirectional relationship between GSD YP and the school social environment; their presence both influences and is influenced by established norms relating to gender and sexuality (2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15). Many participants felt impacted by cis-heteronormativity; that these norms are strongly endorsed by and enforced in their schools (2, 4, 6, 7, 10, 13, 15). These norms influenced pupils' decisions around VM (2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13,

15, 16). Many participants recognised that violating norms results in the assumption that they are GSD, "Remarks such as «queer» and «girlie» are still used to describe slightly effeminate behaviors of straight boys" (4, p.7). The breaking of norms attracts social sanctions, including bullying, and rejection, "This effeminate boy in my class was not very good at running in sports class, so they really discriminated against him, it was kind of pathetic." (3, p.698). This threat inhibited many pupils them from feeling able to share their authentic selves, "It's like with my manners, when I am with straight people, I kind of take them into account. I still behave like I would, but much less...Or they wouldn't feel comfortable. But I don't think. It's more like an automatism. I don't really hold back, it's just that some of my manners are "disabled." (3, p.698). Some pupils actively moderated their visibility in order to conform to norms (16), "It's not like I will behave extra tough but I just try to control my pose. I try not to stand in an effeminate way, don't want to catch the eye" (3, p.700). Participants highlighted the exclusion of GSD identities from peer-peer discourse, particularly around relationships, that this resulted in pressure to conform in order to be included/belong,

> "I found it always very sad that I could never kiss some boy that I found attractive at the school dances. Everybody there was supposed to be heterosexual. During the first year, I took part in this heterosexual game and was kissing girls at dances. That was, however, not something I liked." (7, p.363),

Pupils who did not conform felt totally excluded, "I couldn't do this, I couldn't participate in this kind of discussion, and I felt therefore somehow different, like I was less valued as a man" (3, p.358).

Pupils also cited gender-segregated spaces in school as a means by which cis-heteronormativity is reinforced and highlighted how these spaces can be exclusionary for pupils whose identity does not fit traditional gender norms (2, 4, 6, 13, 15). This environmental enforcement of gender norms requires pupils to publicly confirm their gender identity every day in order to access their education. This makes VM particularly difficult for gender diverse participants who might not fit within the gender binary, "I used to have a running streak of weeks I would cry after PE because I was stuck in the girls' changing rooms and be with the girls, but it is probably better with the girls than with the boys" (2, p.8). Gendered spaces present additional challenge for those exploring/uncertain of their gender identity, "the challenge of having an identity that is not legally recognised or questioning an identity in an environment that relies on gender stability" (2, p.9) or who might not otherwise wish to make themselves visible, "I find it impossible to experiment with my gender identity (dressing and acting like a girl, using a female name etc.) without coming out" (2, p.8). Some studies argue that environmental reinforcement of

cis-heteronormativity acts as an agent for GSD bullying, "School environment was mentioned as many times as *School curriculum, School staff* and *Peers* [in reference to sources of bullying]" (4, p.6). This risk inhibits GSD visibility, "much of what makes school an unsafe space for many YP (queer or otherwise) is the naturalised gender binarism that pervades teaching and the classroom, and from which homophobia arises…" (15, p.390), and gendered spaces were often policed by other pupils, "…she was not 'out' at school, but because it was a very gendered environment in which she faced discrimination: 'I was routinely ridiculed for doing things that were considered "inappropriate" for my presumed gender'." (6, p.164). Despite the experience of broadly of cis-heteronormative school environments and their negative impact on GSD visibility, it is clear that GSD pupils also influence their environment both intentionally and unintentionally, often simply by simply being visible (1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13). GSD pupils often resist compulsory cis-heteronormativity both directly and indirectly.

Many participants spoke about using gender norms as a tool for visibility management, doing this non-verbally, through clothing/hair choices, tone of voice, mannerisms/gesture, and the use of GSD cultural symbols (3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9). Using non-verbal methods to manage visibility has multiple functions for GSD YP at school. As previously mentioned, it allows flexible and subtle VM but it is also recognised by many participants as a 'non-normative act' that defies the popular narrative of compulsory cis-heterosexuality, "She's going to go to prom in a tux, and she's taking her girlfriend, and I think that's neat. . . ." (9, p.110). Some participants also talked about direct resistance, through having to assert their visibility and challenge assumptions made about their identity,

> "When she got the assignment back, the teacher had corrected it, changing female to
> male pronouns, assuming Dani had made grammatical mistakes. After class, Dani went
> to the teacher and told her that this had not been a mistake; she had actually been with
> a girl during that weekend. The teacher realized her heterosexist prejudices and
> apologized to Dani" (7. P.363)

These direct and indirect assertions of GSD visibility are recognised by some participants as having an unintentionally transformative effect on individuals, "…out one guy used to say that I'm in a phase and am going to be completely lesbian. I'm pretty sure he doesn't think that now though." (1, p.29), and on the school community,

> "The notion of VM as a social force rather than a self-centred activity was woven
> throughout the interviews and underscores the point that GLB youth are active players
> in their social world and are keenly aware of their social interactions and the potential
> impact of their visibility management." (8, p.113).

The visibility of GSD pupils changed accepted norms and broader culture within schools (7, 8, 9). Some schools were recognised as inclusive of GSD pupils and this usually reflected broadly inclusive school culture (1, 7, 10). This was attributed to multiple factors but one of these is the existing visibility of other GSD pupils, "One of the reasons for Daisy's affirming college experience is that there were a number of sexual minorities in her school. While all but two participants said that there were other open sexual minorities out at their colleges" (1, p.29). GSD pupils increasing visibility over time had led to changes to the culture, "There are a lot more people, who you can see out in the open. So even though you're still in the minority, people don't care as much." (10, p.406). Other participants attributed inclusive school cultures to more diverse pupil populations, "…there are no stereotypes, or at least they do not matter; there are so many types there. Nobody cares about whether you are wearing this or that or if you are gay or not." (7, p.364). Participants also cited protective and inclusive policies that had shaped norms over time (7, 10) and the reflection of a greater degree of acceptance in wider society over time (1, 7, 10), 'Obviously we don't face a lot of prejudice here anymore.' (10, p.406). Lasser & Tharinger (2003) refer to visibility management as an example of *reciprocal determinism* (Bandura, 1978); where GSD YP are influenced by their school environment and culture but are also both direct and indirect influencers of the school environment and culture through their visible presence and behaviour.

**2.4.4    Theme four: We are acutely aware and often fearful of social reactions to our disclosure**
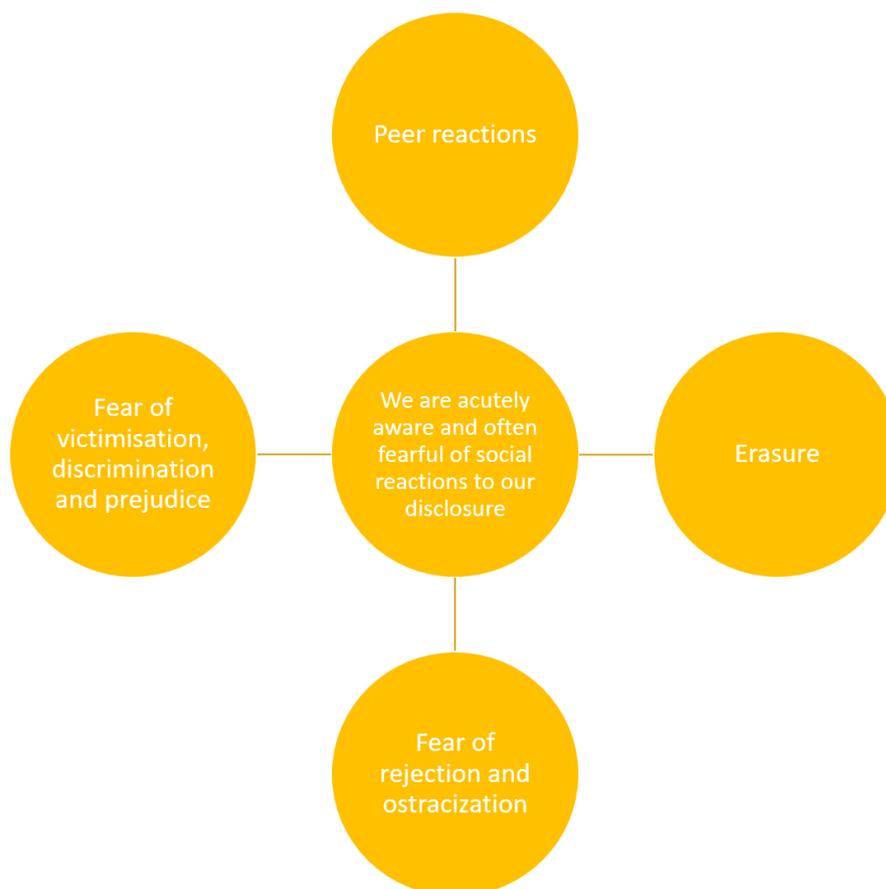


**Figure 10** Analytical Theme four with descriptive subthemes

Theme four featured in all of studies included in synthesis. This theme refers to awareness of and anxiety around the disclosure reactions of the school community and that this informs decisions around VM. For many pupils, anxiety around social reactions relates to fear of bullying, discrimination, and prejudice (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 16). Many participants felt inhibited regarding disclosure due to bullying fears, "If I out myself at school I will be forced to change schools because I know I would be relentlessly bullied" (2, p.10). For many, anticipation of bullying conflicted with a desire to be authentically themselves, "Schools can be rough. They can be really bad for people. And so, in some cases it's better to look at a wall than it is to look at somebody's fist. And to feel like hiding rather than to feel like everyone's against you . . . Kinda like a pro and con thing, like, well, I could feel like I'm lying to everybody or I could get beat up." (7, p.239). In many cases, fears were informed by awareness of the bullying of the GSD community in their school, "Many people, like me, do not feel safe to come-out in school" (4, p.7). Despite negative reactions, some participants also reported unanticipated positive social reaction. They found being visible allowed them, their peers and school staff to recognise any subsequent bullying as prejudicial (where it previously might not have been) and, as such, they attracted more support

from friends (11) and wider condemnation from peers, " A lot of people started sticking up for me, even though the bullying was not new, people perceived it as being homophobic and they were less okay with that." (15, p.392).

Fear of rejection and ostracization were of great concern to participants and referred to fears around losing friends and/or social networks at school after a becoming visible (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 16). Participants were often fearful of isolation, "The process of coming out can thus be isolating and YP may attempt to garner support from family and friends; if rejected, this further contributes to their isolation." (14, p.947). Participants feared rejection based both on peers' perception of deception and a lack of acceptance, ''You're trying to prove that you're not this. You acquire all these friends and stuff and in the back of your mind you think, 'they're not really my friends because if they knew who I was they would drop me'." pp.240. GSD pupils must carefully consider their social networks and anticipate reactions to and impact of disclosure. Reactions inform future visibility, "The reaction of others in rejecting or accepting this act of self-representation can determine future visibility" (3, p.703). For trans participants, gender transition often necessitates disclosure and this group are often unable to adopt closed visibility strategies. Fear of rejection and loss of social networks can be so great that some trans pupils reported withdrawing from or transferring school at the point of transitioning so they can choose whether to disclose their trans identity, in some cases, these pupils chose not to identify themselves as trans (13).

Some pupils spoke about their identity being erased by peers upon disclosure (1, 7, 8, 10). Sceptical peer responses were experienced, "…fellow students, most often boys, sometimes asked him questions about his sexuality. For example, they asked whether he was "sure" about his sexual orientation" (7, p.361). Perhaps unsurprisingly, this experience was mostly reported by those individuals whose identities fall outside the gender binary (8), "They wanted to put her on the axes of binaries, categorize her either as straight or gay, nothing in between. The gay category was for some students seen as more "normal" ´ than the transgender category, which some of her fellow students had difficulty grasping" (7, p.362). This was also experienced by bisexual individuals (1, 10) who sexuality was not binary,

> "…participants were told by others that they were 'confused' about their sexuality, or
> that they were 'just going through a phase'. Alex said, 'a lot of people thought it was just
> a phase at first, and that after a while I would choose whether I was gay or straight'.
> When asked if he ever hears such comments, Paul said, 'One person did say that. He
> doesn't see me as bisexual; he just sees me as gay and doesn't understand how it's
> possible to be interested in both genders." (10, p.408).

For these pupils, disclosure did not attract the kind of negative social response that they might have anticipated, however, peers questioning of the legitimacy of their identities may be interpreted as social rejection. Social rejection following disclosure represents a particularly damaging experience for many participants as it is the sharing of an intrinsic and essential part of the self, "Scared. That's the best way I can describe it. I'm scared of being abused for who I am" (2, p.9). This level of vulnerability might explain the high anxiety that GSD pupils experience in anticipation of a disclosure, "Most youths interviewed saw their sexual orientation as central to who they are making fear of judgment even more pronounced." (12, p.119). Though most participants reported some negative reactions, many participants noted that negative comments were less distressing than anticipated. Study authors propose this narrative is a coping strategy and characterise it as 'reverse relative deprivation' (Anderson et al., 2016), "'What colour carpets do you prefer?' Tamara interpreted this as banter that she found supportive, indicating that homosexually themed discourse can be used to bond and show affirmation of difference" (1, p.30). Bower-Brown et al. (2021) suggest minimisation represents another attempt to protect 'the self' from emotional harm, "After coming out to the people around me, I was taunted a lot … It didn't really affect anything as I didn't take it to heart and carried on with my life as normal apart from switching back to my given name" (p.12). They refer to this coping strategy as 'cognitive restructuring'.

Importantly, many participants emphasised positive social reactions to disclosures (1, 2 , 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 15). Participants highlighted making initial disclosures to those they had identified as 'allies' (1, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12). Allies were usually friends/peers whom they anticipated would have a positive and accepting response, "Only one friend knows that I am bisexual because I do not feel comfortable to come-out to everybody" (4, p.7). Anticipation around peer reactions to disclosure often leads to the adoption of selective disclosure strategies, "Pretty much I couldn't tell anyone, without feeling judged, so I told someone [a close friend] that I knew would be there no matter what." (12, p.119). This strategy attracts social support through the process of becoming more visible and fortifies pupils against negative responses, "[increasing visibility] got so much better and so much easier" (11, p.342).

**2.4.5       Theme five: We need school staff to do more to support us**
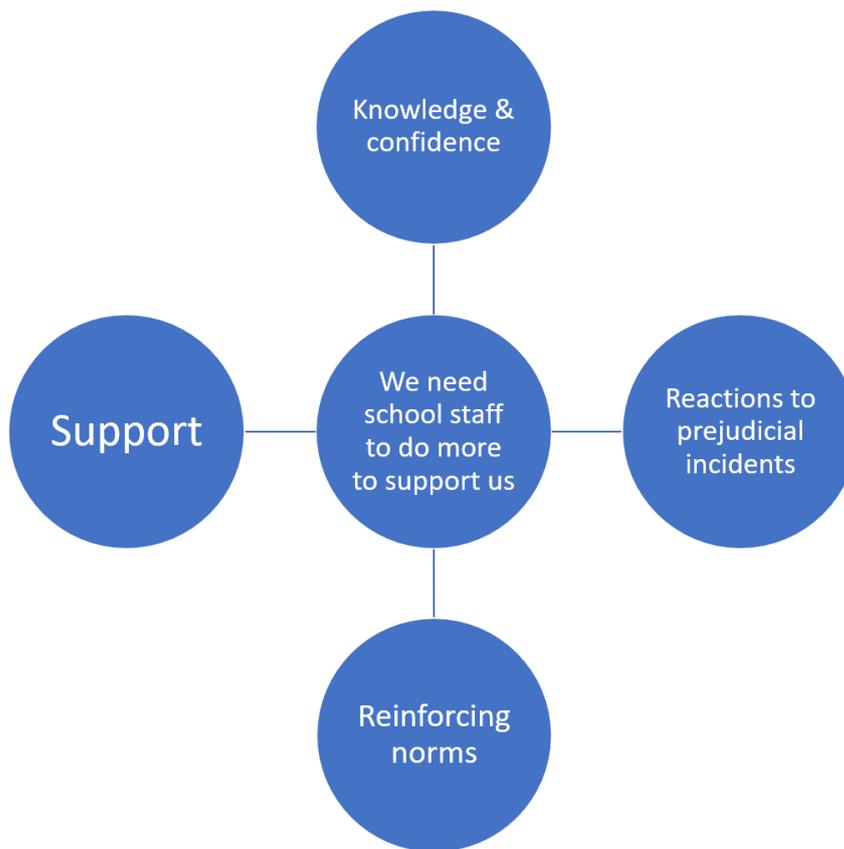


**Figure 11** Analytical Theme five with descriptive subthemes

This theme captures perceived support offered by school staff. While a minority of participants reported adequate staff support after disclosure, many felt staff needed to do more (2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15). Positive support from school staff was highlighted in some studies (4, 10, 11, 13). Some staff were accepting and supportive, "There were accounts of staff being, "really understanding" and saying, "I'm here if you want me"…one teacher subtly included LG sexuality in sex education lessons." (11, p.340). However, participants also highlighted that support was often reactive, "They didn't really talk about it in class unless the subject came up". (9, p.112), which meant some pupils felt exposed after disclosure, "…it's got to be there in the first place rather than just suddenly put up because of one person and everyone's like, 'yeah, yeah, we know'." (15, p.390). Other participants noted that staff sometimes positioned GSD pupils as victims (10) and some inadvertently increased pupils' visibility attempting to offer support, "[placing GSD pamphlets in class was] perceived as very unhelpful by participants because they felt too embarrassed and exposed to pick up a leaflet and considered this to be harmful." (11, p.339).

Overwhelmingly, participants talked about requiring more support from staff (2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15). Staff were sometimes positioned as perpetrators of discrimination and prejudice (4, 6, 9, 13), "…when he verbally disclosed his sexual orientation to the student council, reported that "I was threatened by my sponsor that if I didn't 'straighten up,' as she said, that I would be kicked out of office. . . ."" (11, p.113). This was perceived negatively by all participants, "The school principal said he will never call me a male or use male pronouns until I have my gender reassignment therapy done…It makes me depressed so much that a lot of the time I can't focus at school. Sometimes I really hate myself for this, and I want to die, or to hit myself so hard so that I could faint" (6, p.165). School staff sometimes reinforced gender and sexuality norms (7) and often did not react when witnessing prejudicial incidents (5, 7, 11, 12) or were dismissive or reports of bullying,

> "…most of the time they [teachers] don't give a crap [people smile]. They don't though, they just sit there and … do what you want … they need to be around when it's [bullying] happening. Kyle: Yes I know Jacob: 'Cos, they always used to be not there. Kyle: Plus they don't believe you. Jacob: Yes Kyle: When you tell them, if they haven't seen it, they don't believe you. Jacob: Yes it's like, well, if I've not seen it so there's nothing I can do." (11, p.338).

In addition, school staff to whom  participants disclosed  had inadequate knowledge around GSD issues (2, 4, 6, 11). They felt staff lacked confidence to talk about GSD issues (2, 11, 14), I think it's the confidence to say it. Some tutors and teachers lack a bit of confidence in saying ''lesbian'' or ''gay.''" (14, p.947), and, in one case, staff refused to address GSD issues, "They didn't preach in that class about being gay being wrong, but they didn't even introduce the idea for a second that it might actually be completely fine" (15, p.388). Lack of support from staff both inhibited pupils' willingness to be visible, "I feel I can't come out at school as they wouldn't know what to do with me" (2, p.8), and contributed to negative feelings following disclosure, "James felt uncared for by school staff as his sexuality, which was significantly meaningful to him, lacked meaning for those who had responsibility over his care.", (11, p.338).

**2.4.6        Theme six: We need a visible community to feel safe and experience belonging**



**Figure 12** Analytical Theme six with descriptive subthemes

Theme six relates to the visibility of and access to a GSD community in school (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 13, 15, 16). A visible community is critical for most participants (1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 10, 13, 16). For many, their awareness of this community was positive as the school environment was perceived as more supportive (1, 3, 5, 9, 10) and prevented isolation,  "There are a lot more people, who you can see out in the open." (10, p.406). Awareness of other GSD pupils is supportive for those who restrict visibility and does not require them to make disclosures, "One youth stated she felt like she was "the only one and now that there's a GSA, it's a lot easier because I'm not the only one." (5, p.677). Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) are one way in which the GSA community can become more visible within school. In the face of limited visibility, some pupils reported using non-verbal methods of communication to subtly signal to other GSA individuals, "Because you can immediately see, "he's also like that, I can talk to him." (3, p.699). This facilitates a sense of community whilst allowing pupils to remain largely invisible to the wider school community, "In some cases, the symbols are thought to communicate one's sexual identity only to those "in the know."" (9, p.112).

For participants who restrict visibility, though a visible GSD community is supportive, access to this community is often limited as they fear association might lead peers to infer their GSD identity, ""everyone assumes that if you're friends with somebody that's gay then you have to be

gay too." Because of this assumption, David was not comfortable associating with other gay students and withdrew from some of his friends" (9, p.111). Newly discovered access to the GSD community was a positive outcome of disclosure for many participants (1, 2, 4, 5, 13, 16). They report increased sense of belonging within this newly-discovered community; acquiring new GSD friends, feeling affirmed, accepted, and loved and experiencing deep connection with them through shared experience, "It is good to talk to people who understand…it is still nice to be around people with stuff in common and we are all on the same page." (16, p.1906). However, a minority of pupils reported that they enjoyed school without needing to access the GSD community, "I don't feel the need to surround myself with other LGBT to be accepted and comfortable. School is good. Home is good. Being trans hasn't affected my life much at all." (2, p.12), or by not being visible (15). In the case of the latter, the study authors propose that these pupils might have achieved adequate belonging through other means (e.g., sports participation). Some participants reported protection from bullying was an additional benefit of belonging to a GSD community (5), "I didn't feel alone and I was not afraid anymore" (4, p.7).

### 2.4.7 Theme seven: We fight for our right to be visible



**Figure 13** Analytical Theme seven with descriptive subthemes

The seventh theme refers to narratives around activism and pupils asserting their right to be visible in order to support others to do the same (2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 16). Many participants reported finding activism unintentionally, as an unexpected consequence of their increasingly open visibility (4, 5, 9, 16), "Some guys actually came out after me – they were like, "if Edward can, so can I"" (10, p.405). Others reported finding activism after opportunities for sharing their story emerged, "I gave a talk about transsexuality during which I came out as transexual. In the end of this talk everybody was in tears, waiting in line to give me a hug and give me strength, it was awesome" (4, p7). Some participants talked about seeking activism opportunities at school, supporting, and celebrating their community, reporting discrimination, increasing GSD visibility, and educating peers/staff (4, 5, 6, 12, 16).  They noted an unexpected positive impact as their actions and stories inspired other GSD pupils and educated the school community, "I feel as though engaging in a positive action, something that adds to the world, lifts my spirits greatly"(6, p.166). Some participants viewed positive impacts as part of a narrative that helped make sense

of difficult experiences, despite visibility still being some that they have to fight for, "I owe it to myself to make something out of it, or else like what's the point of going through all this? I'm going to do what I want to do. I'm going to make something out of it " (5, p.673).

Though activism is experienced positively and forms a positive conclusion to difficult experiences, it is also recognised as emotional labour (2, 6) and as attracting negative attention, "The group of people sitting next to us were pretty popular, and I heard one of them start calling another one a "tranny". I turned round to them and politely explained that what they said was transphobic and they shouldn't say it, and they all laughed at me and gave me dirty looks for weeks." (2, p.13). Activism was viewed by some as a responsibility (2) and a burden, 'activism is the rent I pay for living on Earth'. (6, p.167). This is amplified by the lack of support, knowledge and advice offered elsewhere in schools, "pupils could go to "other students for advice, as they are too afraid to talk to staff " (2, p.14). There was an assumption by some participants that visibility is prerequisite for activism (2, 6, 16). Some participants who adopted restricted visibility reported feeling guilty that they were not able to support their GSD peers,

> "I'm in a strange state where I want nothing to do with the activism side – I'm happy to be a stealth, regular guy. But on the other hand, I have a deeply felt rage and sadness about the state of things, and a feeling of social responsibility to look after people who are marginalised in the same ways as I have been, and to improve things for them if I can. They seem to be mutually exclusive options – activism or stealth. One I hate because it means I can't just live as a normal guy – I always have to be 'trans', and I hate that. The other I hate because it means turning my back on people who really do need all the help they can get, when I'm in a position to really help change things" (6, p.167).

## 2.5     Discussion

This review identified 16 studies that addressed the primary research question: *why do YP who identity as gender and sexuality diverse manage their identity at school?* The answer to this question is detailed in seven themes. Additional research questions were explored as data was extracted and themes constructed. Themes two and three explored *how* GSD pupils manage visibility and a table of study characteristics explores the participant demographics across studies. The studies that were included in synthesis were qualitative and mixed-methods where the views and experiences of GSD YP were explored. Due to the approaches adopted within the studies, quality assessment was not primarily concerned with validity of results, rather with the quality and coherence of the reporting of results.

This review offers support to the processes described in the Minority Stress Model (Meyer, 1995). This model cites social norms and societal process that reinforce these as being the context and cause of minority stress. Within Theme Three of this review, participants identify the replication of social norms in the context of schools and echo a common narrative in GSD research, that GSD YP are often victims of their social environment as they break social norms . This theme highlights that GSD YP feel pressure to conform and when they are unable to, that they feel excluded from popular school culture. The participants presence in their schools disrupts norms and they are largely aware of this; they are active influencers of their social environment, their presence resists norms. For some, this is unintentional resistance and for others it is active, but most participants were aware of this disruption of norms and this was perceived as positive but stressful. According to the model, this context gives rise to stressors that are uniquely experienced by minoritized communities.

The Minority Stress Model (Meyer, 1995) outlines a number of *proximal stressors*. These include the internalisation of negative societal attitudes, the process of managing visibility and the anxiety and fear associated with the anticipation of rejection, discrimination, prejudice, and victimisation. Again, these proximal stressors are all replicated in the findings of this review. Theme One highlights the internal processes related to identity formation and many participants discussed the internalisation of negative attitudes and the associated feelings of shame. These creating a strong motivation to conceal identity. Many described going through a non-linear process of realising, exploring, and, at some stage, accepting their GSD identity and this process is stressful. Correspondingly, Theme Two identifies the stress associated with managing visibility and participants characterise this as a burden. What was highlighted as particularly stressful was managing of "dual selves" where their awareness of their identity was developing and they had not yet shared this realisation with their social networks. Fear of rejection, discrimination, prejudice, and victimisation was strongly supported as a significant source of stress in this review. Theme Four highlights the presence of this fear and participants specifically discussed a fear that disclosure may attract bullying and discrimination and, of comparable concern, can result in loss of social networks, rejection and ostracization. In accord with VM theory, this motivated YP to selectively disclose, first coming out to friends or 'allies' before disclosing more widely. Theme Two highlights the need, therefore, to test social environments to avoid the realisation of these fears. Naturally, these processes occupy a good deal of space in the minds of GSD YP. Theme Four also captures the *distal stressors* detailed in Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 1995): actual experiences of rejection, discrimination, prejudice, and victimisation. Interestingly, in this review, though some reactions might have been viewed as negative reactions, many GSD YP did not frame them as such, often describing them as 'banter'. Where GSD pupils are presented with

dissonant negative reactions from friends they might minimise these in order to protect positive narrative around their identity and relationships or may frame banter as relatively less severe than the reprisals they anticipated. Some GSD pupils described erasing reactions to disclosure. The groups that were more likely to talk about erasure were bisexual, gender diverse and questioning pupils. These are pupils who do not possess binary gender and/or attraction to a single gender. It is possible that their presence represents a greater challenge to gender norms than other GSD identities which conform closer to the gender binary and therefore transgress fewer norms. Staff are highlighted as being largely unsupportive in Theme Five. As outlined by Meyer (1995; 2003a; 2003b), GSD YP experience proximal and distal stressors whilst managing visibility at school and characterise these are being stressful and difficult.

Importantly, participants identify the active role they play in shaping their social environment in a way that previous, frequently quantitative, research has often failed to illustrate (McCabe & Anhalt, 2022). Despite, or perhaps due to the challenges associated with visibility, many pupils had come to view visibility as a kind of activism or act of social good; they recognised GSD visibility provided reassurance and support to other GSD pupils and educated their peers; some pupils took opportunities to educate other pupils publicly about their experiences or contributed to school decision making by joining participation groups, such as school council. By framing these acts and visibility itself as activism, pupils found a sense of meaning and pride in their identities. GSD pupils discussed the discovery of or formation of a stronger community. For some, this access was acquired through school groups, such as, Gay Straight Alliances, for others, pupils discovered deeper and closer connections after disclosure. These experiences were profoundly positive. Whilst acknowledgement of the stresses experienced by this population is important, it is essential that their voices contribute to the research narrative and, here, it is clear that managing a GSD identity in school can also be a positive experience in many ways. These conclusions accord with recent positive psychological research and has echoed positive experiences of community (Bates et al., 2019) and journeys of individual strength and growth (Lytle et al., 2014; Vaughan & Rodriguez, 2014).

### 2.5.1 Strengths and limitations

The over-riding strength of this review is the potential for application in the support of marginalised, oppressed, and under-researched GSD young people (YP). Particularly gender diverse YP who currently report greater negative school experiences of school and negative mental health and lower academic outcomes than other sub-groups within the GSD umbrella. The main researcher is a member of the GSD community and this assisted data analysis and shaped the construction of meaning throughout review. This personal experience may be considered a

strength as familiarity with the population may have expediated the analysis process and facilitated deeper and more empathetic understanding of participant experiences.

Though a transparent and systematic search approach was adopted, it may remain the case that valuable research was unintentionally excluded. In addition, inclusion was limited to published papers which means that valuable contributions from unpublished work, such as theses, has been omitted. The search strategy focused on in-school VM experiences and some papers were excluded despite potential to contribute to a deep understanding of VM across the lives of GSD YP. However, this was necessary in order to keep the review manageable and focused on the field of researcher expertise. Participant demographic data clearly reveals a bias for white, able-bodied and neurotypical participants. This is a concern given national statistics suggest individuals that experience additional marginalisation and oppression, such as, pupils of colour and disabled pupils, also experience greater negative outcomes. Similarly, the research included was conducted in Australian, European, and US schools exclusively, meaning the experiences of pupils from other cultures are excluded. The homogenisation of GSD pupils can also be problematic as experiences within the population vary significantly. There are clear justifications for this as most studies included in review explore GSD experiences broadly and GSD pupils have unifying experiences of norm transgression and needing to manage visibility at school. However, further review of research focusing on GSD subgroups would be valuable, especially gender diverse pupils as there is a particular paucity in this area.

### 2.5.2    Applications and future research

Future research might seek to explore the way norms operate and are replicated within schools. This might adopt ethnographic methodologies, such as observation, or a phenomenological approach capturing the perspectives of multiple members of the school community. These approaches might produce deeper understanding of the reciprocal nature of VM and how identities are constructed in social contexts. Pupil video diaries may offer a viable method of obtaining rich data from a variety of perspectives (Cotton et al., 2010; Jones et al., 2014). It would be valuable to include experiences of staff, non-GSD pupils and families also. In terms of exploring intervention impact, future research may explore specific programmes of intervention that aim to challenge cis-heteronormativity and celebrate diversity broadly, such as, *No Outsiders* (Moffat, 2016). It may also be pertinent to explore the attitudes and knowledge and pre-existing support offered by Educational Psychologists in this area.

Educational psychologists (EPs) are ideally positioned to apply learning from this review. Firstly, an essential element of their role, as evidence-informed practitioners, relates to the

dissemination and application of research in practice (BPS, 2018). Research shows therapeutic support can help GSD pupils to make positive meaning of difficult experiences (Lloyd-Hazlett & Foster, 2013). Many EPs will provide formal support, such as supervision, and informal support to staff with therapeutic/pastoral responsibilities within schools, such as Emotional Literacy Support Assistants. However, research demonstrates that staff in emotional and social support roles in school often report feeling they lack the skills and knowledge required to perform this role (Lendrum et al., 2013; Lloyd-Hazlett & Foster, 2013) and supervision by EPs is viewed as a useful source of information and support (Osborne & Burton, 2014). EPs are also competent and regularly involved in individual therapeutic work and may usefully support GSD pupils with the stress of managing visibility (Atkinson et al., 2011; Sharpe et al., 2016). Within individual work, EPs may also be involved in the support of families of GSD YP. Where appropriate, EPs might support families and YP to manage visibility in collaboration with school staff. This may be particularly important for gender diverse pupils who are making social transitions, as caregivers and pupils have reported a wish for greater collaboration with staff (Schimmel-Bristow et al., 2018) and EPs are well-positioned to facilitate this. In addition, EPs are trained in ecological systems theory, meaning they are well-placed for completing systemic/organisational work with schools. This may include dissemination and application of research via staff and pupil training. Teachers have a responsibility for creating and maintaining inclusive classroom environments but report feeling deskilled in supporting GSD pupils (Staley & Leonardi, 2018). This may also be around policy development or project planning with school leadership (Lasser, 2005).

This review demonstrates the necessity for the adoption of a more proactive approach to supporting these pupils. Educational professionals must have considered this population and there must be policies and provision in place to support and celebrate them before individuals make specific disclosures. Too often, GSD pupils are in receipt of reactive support, initiated by them making their presence known and this sometimes unintentionally serves to stigmatise them further. Proactivity from educational professionals would positively change their school landscapes. This review also indicates that educational professionals must be aware of how GSD YP interact with the school social environment and importantly how they are impacted by the reinforcement of cis-heteronormativity within educational institutions. The voices of YP must be central and YP must be supported to retain control of their visibility. Their identity and how it is shared or not shared with the school community should be managed by them and taking control away intentionally or unintentionally can be harmful. In addition, this review positions GSD pupils as active, resilient, and aware of the power of their visibility. This narrative of active engagement, in opposition to passive victim, should be adopted by those researching, supporting and educating this population (McCabe & Anhalt, 2022). Application of this research relates primarily to how the

school community support, react to and manage GSD visibility. In other words, challenging norms and school culture is necessary to support GSD pupils with VM in school. Shifting norms and changing culture requires multiple approaches across the whole institution (Vaitla et al., 2017). This review indicates there is a clear need for provision of information around GSD identities and issues in schools and this might be particularly important for gender diverse YP. GSD-inclusive PSHE and RSE may provide a language for GSD pupils to explore their identity, as well as providing visibility within the curriculum for all pupils, which has lasting positive effects on prejudicial language use (Baams et al., 2017). Representation of GSD issues and history across the curriculum and within school resources appears to have a positive effect on the attitudes of the whole pupil population towards GSD peers (Kosciw et al., 2013). This review indicates that GSD pupils managing visibility need well-informed and confident staff to support them, including emotional support and reliable protection from prejudice. Ideally, staff would be supported by robust and inclusive policies that protect all pupils and give clear guidance around prejudicial incidents and how they are expected to respond (Government Equalities Office (GEO), 2018). School leadership needs to provide opportunities for pupils to engage in GSD advocacy, education of their peers and activism, as well as facilitating GSD-supportive groups and clubs. Importantly, these specific supports should be situated in school-wide adoption of a proactive approach of awareness and support of diversity in the school community, where whole school staff promote a safe and environment for all pupils and talk about and celebrate difference (Steck & Perry, 2018).

## 2.6    Conclusion

GSD pupils often find themselves beginning to explore and discover their GSD identity around adolescence and thus begins the complex process of managing visibility (VM) within the school community. This review has highlighted some critically important school factors that influence decisions around visibility and how VM is experienced. GSD pupils engage in a dynamic, elaborate risk assessment process where they test social reactions and assess attitudes through an acute awareness of their social world to ascertain whether or not it is safe and perhaps even beneficial to be open about who they authentically are. GSD pupils may variously maintain wellbeing through concealment, through total visibility or through selective visibility in different social contexts and the breadth of experiences within the GSD population are reflective of the vastly complex social environment that these pupils navigate at school.

While negative school experiences dominate in much of this field of research, GSD pupils are far from passive. They draw on internal resources to find self-acceptance and share their identities in school contexts where cis-heteronormativity is pervasive and onerous. They are not only aware of their norm transgressions but use these to risk assess their environment and to

non-verbally communicate visibility in deft, diverse, and complex ways. In all cases, they manage their identity on a daily basis whilst managing all the other challenges of adolescence and young adulthood. In many cases, they choose to resist norms and be their authentic selves despite risks to safety and the security of their sense of belonging within their school social network. Some even find a sense of positive meaning/purpose through difficult experiences by embracing activism and supporting their communities. They are active influencers of their school culture and not passive victims of it (McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2017). The picture painted of the support offered by educational professionals is somewhat mixed but largely disappointing; reactive, ill-informed, and self-conscious. This review offers clear and achievable steps to improving support offered to GSD pupils so that when they are ready to share their authentic self, they are protected, encouraged, and can achieve the sense of belonging and acceptance that they deserve from their school community.

# Chapter 3    School Factors That Predict Post-Traumatic Growth in Young People That Have Experienced Bullying at Secondary School Attributed to Their Open Identification as Gender and Sexuality Diverse

## 3.1    Introduction

Bullying can be defined as repeated acts of aggression intended to cause physical or psychological harm to another where there is an imbalance of power between parties involved (Fenaughty, 2019). Whilst bullying has a complex aetiology, research indicates deviance from social norms, or characteristics and behaviour that mark a pupil as 'different' from the dominant social group, are significant risk factors (Juvonen & Graham, 2014; Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Side & Johnson, 2014; Thornberg & Delby, 2019). This deviation from norms or difference is recognised by pupils who have experienced bullying in school as a significant reason why they were victimised (Side & Johnson, 2014; Thornberg & Delby, 2019). Given this finding of the key role social constructions of difference play, it is perhaps not surprising that pupils who are gender and sexuality diverse (GSD) are at an elevated risk of bullying due to their transgression of established societal and school norms around gender and sexuality or *cis-heteronormativity* (Abreu et al., 2021; Camodeca et al., 2018; Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012; Vega et al., 2012).

In a UK survey of GSD youth (Bradlow et al., 2017), 45% of GSD pupils reported being bullied at school for being GSD and this number rose to 64% for trans pupils specifically. In addition, many reported hearing prejudicial language 'frequently' or 'often' at school (52% homophobic language, 36% biphobic language and 46% transphobic language). Specifically, 86% reported hearing the phrase 'that's so/you're so gay' at school. Understandably, GSD pupils experience a great deal of fear and anxiety around bullying after making their GSD identity known to others in the school community (Bower-Brown et al., 2021; Morris et al., 2014; Robinson, 2010; Taylor & Cuthbert, 2019; Toft, 2020). Worryingly, 68% of pupils reported that school staff only 'sometimes' or 'never' challenge prejudicial language and only 29% reported staff intervening when they witnessed GSD-based bullying. Perhaps unsurprisingly, only 45% of pupils who experienced GSD-based bullying reported it to school staff, with those that did not report it, citing doubt that staff would intervene or fears that staff involvement would make the situation worse

(Bradlow et al., 2017). GSD-pupils experiences of school are disparate from teachers perceptions of school climate for GSD pupils (Harris et al., 2021).

Pupils who experience GSD-based bullying at school are likely to experience a range of negative mental health outcomes, including, decreased sense of school belonging and safety, increased self-harm and suicidal thoughts and behaviour and lower self-esteem and greater depressive symptoms (Abreu et al., 2021; Bradlow et al., 2017; Hatchel et al., 2019; S. E. Holmes & Cahill, 2013; House et al., 2011). GSD-based bullying is also associated with increased school absence and lower academic attainment (Abreu et al., 2021; Aragon et al., 2014; Bradlow et al., 2017). These experiences and outcomes fit within definitions of *trauma* as a series of events that have emotionally harmful and lasting effects on individual functioning and well-being (Kimberg & Wheeler, 2019). Experiences of frequent or severe GSD-based bullying in school have been associated with symptoms of posttraumatic stress and increased incidence of posttraumatic stress disorder (Alessi et al., 2013; Beckerman & Auerbach, 2014; Brown, 2003; Brown & Pantalone, 2011; Mustanski et al., 2016). Most research in this field studies predominantly cisgender and heterosexual populations. Where GSD young people are studied, they are often white and able-bodied, this is particularly worrying given that pupils who experience more than one kind of bias-based bullying report more negative mental health outcomes and more school avoidance than those who experience one kind or bullying that is not based on bias (Mulvey et al., 2018). Research clearly highlights the negative outcomes of GSD-based bullying in school but emphasising negative outcomes risks positioning GSD-pupils as passive victims (Formby, 2015). The positive outcomes following GSD-based bullying experiences have been studied in a considerably smaller body of research. Though there is much still to elucidate in the field, is appears that some pupils that experience GSD-based bullying at school go on to experience positive change and *posttraumatic growth* (PTG).

### 3.1.1    Posttraumatic growth

Posttraumatic growth is described by Tedeschi & Calhoun (2004) as 'the positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances' (p.1) and its manifestations include five domains: greater appreciation for life, improved and more meaningful interpersonal relationships, increased sense of personal strength and wisdom, a greater sense of new possibilities and spiritual change (Joseph et al., 2012; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; see Figure 14). It appears to be relatively common with a large scale review suggesting that around 50% of those who have experienced a wide range of traumatic events go on to report PTG (Jieling & Xinchun, 2017). PTG appears to occur after a process of 'productive rumination' following trauma and it is hypothesised that this facilitates the necessary

narrative development where the individual reconciles their traumatic experiences with their view of themselves, others, and the world (Triplett et al., 2012). Congruently, individuals who are more likely to ruminate are more likely to experience PTG (Kilmer et al., 2014; Meyerson et al., 2011).
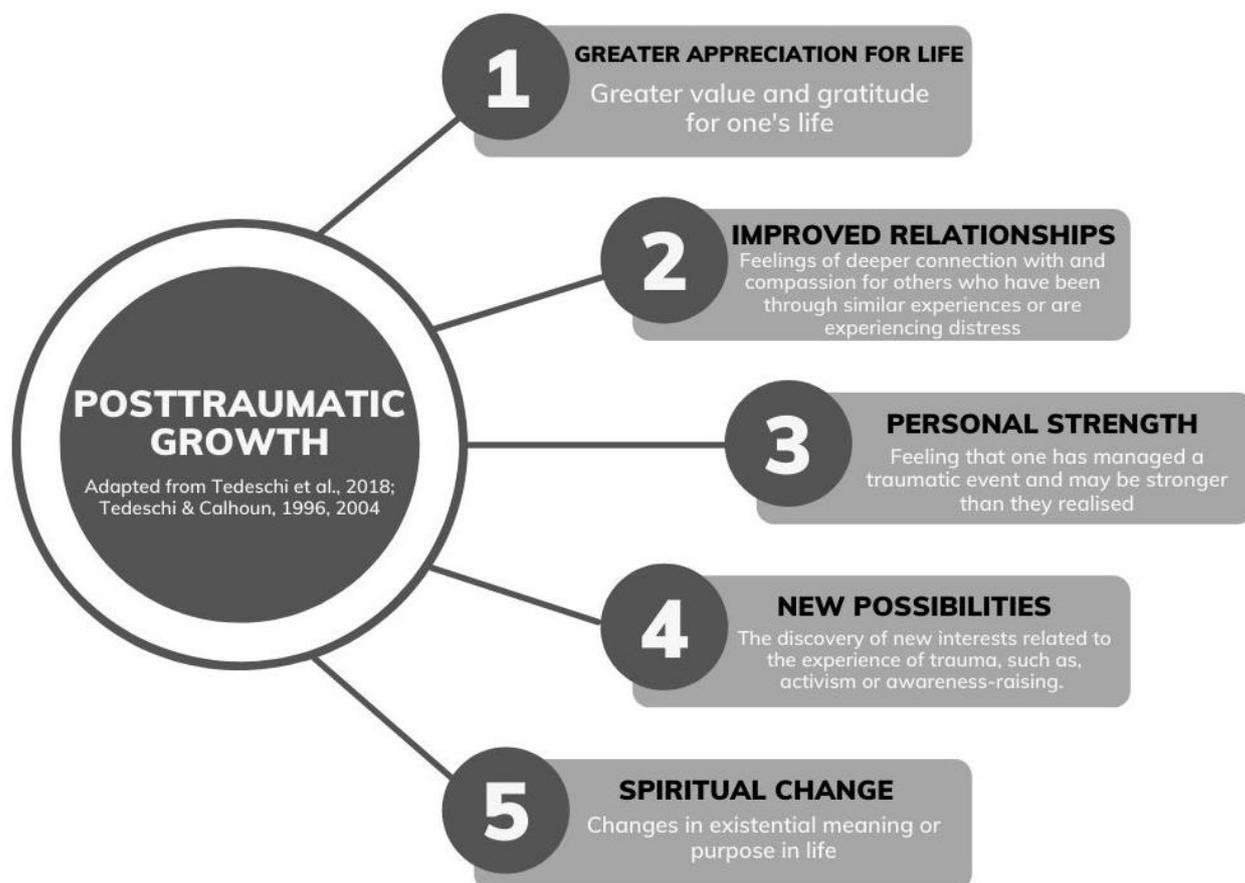


**Figure 14** Five domains of posttraumatic growth

Though PTG refers to the perception of improved functioning, there is dispute in the literature as to whether it represents a quantifiable improvement (Johnson & Boals, 2015). However, as measures of wellbeing and PTG are largely self-reported, it could be argued that these measures are always subjective. In addition, some argue that the positive perception of growth following a traumatic experience represents an essential process of reasoning and meaning finding (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011).

The process of creating a positive narrative or interpretation following a traumatic experience does seem to have a quantifiable positive effect on wellbeing. For example, adults who had experiences of serious ill health that were narrated with themes of agency and redemption resulted in improved mental health outcomes in the proceeding four years of recovery (Adler, 2012). Similarly, adults who engaged in positive meaning-making around high and low points in their lives during a life story task had significantly better emotional regulation skills

in the two years following (Cox & McAdams, 2014). In addition, PTG and wellbeing are correlated, where wellbeing is captured by *quality of life* and *meaning in life* measures (Cann et al., 2010). PTG has also been positively associated with resilience (Dong et al., 2017) and subjective wellbeing, where PTG appears to have a buffering effect on the negative impact of trauma (Veronese et al., 2017). PTG also appears to have a buffering effect on distress following experiences of cancer (Silva et al., 2012; Teixeira & Pereira, 2013; Wang et al., 2017). Similarly, PTG is positively related to positive mental health and subjective physical health in a meta-analysis of PTG following significant health issues (Sawyer et al., 2010). Finally, there is tentative longitudinal evidence that PTG is associated with lower levels of distress over a year after the bereavement of a close relation (Tennen & Affleck, 2002).

Importantly, PTG appears to be preceded by trauma that challenges fundamental core beliefs and identity. We all hold assumptions or core beliefs about ourselves and the world, this typically includes a sense of meaningfulness or purpose to life and that the world makes sense and is understandable, and traumatic, stressful experiences often challenge these fundamental views (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Kaufman et al., 2018). Congruently, in order to induce PTG, the traumatic experience must represent a threat to the individual's view of the world and challenge their core beliefs, prompting a search for new meaning and narratives about the self, others, and the world (Arpawong et al., 2014; Schuettler & Boals, 2011; Davis & Mckearney, 2005; Lindstrom et al., 2013).

The presence of PTG does not indicate a total absence of the negative effects of trauma, rather a possible co-existence of the two. Indeed, posttraumatic stress and PTG have a complex relationship (Andreou et al., 2021; Hall et al., 2008). Research tentatively indicates that those individuals who experience a traumatic event but do not experience posttraumatic stress symptoms following trauma may demonstrate *resilience* but individuals who exhibit posttraumatic stress may also experience posttraumatic growth (Jieling & Xinchun, 2017). However, PTG and degree of stress appear to have a curvilinear relationship where moderately severe stress is associated with higher PTG but very low and very high stress result in less PTG (Andreou et al., 2021; Dekel et al., 2012; Shakespeare-Finch & Lurie-Beck, 2014).

Much of the field concerns adult participants and though adolescents' regulatory and cognitive skills are still developing, they do have the cognitive capabilities required to support PTG, including understanding of abstract thought and hypothetical thinking (Steinberg, 2005). PTG as reported in adults seems to occur similarly in adolescents (Kilmer et al., 2014) and children and adolescents experience PTG following environmental disasters (Bernstein & Pfefferbaum, 2018; Meyerson et al., 2011), cancer (Duran, 2013; Turner-Sack et al., 2012) and bereavement (Altınsoy,

2022; Asgari & Naghavi, 2019). Regarding interpersonal trauma, there is evidence for PTG in adolescents following incidents of terrorism (Milam et al., 2005), sexual abuse (Vloet et al., 2014; Woodward & Joseph, 2003), emotional and physical abuse (Woodward & Joseph, 2003) and close relational conflict (Ickovics et al., 2006). In qualitative research, where young people attribute their bullying to a part of their identity, such as their body size or race, they report feeling significantly changed by the experience, in how they viewed themselves and others (Side & Johnson, 2014). Emerging research exploring bullying in school and PTG suggest that PTG can result from these experiences (Andreou et al., 2021; DeLara, 2016; Ratcliff et al., 2017). Interestingly, bullying at school that was perceived to be identity-based led to greater PTG as retrospectively reported by adults (Ratcliff et al., 2020).

### 3.1.2       Predictors of posttraumatic growth

There are numerous variables that predict PTG. These include individual personality traits, such as optimism (Meyerson et al., 2011; Schaefer et al., 2018; Turner et al., 2018), individual level of comfort with emotional disclosure and individual coping style, emotion and problem-focused rumination (Kilmer et al., 2014; Meyerson et al., 2011; Ramos & Leal, 2013). Certain demographic factors also predict PTG, including the individual's age at the time of incident (Milam et al., 2004). Women also have an increased likelihood of experiencing PTG after a traumatic incident (Berger & Weiss, 2009; Stanton et al., 2014) possibly because they typically access more social support than men; young people have a similarly increased likelihood, for likely similar reasons (Meyerson et al., 2011). The field has included a diverse sample of ethnicities and there are some significant differences reported, with a tentative indication that ethnic minorities tend to experience greater growth (Elderton et al., 2017; Meyerson et al., 2011). There also appears to be a link between PTG and religiosity (Milam et al., 2004; Ramos & Leal, 2013). However, this may be related to spirituality, rather than affiliated with a specific religion (Milam et al., 2004; Shaw et al., 2007). There is some indication that belonging may play the more significant role in higher levels of PTG experienced by religious participants as they have access to a supportive community with shared values (Henson et al., 2021).  The relationship between type of traumatic event and PTG is currently unclear as the field of research is mixed (Harmon & Venta, 2021). The amount of time since event, again, seems unclear with some review research suggesting that growth in young people declines over time (Meyerson et al., 2011), and others finding the likelihood of young people experiencing PTG increases over time (McElheran et al., 2012). Importantly though, there appear to be some contextual factors that predict PTG. The potential for new and deeper connections with others, as well as increased feelings of compassion towards others are essential elements of PTG (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) and, therefore, it is interesting that social support

consistently appears to play an important, predictive role in the experience of PTG and this has been observed across many studies (Kilmer, 2006; Meyerson et al., 2011; Ramos & Leal, 2013; Scrignaro et al., 2011; Turner et al., 2018). Similarly, parental support, specifically, appears to be predictive of PTG in adolescents (Kilmer, 2006; McElheran et al., 2012).

Research into PTG in the GSD population is limited. Within an adult GSD population, trauma associated with unique, traumatic GSD experiences of heterosexism and oppression were linked by authors to their finding that participation in *LGBTQ activism* or *community connection* was indirectly related to positive affect through *meaning in life* in GSD adults (Szymanski et al., 2021). Research around PTG in GSD youth experiences has previously framed 'coming out' and associated minority stress as traumatic. Zavala & Waters (2020) used this frame to investigate PTG in GSD adults who had had traumatic coming out experiences and found that greater PTG was associated with retrospective accounts of strength-based parenting in an adult GSD population. Authors highlight strength-based parenting as accepting and supportive. In a large survey (n=6249) of GSD adolescents, PTG following 'coming out' was also associated with social acceptance of GSD identity (aged 14-30; Cox et al., 2011). Specifically, greater social acceptance of GSD identity predicted greater PTG. Additionally, participants that perceived greater PTG during the 'coming out' process had lower internalised homonegativity (Cox et al., 2011). Similarly, higher positive social reactions and lower negative social relations predicted greater PTG in undergraduate students (Solomon et al., 2015) and greater 'outness' to friends, family and community predicted greater PTG following bullying in school through the proximal impact of social support as retrospectively reported by GSD adults (Ratcliff et al., 2020).

It is clear that this unique population may experience a high level of stress and trauma as their identity develops through adolescence and young adulthood and that PTG is experienced by some within this group. It is also clear that support and acceptance from social networks is a likely predictor of PTG. Given that PTG is often precipitated by an experience that threatens an individual's identity, and that many GSD individuals, and particularly gender diverse young people, report going through periods of identity uncertainty and exploration (Bower-Brown et al., 2021; Dewaele et al., 2014; Schimmel-Bristow et al., 2018), it may be interesting to explore whether different GSD identities experience PTG to differing extents. Most significantly, it is clear that there has been very little research exploring experiences of PTG in the GSD youth population. Though some predictors of PTG have been established in non-GSD populations, it is not clear whether these predictors apply to GSD young people. This study aims to address these gaps in the literature.

One major criticism of theories around PTG is that this narrative of growth following trauma may unintentionally place undue pressure on individuals who have experienced trauma to find the positive in very difficult experiences (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). To the contrary, the emergence in the literature of some key predictors of PTG, highlight the importance and potential of considering PTG when supporting these individuals. For GSD young people, who are disproportionately likely to have traumatic bullying experiences, it is important that research does not position them as victims. Rasmussen & Crowley (2004) argue that this portrayal deflects from addressing the culture of cis-heteronormativity in schools and focuses on pathologizing the individual. Indeed, the discourse around bullying and victimhood dominant in this field may contribute to a reduction of the role of educational professionals to protection rather than a part of the proactive dismantling of systemic marginalisation (Payne & Smith, 2013). Critical pedagogy recognises the importance of school communities in the shaping of young people and notes that, while schools can be oppressive social structures, they also have the potential to be sites of liberation if they can mitigate, rather than facilitate oppression (Fenaughty, 2019; Kumashiro, 2002).

The objectives of the present study are to examine levels of PTG in GSD young people after having had secondary school experiences of bullying attributed to their GSD identity and to identify which school based variables predict higher levels of PTG in these circumstances. The study of PTG in both young people and the GSD community is relatively new and there also remains a limited understanding of PTG following bullying experiences. Given that school bullying experiences are common in GSD young people and that negative mental health outcomes are associated with these experiences, it is pertinent for educational professionals, psychologists, and young people and their families to better understand the relationship between PTG and various school factors. Greater knowledge about the relationship between these school factors and PTG may facilitate better support for GSD young people to realise positive health outcomes, after difficult school experiences.

### 3.1.3 Hypotheses

In accordance with previous research, it was anticipated that greater social support and sense of school belonging (Kilmer, 2006; Meyerson et al., 2011; Ramos & Leal, 2013; Ratcliff et al., 2020; Scrignaro et al., 2011; Solomon et al., 2015; Turner et al., 2018), engagement in activism (Szymanski et al., 2021) and more GSD inclusive school culture would predict higher levels of PTG. It is anticipated that these school factors will predict PTG after individual factors and parenting factors have been controlled for.

## 3.2 Method

### 3.2.1 Design

A cross-sectional, quantitative, online survey design was utilised to obtain a large amount of data which was collected at a single time-point in order to gain a broad understanding of posttraumatic growth (PTG) in GSD young people. The independent variable was PTG and the dependent variables were school-related predictors of PTG. These predictors were identified through a search of relevant GSD and PTG literature and include social support and belonging, activism and school culture, as well as some individual factors.

### 3.2.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Participants were required to be between 16-25 years in age, to identify within the GSD umbrella, to have attended a UK secondary school and to have experienced bullying whilst attending secondary school. Importantly, participants must have perceived the bullying to have been attributed to their GSD identity. These criteria were assessed via self-report at the beginning of the survey. Where participants did not confirm experiences of GSD identity-based bullying they were screened prior to beginning the survey. Where participants reported age and identity that were outside the inclusion criteria, they were advised to exit the survey, however, some of these continued to complete the survey. These participants were manually screened and removed ($N$ =39). Adequate target sample size was calculated using Green's (1991) Rule of Thumb, 50+8$n$ (where $n$ is the number of predictor variables). The sample size required for this study to assume a moderate effect size is >138 participants.

### 3.2.3 Participants

Participants were recruited nationally within the UK via the internet. Informed consent was required prior to survey access being granted via a study information page and a tick box consent item. Participants were asked to confirm that they met the inclusion criteria for the study prior to consenting. Two-hundred and twenty-three participants responded to the survey. Of these, 39 were removed as they did not meet the inclusion criteria (as above), three were removed for not completing any measures beyond the consent page and two further participants were removed as they did not complete key measures within the survey, leaving 179 participants at this stage. Participant ages ranged from 16-25 ($M$=22.26). Participant demographics are captured in full in table 6. Participant gender identity and sexuality are independent of one another and therefore gender does not predict or indicate sexuality or vice versa.

**Table 6** Demographic Characteristics of Participants

| Characteristic | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Sexuality | | |
|    Lesbian/gay woman | 53 | 30.6 |
|    Gay man | 26 | 15.0 |
|    Bisexual | 35 | 20.2 |
|    Pansexual | 21 | 12.1 |
|    Same-sex attracted | 12 | 6.9 |
|    Queer | 8 | 4.6 |
|    Heterosexual/straight | 18 | 10.4 |
| Gender Identity | | |
|    Transgender | 13 | 7.5 |
|    Trans woman/feminine | 29 | 16.8 |
|    Trans man/masculine | 41 | 23.7 |
|    Non-binary/third gender | 12 | 6.9 |
|    Gender queer | 11 | 6.4 |
|    Gender non-conforming | 9 | 5.2 |
|    Cisgender woman | 37 | 21.4 |
|    Cisgender man | 18 | 10.4 |
|    Other gender identity | 3 | 1.7 |
| Education status | | |
|    Currently attending secondary school | 7 | 4.0 |
|    Currently attending college/sixth form | 16 | 9.2 |
|    Currently attending university | 87 | 50.3 |
|    Not in education currently | 63 | 36.4 |
| Ethnicity | | |
|    White/Caucasian | 111 | 64.2 |
|    Black/African/Caribbean/black British | 26 | 15.0 |
|    Mixed/multiple ethnic groups | 8 | 4.6 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Asian/Asian British | 15 | 8.7 |
| Arab/Arab British | 11 | 6.4 |
| Other ethnic group | 1 | 0.6 |
| Undisclosed | 1 | 0.6 |
| Disability | | |
| Yes | 14 | 8.1 |
| No | 154 | 89.0 |
| Undisclosed | 5 | 2.9 |
| Location | | |
| City/town/urban | 117 | 67.6 |
| Village/rural | 53 | 30.6 |
| Undisclosed | 3 | 1.7 |
| Religion | | |
| No religion | 41 | 23.7 |
| Christian | 104 | 60.1 |
| Buddhist | 5 | 2.9 |
| Hindu | 8 | 4.6 |
| Muslim | 7 | 4.0 |
| Sikh | 3 | 1.7 |
| Any other religion | 3 | 1.7 |
| Undisclosed | 2 | 1.2 |

### 3.2.4    Measures

#### 3.2.4.1    Posttraumatic growth

Posttraumatic Growth (PTG) was measured using a modified version of the 21-item Post Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). This modified PTGI includes slight changes to the wording of some items adopted from Ickovics et al. (2006) to ensure they were easily understandable by modern adolescents, for example, "Having compassion for others" was adapted to "You understand people's feelings better". Scores for each item were given via a 6-point Likert scale, from 1 (*no change*) to 6 (*a great deal of change)* with higher total scores indicating higher PTG. The original 21-item PTGI produce an internal consistency of $\alpha$ = .9 and an

acceptable test-retest reliability ($r$ = .71). The adapted version also demonstrated adequate and similar reliability to the original scale ($\alpha$ = .9). Within the sample population in this study, the PTGI showed a good level of internal consistency ($\alpha$ = .85).

### 3.2.4.2 GSD school culture

The inclusion of GSD people within the school culture was measured using a novel 6-item scale created for this study. The scale aimed to collect information about the participants secondary school so the wording is inclusive of those who have recently left secondary school and are reporting retrospectively. Each item was prefaced with "During my time in secondary school…" and the items included, "I am/was aware of other GSD pupils", "I am/was aware of GSD members of staff", "GSD people are/were included in relationships and sex education (SRE)", "There is/was specific support available for GSD young people", "I am/was aware of a school policy regarding the bullying of GSD young people" and "I believe/believed that my school is/was a safe place for GSD young people". Each item was scored from 1 (*strongly agree)* to 4 (*strongly disagree)* on a 4-point Likert scale with a low score indicating greater inclusion of GSD individuals. Within the sample population in this study, the newly created GSD School Culture Scale (GSD-SCS) showed a good level of internal consistency ($\alpha$ = .79).

### 3.2.4.3 GSD Activism

How much participants perceived themselves as engaging in GSD activism was measured using the novel GSD Activism Scale (GSD-AS), created for this study. The GSD-AS consists of four items, each scored on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly agree), to 4 (strongly disagree); with a low score indicating greater perceived engagement in activism. Within the sample population in this study, the novel GSD-AS showed a good level of internal consistency ($\alpha$ = .74).

### 3.2.4.4 Sense of school belonging

Sense of school belonging was measured using the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM; Goodenow, 1993). This scale is designed for use with young people (age >10) and measures perceptions of sense of school belonging or measures psychological membership to school, which is the extent to which individuals feel accepted, included, respected, and supported at school. The PSSM scale contains 18-items and each is measured on a Likert scale from 1 (n*ot true at all*) to 5 (*completely true*). Five items in this scale are reverse-coded and a high overall score indicates a greater sense of belonging. The PSSM scale demonstrated high reliability (internal consistency, $\alpha$ = .80-.88; Goodenow, 1993). Within the sample population in this study, the PSSM showed an acceptable level of internal consistency ($\alpha$ = .69).

### 3.2.4.5    Social support

The perception of support from specific social groups was measured using an adapted Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988). The original 12-item scale contains three subscales of four items each, including, *significant other, family* and *friends.* Each item is scored from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) and a higher score indicates a higher perception of supportiveness. For use in this study, the scale was modified to reflect better the likely sources of support accessed by pupils of secondary school age and thusly the subscale *significant other* was replaced with a *school staff member* subscale, with the phrase "special person", replaced with "adult at school" for these items, for example, "I can talk about my problems with an *adult at school*". The MSPSS was designed for use with young adults (aged 17-22 years) and showed good overall internal consistency (α = .88; Zimet et al., 1988). Within the sample population in this study, the MSPSS subscales internal consistency was assessed separately. Cronbach's alpha for each scale was acceptable-good: *family: α =.66, friends: α =.65, school staff: α =.71*).

### 3.2.4.6    Social reactions – secondary school friends

Social reactions to a disclosure of a GSD identity by secondary school friends were measured using an adapted version of the Social Reactions Questionnaire (SRQ; Ullman, 2000). The scale consists of seven subscales; *Emotional Support, Treat Differently, Distractions/Discourage Talking, Taking Control, Information Support, Blame* and *Egocentric Reactions*. This scale was originally designed to measure the social reactions to a disclosure of sexual assault so this scale was altered in a number of ways. The disclosure of a sexual assault is a notably different from a GSD disclosure and many of the items were edited. Firstly, the original 46-items were reduced to 25-items. The items that were omitted pertained explicitly to sexual assault and were inappropriate for this study. The items that were retained were deemed to represent the range of peer reactions to GSD disclosure reported in the literature (Anderson et al., 2016; Bower-Brown et al., 2021; Higa et al., 2014; Morris et al., 2014; Robinson, 2010; Roe, 2015; Taylor & Cuthbert, 2019). Participants were asked, "Please indicate how often you received the following reactions when you told your secondary school friends that you are GSD. Your secondary school friends…". Of the 25 items that were included in the adapted scale, most were reworded, for example, "Told others about your experience without your permission" became, "Told others about your identity without your permission". The scale was scored on a Likert scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*) and negatively worded items (items 15-25) were reverse scored. A lower overall score was indicative of more positive social reactions. Internal consistency reliability for each subscale of the original SRQ ranged from α = .77 to α = .93, and test-retest reliability for

each subscale ranged from *r* = .64 to .81. As some adaptations were made to the items included in the SRQ, subscales were not retained and the scale was scored as an overall measure of social reactions. Within the sample population in this study, the adapted SRQ showed a good level of internal consistency ($\alpha$ = .78).

### 3.2.4.7 GSD identity uncertainty and visibility anxiety

Factors relating to GSD identity and anxiety related to being openly GSD were both measured using an adapted version of the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Identity Scale – Revised (LGBIS-R; Mohr & Kendra, 2011). This 27-item scale is designed to measure eight dimensions of GSD identity that have been identified/discussed in literature and that relate to GSD individuals attitudes towards their GSD identity (Mohr & Kendra, 2011). These include eight subscales: *Concealment Motivation, Acceptance Concerns, Identity Uncertainty, Internalised Homonegativity, Difficult Process, Identity Superiority, Identity Affirmation,* and *Identity Centrality*. The scale is scored on a Likert from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 6 (*strongly disagree*). Higher scores indicate greater presence of each subscale dimension, e.g., a higher score for *Internalised Stigma* indicates greater internalised stigma. This scale was adapted to be inclusive of diverse gender identities. Where each item referred to 'sexual orientation', it was edited to 'sexual orientation and/or gender identity' and 'heterosexual' was adapted to 'heterosexual and/or cisgender'. Similarly, the acronym 'LGB' was adapted to 'LGBTQ+'. For example, item 26, originally read, 'I am proud to be LGB' and was adapted to, 'I am proud to be LGBTQ+'. In addition, selected subscales were deemed theoretically relevant to this study and only these were selected for use: *Concealment Motivation* and *Acceptance Concerns* were combined and renamed, *Visibility Anxiety (GSD-VA),* consisting of six items. The 4-item *Identity Uncertainty* (*GSD-IU*) subscale was also used. Reliability for all subscales of the original LGBIS-R were adequate with coefficient alphas ranging from .76 to .89. Test-retest correlation coefficients for each subscale were moderate to high, ranging from .70 to .92. Within the sample population in this study, this *Visibility Anxiety* subscale showed an adequate level of internal consistency ($\alpha$ = .60). Within this population, the *Identity Uncertainty* subscale also showed adequate internal consistency after the removal of one item ($\alpha$ = .63).

### 3.2.4.8 Caregiver style

Caregiver warmth and control were measured using two combined scales; the 6-item Parental Affection Scale and the 3-item Parental Control Scale, created by Rossi (2001) and as described in Chen et al. (2019) to create the Caregiver Warmth and Control Scale (CWCS). The wording of these scales was adapted from 'mother' and 'father' to 'primary caregiver' and 'secondary caregiver', respectively, to reflect the diversity in different modern families.

Participants were given the option to complete a secondary caregiver scale if they confirmed that they felt that had a secondary caregiver, therefore, some participants only completed the scale for a primary caregiver. The combined scale is scored on a 4-point Likert rating from 1 (*a lot*) to 4 (*not at all*), however, these scores were reversed for some items (7-9) and a higher score indicates higher warmth and lower control. The scales had good internal consistency reliability, with alpha coefficients ranging from .74 to .91 when tested with a range of samples. Within the sample population in this study, this CWCS showed a good level of internal consistency ($\alpha$ = .76).

### 3.2.4.9 Optimism

Optimism was measured using the Life Orientation Test Revised (LOT-R; Scheier et al., 1995; Scheier & Carver, 1985). This individual personality trait variable has been studied using this scale in a large body of research. The 6-item scale is scored via 5-point Likert from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), however, three items (8-10) are reverse coded. The scale includes four filler items which are not included in the total score. Higher scores indicate greater optimism. Internal consistency reliability is good ($\alpha$ = .82) and test-retest reliability was acceptable at $r$ =.79.  Within the sample population in this study, the LOT-R showed an inadequate level of internal consistency ($\alpha$ = .12). This measure was abandoned at this stage due to limited reliability within the study population.

### 3.2.4.10 Bullying

Bullying was not measured using quantitative scales. All participants were required to self-select as having experienced bullying that they attributed to their GSD identity and bullying was defined as "an intentional act to repeatedly cause harm to another individual, emotionally, or physically in person or online (e.g., making threats, spreading rumours, attacking someone physically or verbally, excluding someone from a group)".

**Table 7** Scale maximum and minimum ranges

| Scale | Min | Max |
| --- | --- | --- |
| PTGI | 21 | 126 |
| GSD-SCS | 6 | 24 |
| PSSM | 18 | 90 |
| MSPSS | 12 | 60 |
| SRQ | 25 | 125 |
| GSD-AS | 4 | 16 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| GSD:VA | 6 | 36 |
| GSD:IU | 6 | 18 |
| CWCS | 9 | 36 |

### 3.2.5    Procedure

Ethical approval was granted by the University of Southampton Ethics Committee (ERGO number 64760, approved 30/06/2021). Recruitment took place between November 2021 and December 2021. Recruitment advertisements (Appendix E) were posted online via Twitter and within numerous GSD-oriented Facebook pages and groups e.g., *LGBTQ+ Community*. In addition, multiple GSD-oriented charities and community groups were contacted directly via email and asked to distribute the recruitment flyer to their members. Particular focus was given to groups that support gender diverse and/or disabled young people and those who belong to minoritised ethnic or cultural groups in order to attract a sample that was representative of the diversity within the GSD community in the UK. Finally, the primary researcher also contacted a several large colleges and sixth forms across the country via pastoral staff members (where contact details were available on their websites) and requested the sharing of the recruitment flyer with pupils at that provision. Participants could then take part by following the information on the recruitment flyer to the online survey via Qualtrics (qualtrics.com).  The survey used an opt-in consent procedure and information sheets (Appendix F) were provided prior to consent was requested and before the participant was able to proceed to the survey. Debrief statements (Appendix G) were provided upon completion or exit from the survey and included signposting to a range of support services and information about deleting browser history, should these be required in order to safeguard the participant. An incentive to take part was detailed in the information sheet and participants were invited to opt-in to this upon completion of the survey. The incentive was inclusion in a prize draw to win a single gift voucher from Amazon or a donation of the same value to 'ATK' (formerly 'The Albert Kennedy Trust'; an LGBTQ+ youth homelessness charity).

## 3.3    Results

### 3.3.1    Analysis

Total PTGI scores indicated that, as expected, this study population experienced PTG (*M*=71.17, *SD*=11.57). The mean PTGI score found here is similar or higher to mean scores in

previous studies of individuals who have experienced a range of traumatic events, including serious ill health (Sheikh & Marotta, 2017), ill-health of a parent (Teixeira & Pereira, 2013), bereavement (Engelkemeyer & Marwit, 2008) children who had experienced a natural disaster (Cryder et al., 2006) and LGBT individuals who had experienced 'coming out' (Zavala & Waters, 2020). Mean differences in PTG between different demographic groups included in this study were explored.

### 3.3.1.1    PTG by gender identity

Mean PTG scores by gender identity (see Table 8)  indicated that transgender participants experienced the greatest PTG ($M$=73.88, $SD$=12.19), followed by nonbinary/gender non-conforming participants ($M$=69.93, $SD$=13.31) and cisgender participants experienced the lowest PTG ($M$=67.93, $SD$=8.42). There was a statistically significant difference between PTG across gender identity groups as determined by one-way ANOVA ($F$(2, 168)=4.908, $p$ =.008). Post hoc tests revealed that the difference between the transgender group and the cisgender group was significant ($p$=.008).

**Table 8** PTG Means by Gender Identity

|  | $N$ | $M$ | $SD$ |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Transgender | 83 | 73.88 | 12.19 |
| Non-Binary/Gender Non-conforming | 32 | 69.69 | 13.31 |
| Cisgender | 55 | 67.93 | 8.42 |

### 3.3.1.2    PTG by ethnicity

Mean PTG scores by ethnicity (Figure 15) indicated that white/Caucasian participants experienced the highest PTG ($M$=73.92, $SD$=9.21) and Arab/Arab British participants experienced the lowest ($M$=62.55, $SD$=15.57). There was a statistically significant difference between PTG across ethnic groups as determined by one-way ANOVA ($W_{elch}$(4,25.23) = 4.053, p = .011). Levene's indicated a violation of homogeneity so an adjusted $F$ is reported. Games-Howell post hoc tests revealed that PTG was highest in the White/Caucasian group (73.9 ± 9.62) and that this was statistically significantly higher than the Asian/Asian British group (66.13 ± 8.54, p = .029). There was no statistically significant difference between the other specific ethnic groups (p = >.05). Participants were then regrouped into binary ethnicity groups to assess whether there was a difference between mean PTG in white participants, compared to those participants who were not white or identified themselves as belonging to a minoritised ethnic group. The white

ethnic group reported higher PTG (*M*=73.91, *SD*=9.67) than the combined minoritised ethnic group (*M*=66.40, *SD*=13.06). An independent samples t-test indicated that this difference was significant, *t*(171)=4.316, *p*<.001.
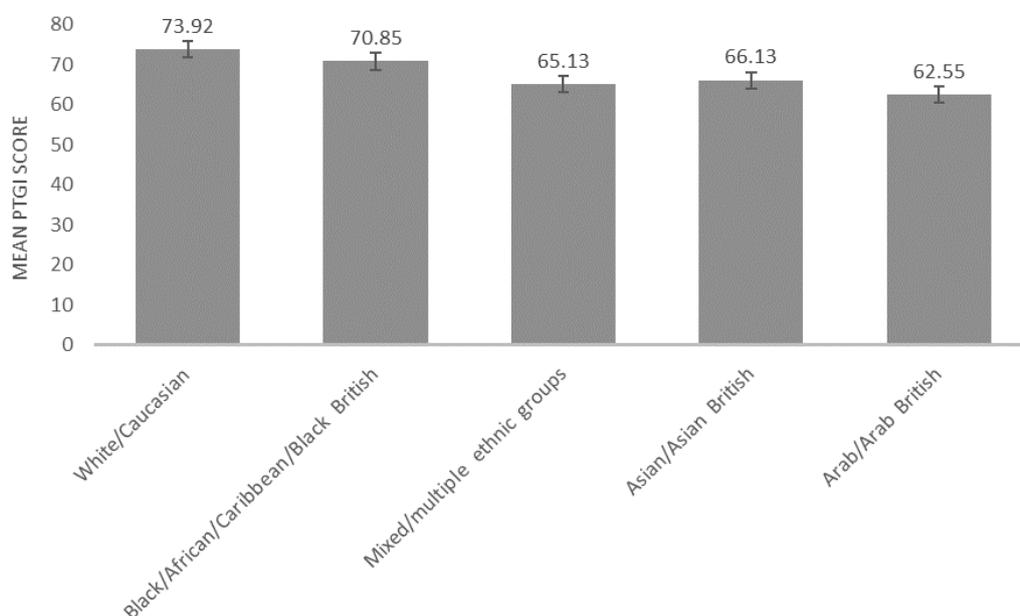


**Figure 15** Mean PTG by ethnicity

### 3.3.1.3     PTG by disability

An independent samples t-test was conducted to assess whether there was any difference in mean PTG between participants that described themselves as disabled and those who did not. Those who did not describe themselves as disabled reported higher PTG (*M*=72.15, *SD*=11.29) than the disabled group (*M*=63.00, *SD*=12.62). An independent samples t-test indicated that this difference was significant, *t*(166)=-2.875, *p*=.005.

### 3.3.1.4     PTG by sexuality

Mean PTG scores by sexuality (see Figure 16)  indicated that gay men experienced the highest PTG (*SD*=12.667). However, there was no significant difference between these groups as indicated by analysis via a one-way ANOVA (*p*=>.05).
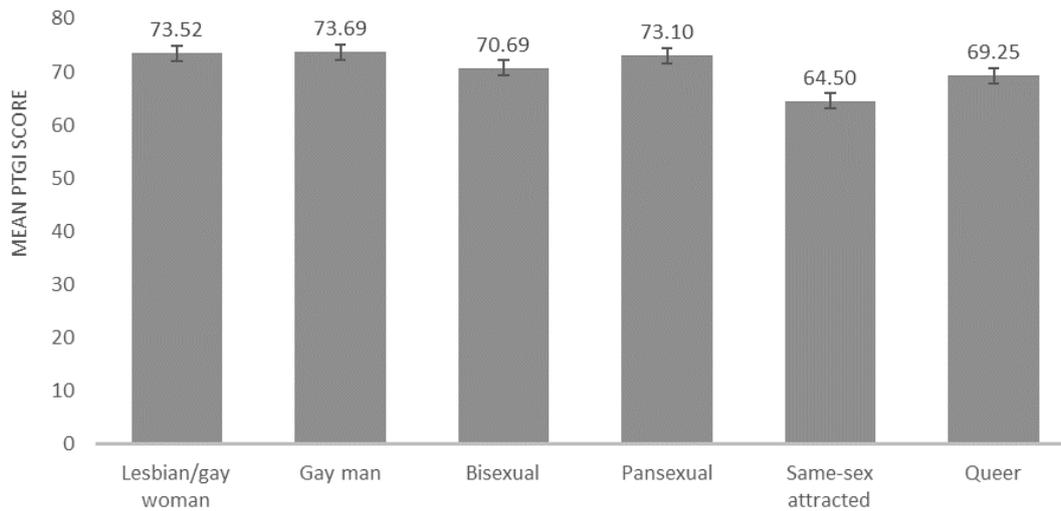
**Figure 16** Mean PTG by sexuality

### 3.3.1.5 PTG by religiosity

Mean PTG scores by religious affiliation (see Table 9) indicated that Christian participants experienced the highest PTG ($M$=72.64, $SD$=9.98) and non-religious participants experienced the lowest ($M$=68.07, $SD$=15.70). However, there was no significant difference between the different religious groups as indicated by analysis via a one-way ANOVA ($p$=>.05).

**Table 9** PTG Means by Religious Affiliation

|  | *N* | *M* | *SD* |
|---|---|---|---|
| No religion | 41 | 68.07 | 15.70 |
| Christian (including all Christian denominations) | 104 | 72.64 | 9.98 |
| Buddhist | 5 | 65.60 | 11.08 |
| Hindu | 8 | 70.75 | 8.00 |
| Muslim | 7 | 69.71 | 9.73 |
| Sikh | 3 | 72.00 | 5.57 |

Means for key measures by demographic groups of interest are detailed in table 10.

**Table 10** Means for key measures by demographic groups

| | Activism | | GSD Inclusion | | Identity Uncertainty | | Visibility Anxiety | | Social Reactions | | Belonging | | Support (friends) | | Support (school staff) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | N |
| Gender Identity | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Transgender | 9.25 | 3.00 | 14.14 | 4.00 | 11.61 | 3.08 | 20.67 | 3.75 | 70.33 | 12.14 | 54.18 | 8.88 | 14.31 | 3.03 | 14.34 | 3.34 | 83 |
| Non-Binary/GNC | 8.68 | 3.07 | 14.26 | 4.02 | 11.00 | 2.98 | 19.19 | 4.25 | 71.39 | 14.43 | 54.13 | 10.46 | 13.84 | 3.41 | 12.90 | 3.22 | 31 |
| Cisgender | 8.60 | 1.81 | 12.87 | 2.33 | 11.47 | 2.66 | 20.85 | 3.21 | 74.79 | 7.62 | 53.34 | 5.83 | 13.66 | 2.30 | 13.45 | 2.34 | 53 |
| Sexuality | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Lesbian | 8.54 | 2.33 | 13.54 | 3.59 | 11.54 | 2.57 | 20.78 | 3.04 | 71.93 | 11.19 | 55.44 | 8.02 | 14.44 | 2.65 | 13.87 | 3.14 | 54 |
| Gay man | 8.96 | 3.18 | 12.80 | 3.95 | 10.84 | 3.75 | 20.88 | 4.92 | 68.76 | 14.33 | 55.72 | 9.16 | 13.64 | 3.30 | 14.76 | 2.86 | 25 |
| Bisexual | 8.85 | 2.11 | 13.59 | 2.95 | 11.65 | 2.95 | 20.91 | 3.15 | 75.00 | 8.03 | 53.09 | 7.35 | 14.32 | 1.85 | 13.68 | 2.27 | 34 |
| Pansexual | 8.90 | 2.65 | 15.15 | 3.76 | 11.90 | 3.19 | 19.05 | 4.57 | 68.60 | 14.96 | 49.70 | 7.78 | 14.10 | 3.35 | 13.25 | 3.75 | 20 |
| SSA | 10.17 | 4.06 | 13.83 | 3.83 | 11.25 | 2.70 | 19.58 | 4.32 | 68.92 | 19.57 | 52.58 | 8.66 | 13.75 | 3.17 | 12.82 | 2.89 | 11 |
| Queer | 8.71 | 3.50 | 14.71 | 4.23 | 11.86 | 1.35 | 20.43 | 3.41 | 73.14 | 4.30 | 48.43 | 10.78 | 13.29 | 4.42 | 13.43 | 4.43 | 7 |
| Heterosexual | 9.38 | 3.03 | 14.38 | 3.61 | 11.19 | 3.06 | 19.81 | 3.47 | 73.75 | 5.87 | 56.56 | 7.07 | 13.13 | 3.44 | 13.38 | 3.52 | 16 |

Ethnicity

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Caucasian | 8.27 | 2.24 | 13.11 | 3.53 | 11.54 | 3.08 | 20.84 | 3.62 | 71.45 | 11.64 | 53.82 | 9.06 | 14.53 | 2.62 | 14.02 | 3.08 | 108 |
| Black | 10.85 | 3.13 | 15.96 | 3.14 | 12.31 | 2.00 | 20.50 | 3.39 | 72.73 | 13.23 | 54.19 | 8.14 | 13.58 | 2.12 | 13.76 | 2.74 | 25 |
| Mixed ethnicity | 8.25 | 2.76 | 14.50 | 4.84 | 10.25 | 2.60 | 18.50 | 5.10 | 75.88 | 6.38 | 56.88 | 7.75 | 10.75 | 3.81 | 13.38 | 3.02 | 8 |
| Asian | 8.57 | 2.56 | 13.64 | 2.68 | 10.29 | 3.02 | 20.00 | 3.16 | 67.86 | 16.18 | 54.71 | 5.95 | 14.86 | 2.66 | 13.64 | 2.71 | 14 |
| Arab | 11.36 | 3.04 | 14.82 | 3.54 | 11.00 | 2.86 | 18.27 | 4.58 | 72.91 | 8.67 | 51.18 | 2.93 | 11.82 | 4.14 | 11.82 | 4.14 | 11 |
| Other ethnicity | 11.00 | | 14.00 | | 12.00 | | 18.00 | | 77.00 | | 55.00 | | 12.00 | | 11.00 | | 1 |

Religion

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No religion | 8.93 | 3.33 | 14.63 | 4.51 | 10.51 | 3.63 | 19.76 | 4.39 | 67.02 | 18.58 | 51.54 | 11.31 | 14.24 | 3.66 | 13.40 | 3.33 | 40 |
| Christian | 8.62 | 2.43 | 13.13 | 3.13 | 11.67 | 2.60 | 20.55 | 3.61 | 72.44 | 8.78 | 54.93 | 7.34 | 14.03 | 2.81 | 14.00 | 3.20 | 104 |
| Buddhist | 9.80 | 3.11 | 15.40 | 4.56 | 11.40 | 1.14 | 20.80 | 4.15 | 73.80 | 4.15 | 55.40 | 4.45 | 14.60 | 0.89 | 12.20 | 1.79 | 5 |
| Hindu | 11.13 | 2.64 | 16.63 | 2.67 | 11.88 | 3.48 | 20.00 | 3.12 | 78.13 | 3.23 | 54.00 | 5.86 | 13.38 | 1.60 | 13.00 | 1.93 | 8 |
| Muslim | 9.57 | 2.30 | 14.29 | 2.06 | 12.14 | 2.34 | 22.43 | 1.51 | 76.57 | 5.91 | 52.57 | 5.47 | 13.29 | 1.60 | 14.29 | 1.60 | 7 |
| Sikh | 10.00 | 0.00 | 13.33 | 2.89 | 14.33 | 0.58 | 21.00 | 1.00 | 77.33 | 6.51 | 52.67 | 4.04 | 14.00 | 1.73 | 13.33 | 2.89 | 3 |

Disability

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | 8.77 | 2.39 | 16.08 | 3.99 | 9.15 | 3.48 | 17.54 | 4.35 | 73.46 | 4.74 | 49.23 | 11.23 | 12.69 | 4.75 | 11.69 | 4.57 | 13 |
| No | 8.89 | 2.73 | 13.58 | 3.50 | 11.68 | 2.76 | 20.76 | 3.44 | 71.28 | 12.38 | 54.23 | 7.97 | 14.21 | 2.65 | 13.95 | 2.88 | 150 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Undisclosed | 10.00 | 3.65 | 14.00 | 4.24 | 10.75 | 4.03 | 17.00 | 6.93 | 81.25 | 3.86 | 58.25 | 6.90 | 12.00 | 3.37 | 13.00 | 3.37 | 4 |
| Total | 8.94 | 2.70 | 13.76 | 3.59 | 11.46 | 2.92 | 20.46 | 3.72 | 71.94 | 11.51 | 53.90 | 8.34 | 14.02 | 2.89 | 13.79 | 3.07 | 167 |

### 3.3.2 Main analysis: Hierarchical multiple regression

A hierarchical multiple regression was run to determine if PTG in GSD secondary school pupils who have experienced identity-based and traumatic bullying can be predicted by engagement in activism, school culture, social reactions to disclosure by secondary school friends, perceived social support at school and sense of school belonging. Results indicate that this model statistically significantly predicted PTG, $F(11, 152) = 7.350$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .347$. Results show that 34.7% of the variance in PTG can be accounted for by the predictor variables in this model. Looking at the unique contributions of the predictors demonstrates that social reactions (secondary school friends) to disclosure ($\beta = -.359$, $t = -4.730$, $p < .001$), support from school friends ($\beta = .177$, $t = 2.244$, $p = .026$) added statistically significantly to the prediction. Participants predicted PTG is equal to $70.264 - .335$ (social reaction) $+ .674$ (support from school friends). Individual beta values for each predictor are shown in Figure 17.
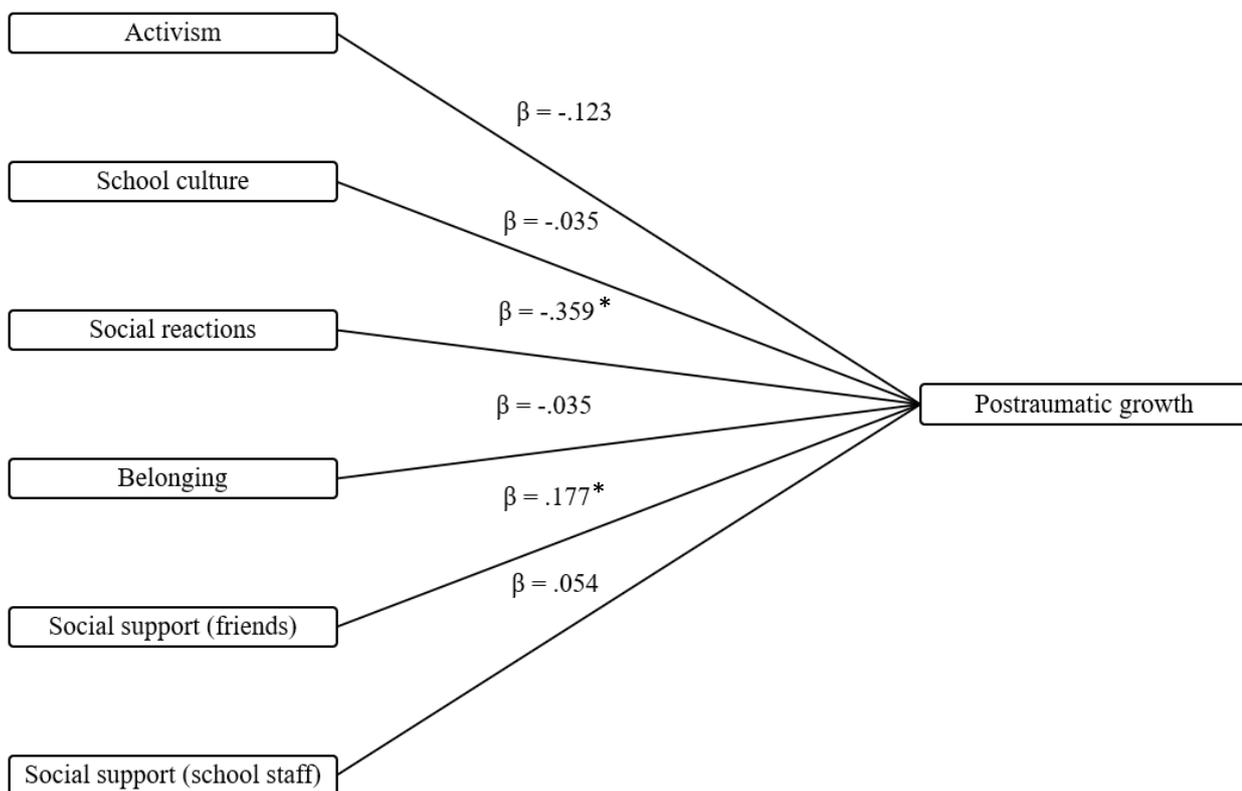


**Figure 17** Regression model showing predictor variable beta coefficients with significance at <.05

## 3.4 Discussion

To date, there is little research that explores the phenomenon of PTG in GSD young people at school. In the current study, we sought to advance knowledge in this area by exploring a number of possible school-based predictors that may facilitate PTG following traumatic

experiences of identity-based bullying. Our results indicate there are a number of school-based factors that significantly predict posttraumatic growth in GSD secondary school pupils after experiences of identity-based bullying. These included social support from peers and school staff, acceptance from school friends, sense of school belonging, engagement in activism and GSD inclusive school cultures. These results have been found in an ethnically diverse sample of GSD young people.

The strongest predictors are support and acceptance from school friends. Acceptance from school friends was operationalised in this study through the adaption of a social reactions scale (Ullman, 2000), to capture the social reactions of secondary school friends to GSD identity disclosure. There is a considerable body of research demonstrating the significance of the reaction that school friends have to this disclosure. Disclosure to friends is often preceded by anxiety and fear of rejection or a lack of acceptance and this is described as particularly acute given that the disclosure pertains to an inextricable part of an individual's identity (Bower-Brown et al., 2021; Dewaele, Van Houtte, et al., 2013; Gato et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2016; Kjaran & Jóhannesson, 2013; Lasser & Tharinger, 2003; Roe, 2015; Schimmel-Bristow et al., 2018; Sherriff et al., 2011; Toft, 2020). Qualitative research indicates that GSD pupils often choose to disclose to their school friends before making disclosures to the wider school community as their support is viewed as essential in order to cope with potential wider rejection, prejudice and bullying (Anderson et al., 2016; Gato et al., 2020; Higa et al., 2014; Morris et al., 2014; Robinson, 2010; Roe, 2015). Clearly, acceptance at this pivotal moment in GSD young people's school experience is important.

Social support was also a predictor of PTG, with social support from friends being particularly important. Support was measured using the 'friends' and an adapted 'school staff' dimension of a scale of perceived support (Zimet et al., 1988). Research has previously demonstrated an association between social support and PTG in adults (Ramos & Leal, 2013) and young people (Kilmer et al., 2014; Meyerson et al., 2011). The current study establishes this link in GSD youth populations also. This association might be expected, given the PTG dimension *improved relationships,* as support prior to and during trauma is a logical prerequisite to developing deeper and more meaningful relationships post-trauma. In fact, Tedeschi & Calhoun (2004) suggest that social support can provide opportunities to 'craft narratives' about the traumatic experiences and assist with the assimilation of traumatic experience into core beliefs. Opportunities for GSD young people to re-craft narratives with their school friends following traumatic bullying may facilitate PTG n this population. Congruently, the support of friends is protective against some of the negative mental health outcomes following bullying experiences in general youth populations (Brendgen & Poulin, 2018; Noret et al., 2020). Interestingly, a recent qualitative study found that GSD young people often 'self-manage' their mental health and that

social support is an essential element of this. The majority of these participants note that a central mental health management strategy is talking to others who may offer emotional support and challenge negative narratives (Town et al., 2021). We propose that the social support may facilitate the process of productive rumination that is necessary for PTG to occur (Triplett et al., 2012) through opportunities to talk about traumatic experiences and create a positive narrative following experiences of bullying.

As predicted, engagement in activism was also a predictor of PTG. This, less studied, predictor was largely theoretically linked to PTG. However, had been empirically linked to PTG and to wellbeing in GSD adults (Szymanski et al., 2021). Szymanski et al. (2021) situated GSD activism in the context of pervasive heterosexism, and as a 'fight' against the social norms and describe it as actions that advance the rights of or improve conditions for the GSD community in society. They found the links between participation in activism and positive affect and PTG were mediated by meaning in life. Meaning in life, links theoretically well with dimensions of PTG and the two concepts appear to correlate with one another (Triplett et al., 2012). Links between activism and PTG were also mediated by *community connection* or involvement with the GSD community. We suggest that these findings alongside the findings of the current study position opportunities for activism as a unique conduit for PTG, combining social opportunities for support, validation and to create new narratives around meaning and purpose after trauma whilst simultaneously facilitating new and deeper relationships through shared goals and experiences.

To a lesser extent, the wider GSD inclusive school culture and a sense of school belonging predict PTG. Previous research linking belonging with PTG in adults suggests that belonging may facilitate access to social support (Henson et al., 2021). This may be the case in the present study as social support is evidently important, though sense of school belonging was a weaker predictor than expected. Here, belonging at school was the chosen predictor, however, it may be that other belonging within other groups might have been more predictive. Given the predictive power of GSD activism, sense of belonging to the GSD community may be an interesting factor for future research to explore. Previous studies have linked sense of belonging to findings of higher PTG in minoritised ethnic (Elderton et al., 2017; Meyerson et al., 2011) and religious groups (Prati & Pietrantoni, 2009) as belonging to these groups may provide increased access to social support and facilitate opportunities for collective meaning-making following shared experiences. GSD inclusive school culture was a theoretically linked predictor as it was expected that inclusive school culture might act similarly to belonging in providing access to increased social support.

The presence of PTG in this population was anticipated. Additional, secondary findings within this study around differing levels of PTG in different demographic subgroups is interesting.

We found transgender participants experienced significantly higher PTG than their cisgender GSD peers; this finding certainly warrants further investigation in future research. This indicates, as suspected that, while GSD young people are united in their transgressions of cis-heteronormativity, there are important within group differences to explore too. Qualitative research that explored the school experiences of trans and gender diverse young people offers some interesting insights. Gender diverse young people within these studies describe a journey of identity that involves, initially, a great deal of identity uncertainty and confusion, and often shame, but that often eventually leads to self-acceptance and a recognition that being authentically oneself is essential for wellbeing (Bower-Brown et al., 2021; T. Jones et al., 2016; McGowan et al., 2022; Schimmel-Bristow et al., 2018). The themes around an identity journey that is characterised by significant challenge to identity and core beliefs alongside the importance of supportive friends throughout this journey are consistent with themes from within PTG literature.

In addition, we found that there were some differences between levels of PTG within different ethnic groups, with white participants experiencing significantly higher PTG than those that belonged to minoritised ethnic groups. This interesting finding contradicts previous research with adults and young people that has found ethnic minorities experience greater PTG (Elderton et al., 2017; Meyerson et al., 2011). The differences in PTG in GSD young people of varying ethnic backgrounds has not previously been studied. We suggest that further research is needed to explore this. GSD pupils that are ethnic minorities represent the intersection of more than one category of historically oppressed, non-normative social groups and may be vulnerable to the impact of bullying based on multiple aspects of identity (Angoff & Barnhart, 2021; Crenshaw, 1989) indicating that minoritised ethnic GSD youngsters may be at particularly high risk. Similarly, participants who identified themselves as disabled reported significantly lower PTG than those who did not. Again, these youngsters belong to more than one social category of non-normative social group and may, again, be at a higher risk for multiple forms of identity-based bullying (Miller & Smith, 2020; Mishna et al., 2020). This is an area that requires further exploration to examine how these dual social categories impact on likelihood, severity, and impact of combined forms of identity-based bullying at school and why these pupils may experience less PTG following bullying. Particularly, given research indicates that both minoritised ethnic (Truong et al., 2020) and disabled (Toft, 2020) GSD pupils often feel excluded from traditional sources of social support for GSD pupils, such as organised social groups.

### 3.4.1        Limitations

There are a number of conceptual limitations within this study that must be considered. Firstly, the unavoidable homogenisation of GSD young people that occurs when they are studied as a group. Whilst it is important for large samples of these young people to be included in the quantitative research from which they are most often excluded, it should also be recognised that there is much variation within this group too and that much of this nuance of experience is lost. It is important for this study to be situated within a broader literature, including studies of GSD subgroups and qualitative work.

There are also difficulties here with defining bullying. Within this study this was defined as "an intentional act to repeatedly cause harm to another individual, emotionally, or physically in person or online (e.g., making threats, spreading rumours, attacking someone physically or verbally, excluding someone from a group)" and that this behaviour was attributed by the participant to their GSD identity. However, this is both open to participant interpretation and the definition covers a variety of acts. Differences in severity, time frame and perpetrator and impact on PTG could be subject to future research. Further work may  establish the type and nature of bullying trauma that results in PTG. Finally, there is no research into PTG currently that features the implementation of a control group. As such, it is difficult to determine whether PTG is result of trauma in adolescents or whether it is simply a stage of adolescent growth (Harmon & Venta, 2021).

The quality of this study was assessed against the JBI *Critical appraisal tool: Checklist for quasi-experimental studies* (2022). There are a number of strengths, including the reliability assessments of measures  and appropriateness of statistical analysis. There are also some measurement issues to be considered. Firstly, the majority of the measures used here were not designed or tested for use with GSD populations. This is clear from the measures of reliability conducted within the current study population. A number of measures produced lower reliability in this population, with the measure of Optimism (LOT-R; Scheier et al., 1995; Scheier & Carver, 1985) rendered unusable in this study by low reliability. These issues highlight the need for measures to be designed for more diverse samples. Similarly, many of the measures used here are designed for adult use or have been adapted from measures originally designed for adult populations. The most significant of these is the PTGI itself (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Whilst this study utilised an adapted adolescent version (Ickovics et al., 2006), the measure itself and the theory relate to adult populations and have been less rigorously tested with young people. This measure is self-report and is measuring the perception of growth, rather than growth itself. Further research might employ observational methods or seek to triangulate with additional

measures. In addition, this study is cross-sectional, correlational, and retrospective. This limits our ability to measure 'change' such as PTG. Future work might utilise longitudinal or multilevel modelling methods. The latter might measure within person changes as well as between and so can measure change over time at individual level.

The diversity of the study population improves representativeness. However, there are some measurement issues associated. Included measures were designed and tested with predominantly white Euro-American populations and their validity with diverse populations is questionable. Moreover, the defining of GSD-based bullying reduces bullying to relate to this single aspect of identity. In reality, identity-based bullying experiences are considerably more complex than this study can capture (Bauer, 2014).

### 3.4.2      Implications for practice

Whilst interpersonal violence and aggression remain a pervasive feature of the lives of GSD adolescents, recovery work within school will remain relevant. Education professionals must pay attention to the importance of social support relevant to PTG after bullying. There are clearly potential benefits to formalising access to social support, particularly where this focuses on cognitive reappraisal or the re-creation of positive narratives following trauma and on the building of new or deeper relationships (Sheikh, 2008). This support may be in the form of 1:1 with an adult, where deep exploration of the narratives can be guided by an expert adult (Lloyd-Hazlett & Foster, 2013; Sheikh, 2008). Alternatively, gay-straight or rainbow alliances and other peer support groups are recommended and the benefits of these are well-established (Heck et al., 2011; Page, 2017). Peer support groups may allow opportunities for members with similar experiences to co-construct positive changes in each other and to experience a shared growth (Cann et al., 2010; Sheikh, 2008). Acceptance from friends during disclosure is highly important if PTG is to occur post-trauma. Reactions to disclosure are often informed by school social norms and the school climate for GSD young people. If educational professionals hope to have an impact on acceptance of GSD pupils, then strategies that challenge prejudicial social norms are essential (Cox et al., 2011). In addition to individual and group level support, there must be wider education of whole-school populations around GSD identity and related issues and clear protective policies that condemn GSD-identity-based bullying (Steck & Perry, 2018).

There is clear benefit to GSD young people with increased opportunities to partake in activism. Interestingly, within qualitative research, many GSD pupils who have had difficult school experiences describe experiences, that can be recognised as acts of activism, as powerfully positive and meaningful (Bower-Brown et al., 2021; Gato et al., 2020; Higa et al., 2014; Jones et

al., 2016; Roe, 2015; Toft, 2020). Schools may play an essential role in planning for and providing opportunities to take part in activism. Any social intervention or support provided should consider subgroup differences between GSD pupils and the intersectionality of the pupils being supported. For intervention to be effective, educational professionals must have awareness of intersectionality and provide inclusive support (Bauer, 2014).

There are clear roles for educational psychologists (EPs) in the implementation of aforementioned support. As evidence-based practitioners, EPs may disseminate research findings to school staff and EPs are experienced in delivering systems/organisation-level intervention, such as, whole school trainings (BPS, 2018). They are also able to deliver individual therapeutic work and may support GSD pupils through meaning making following bullying (Atkinson et al., 2011; Sharpe et al., 2016). Specifically, EPS may be trained in approaches such as narrative therapy, which may be particularly appropriate to the development of PTG (Dunsmuir & Hardy, 2016). Additionally, EPs often provide formal support, such as supervision, and informal support to staff with therapeutic/pastoral responsibilities, such as those who may facilitate peer support groups and may therefore provide advice and support to these staff (Osborne & Burton, 2014).

## 3.5    Conclusion

Posttraumatic growth in GSD populations has been little-studied. Within broad populations, PTG occurs after a range of traumatic experiences, including various types of inter-personal trauma. PTG can be recognised as a positive outcome following trauma and is associated with various other measures of psychological wellbeing. However, it is also clear that not everyone experiences PTG following trauma. Importantly, PTG must be preceded by a traumatic event that threatens one's core beliefs about oneself, others, and the world. The nature of identity-based GSD bullying and its traumatic impact suggests that GSD young people who have experienced this at school are likely to experience PTG following this. Research has revealed numerous factors that predict PTG in broad populations but their relevance to young people, and to GSD young people, more specifically, has not yet been established. This study has contributed to the PTG literature and offered some contextual predictors for PTG in this unique, understudied population. These include social support from school staff and friends, accepting responses to GSD identity disclosure to school friends, engagement in GSD activism at school and more GSD inclusive school cultures. Schools can be difficult spaces for GSD young people to navigate and the prevalence of GSD identity-based bullying and violence demands that action is taken to better protect them. The social norm and culture change that is required to make schools safer places requires multiple approaches to intervening, supporting and meaningfully including GSD young people. However, currently many GSD young people are left managing the fallout of bullying experiences with

limited support. This study suggests that positive change, in the form of posttraumatic growth,
can be achieved in the aftermath of trauma and provides some direction to education
professionals around how they can help to facilitate this.

# Appendix A     Search terms and results

**ProQuest databases (ERIC)**

Document title OR abstract Search: (school or education or college) and ("coming out" or "being out" or "authentic sel*" or "sharing identity" or "visibility management" or closet* or disclosure or openness) and (LGB* or queer or "sexual minority" or "gender minority" or "gender non*" or "same-sex attracted" or "gender question*" or TGNB or "two-spirit*" or lesbian or gay or bisexual or trans or transgender or pansexual or SSAGQ or sexuality or homosexual) and ("young people" or children or youth or adolescents or pupils or students or "young adults" or teenagers or teens) not (HIV or AIDS)

Narrow search by age: infancy (1-23 months) to adolescence (13-17 years)

Search results: **113**

Search limited to English and academic journals and duplicates removed: **56**

**EBSCO host databases (PsycINFO, PsychARTICLES, CINAHL Plus with full text and MEDLINE)**

Title OR abstract search: (school or education or college) and ("coming out" or "being out" or "authentic sel*" or "sharing identity" or "visibility management" or closet* or disclosure or openness) and (LGB* or queer or "sexual minority" or "gender minority" or "gender non*" or "same-sex attracted" or "gender question*" or TGNB or "two-spirit*" or lesbian or gay or bisexual or trans or transgender or pansexual or SSAGQ or sexuality or homosexual) and ("young people" or children or youth or adolescents or pupils or students or "young adults" or teenagers or teens) not (HIV or AIDS)

Narrow search by age: infancy (1-23 months) to adolescence (13-17 years) and publication year: >2000

Search results: **184**

Search limited to English and academic journals and duplicates removed: **68**

**Web of Science Core Collection**

Topic search: (school or education or college) and ("coming out" or "being out" or "authentic sel*" or "sharing identity" or "visibility management" or closet* or disclosure or openness) and (LGB* or queer or "sexual minority" or "gender minority" or "gender non*" or "same-sex attracted" or "gender question*" or TGNB or "two-spirit*" or lesbian or gay or bisexual or trans or transgender

or pansexual or SSAGQ or sexuality or homosexual) and ("young people" or children or youth or adolescents or pupils or students or "young adults" or teenagers or teens) not (HIV or AIDS)

Narrow search by publication year: >2000

Search results: **571**

Search limited to English and academic journals and duplicates removed: **106**

# Appendix B    Articles excluded from review with reasons

| 1 | Adrian Zongrone, by D., Nhan Truong, M. L., & Kosciw, J. G. (2020). *Erasure and Resilience: The Experiences of LGBTQ Students of Color*. www.glsen.org/research. | Quantitative<br><br>Not relevant to VM |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | Almeida, J., Johnson, R. M., Corliss, H. L., Molnar, B. E., & Azrael, D. (2009). Emotional distress among LGBT youth: The influence of perceived discrimination based on sexual orientation. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, *38*(7), 1001-1014. | Not relevant to VM |
| 3 | Austin, A. (2016). "There I am": A Grounded Theory Study of Young Adults Navigating a Transgender or Gender Nonconforming Identity within a Context of Oppression and Invisibility. *Sex Roles*, *75*(5–6), 215–230. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-016-0600-7 | Not school based<br><br>Adult sample |
| 4 | Cox, N., Dewaele, A., Van Houtte, M., & Vincke, J. (2010). Stress-related growth, coming out, and internalized homonegativity in lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth. An examination of stress-related growth within the minority stress model. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *58*(1), 117-137. | Not school based<br><br>Quantitative |
| 5 | D'Augelli, A. R., Hershberger, S. L., & Pilkington, N. W. (2001). Suicidality patterns and sexual orientation-related factors among lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths. *Suicide and life-threatening behavior*, *31*(3), 250-264. | Not relevant to VM<br><br>Quantitative |
| 6 | DeHaan, S., Kuper, L. E., Magee, J. C., Bigelow, L., & Mustanski, B. S. (2013). The interplay between online and offline explorations of identity, relationships, and sex: A mixed-methods study with LGBT youth. *Journal of sex research*, *50*(5), 421-434. | Not school based |
| 7 | Erhard, R. L., & Ben-Ami, E. (2016). The schooling experience of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth in Israel: Falling below and rising above as a matter of social ecology. *Journal of homosexuality*, *63*(2), 193-227. | Not relevant to VM |
| 8 | Fish, J. N. (2020). Future directions in understanding and addressing mental health among LGBTQ youth. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, *49*(6), 943-956. | Quantitative<br><br>Not relevant to VM |

| 9 | Gnan, G. H., Rahman, Q., Ussher, G., Baker, D., West, E., & Rimes, K. A. (2019). General and LGBTQ-specific factors associated with mental health and suicide risk among LGBTQ students. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *22*(10), 1393-1408. | Quantitative<br><br>Not relevant to VM |
|---|---|---|
| 10 | Haltom, T. M., & Ratcliff, S. (2021). Effects of sex, race, and education on the timing of coming out among lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults in the US. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *50*(3), 1107-1120. | Quantitative<br><br>Adult sample<br><br>Not school based |
| 11 | Hardie, A. (2012). Lesbian teachers and students: Issues and dilemmas of being "out" in primary school. *Sex Education*, *12*(3), 273–282. | Case study<br><br>One youth participant |
| 12 | Harper, G. W., Serrano, P. A., Bruce, D., & Bauermeister, J. A. (2016). The internet's multiple roles in facilitating the sexual orientation identity development of gay and bisexual male adolescents. *American journal of men's health*, *10*(5), 359-376. | Not school based |
| 13 | Hill, A. O., Lyons, A., Jones, J., McGowan, I., Carman, M., Parsons, M., Power, J., & Bourne, A. (2021). *Writing themselves in 4: The health and wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ young people in Australia* (Issue February). https://doi.org/10.26181/6010fad9b244b | Quantitative |
| 14 | Hillier, L., Jones, T., Monagle, M., Overton, N., Gahan, L., Blackman, J., & Mitchell, A. (2010). *Writing themselves in 3: The third national study on the sexual health and wellbeing of same sex attracted and gender questioning young people* (Vol. 53, Issue 9). | Quantitative |
| 15 | Holmes, S. E., & Cahill, S. (2004). School experiences of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education*, *1*(3), 53-66. | Not original research |
| 16 | Horowitz, A., & Itzkowitz, M. (2011). LGBTQ youth in American schools: Moving to the middle. *Middle School Journal*, *42*(5), 32-38. | Not relevant to VM |

| 17 | Johns, M. M., Poteat, V. P., Horn, S. S., & Kosciw, J. (2019). Strengthening our schools to promote resilience and health among LGBTQ youth: Emerging evidence and research priorities from The State of LGBTQ Youth Health and Wellbeing Symposium. *LGBT health*, *6*(4), 146-155. | Quantitative<br><br>Not relevant to VM |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 18 | Jones, T., & Hillier, L. (2013). Comparing trans-spectrum and same-sex-attracted youth in Australia: Increased risks, increased activisms. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, *10*(4), 287-307. | Quantitative<br><br>Not relevant to VM |
| 19 | Kosciw, J. G., Palmer, N. A., Kull, R. M., & Greytak, E. A. (2013). The effect of negative school climate on academic outcomes for LGBT youth and the role of in-school supports. *Journal of School Violence*, *12*(1), 45-63. | Not relevant to VM<br><br>Quantitative |
| 20 | Kroneman, M., Admiraal, W., & Ketelaars, M. (2019). A peer–educator intervention: Attitudes towards LGB in prevocational secondary education in the Netherlands. *Journal of LGBT youth*, *16*(1), 62-82. | Sample not GSD youth |
| 21 | Legate, N., Ryan, R. M., & Weinstein, N. (2012). Is coming out always a "good thing"? exploring the relations of autonomy support, outness, and wellness for lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *3*(2), 145–152. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550611411929 | Adult sample<br><br>Quantitative |
| 22 | Lisdonk, J. V., Bergen, D. D. V., Hospers, H. J., & Keuzenkamp, S. (2015). The Importance of Gender and Gender Nonconformity for Same-Sex-Attracted Dutch Youth's Perceived Experiences of Victimization Across Social Contexts. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, *12*(3), 233-253. | Not relevant to VM<br><br>Quantitative |
| 23 | McConnell, E. A., Janulis, P., Phillips II, G., Truong, R., & Birkett, M. (2018). Multiple minority stress and LGBT community resilience among sexual minority men. *Psychology of sexual orientation and gender diversity*, *5*(1), 1. | Adult sample<br>Not school context |
| 24 | McKay, T. R., & Watson, R. J. (2020). Gender expansive youth disclosure and mental health: Clinical implications of gender identity disclosure. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 7(1), 66. | Not school based<br><br>Quantitative |

| 25 | Mishna, F., Newman, P. A., Daley, A., & Solomon, S. (2009). Bullying of lesbian and gay youth: A qualitative investigation. *The British Journal of Social Work*, *39*(8), 1598-1614. | Adults<br><br>Not school context |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 26 | Payne, E., & Smith, M. (2013). LGBTQ kids, school safety, and missing the big picture: How the dominant bullying discourse prevents school professionals from thinking about systemic marginalization or… why we need to rethink LGBTQ bullying. *QED: A journal in GLBTQ worldmaking*, (1), 1-36. | Not relevant to VM |
| 27 | Peterson, J. S. (2000). Gifted and gay: A study of the adolescent experience. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, *44*(4), 231-246. | Not relevant to VM |
| 28 | Pollitt, A. M., & Mallory, A. B. (2021). Mental and sexual health disparities among bisexual and unsure Latino/a and Black Sexual Minority Youth. *LGBT health*, *8*(4), 254-262. | Quantitative<br><br>Not relevant to VM |
| 29 | Riley, E. (2018). Bullies, blades, and barricades: Practical considerations for working with adolescents expressing concerns regarding gender and identity. *International Journal of Transgenderism*, *19*(2, SI), 203–211. https://doi.org/10.1080/15532739.2017.1386150 | Not original research |
| 30 | Rosario, M., Schrimshaw, E. W., & Hunter, J. (2011). Different patterns of sexual identity development over time: Implications for the psychological adjustment of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths. *Journal of Sex Research*, *48*(1), 3–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224490903331067 | Not school based<br><br>Quantitative |
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| 32 | Shilo, G., & Savaya, R. (2011). Effects of family and friend support on LGB youths' mental health and sexual orientation milestones. *Family Relations*, *60*(3), 318-330. | Not relevant to VM<br><br>Not school based |
| 33 | Snapp, S. D., Watson, R. J., Russell, S. T., Diaz, R. M., & Ryan, C. (2015). Social Support Networks for LGBT Young Adults: Low Cost Strategies for Positive | Not original research |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Adjustment. *Family Relations*, *64*(3), 420–430.<br><br>https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12124 | Adult sample<br><br>Not relevant<br>to VM |
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| 35 | Watson, R. J., Grossman, A. H., & Russell, S. T. (2019). Sources of social support and mental health among LGB youth. *Youth & society*, *51*(1), 30-48. | Quantitative<br><br>Not relevant<br>to VM |
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# Appendix C    CASP Table – Quality assurance

**CASP Table -** Responses scored as: "clearly reported/comprehensive" scored as 2, "partially reported/considered" scored as 1, and "no/not reported/flawed" scored as 0

| Article: | | A: | | | | | | B: | | C: | Total QA score: |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1* | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | |
| 1 | Anderson et al. 2016 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 13 |
| 2 | Bower-Brown et al. 2021 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 19 |
| 3 | Dewaele et al. 2013 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 18 |
| 4 | Gato et al. 2020 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 14 |
| 5 | Higa et al. 2015 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 14 |
| 6 | Jones et al. 2016 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 19 |
| 7 | Kjaran & Jóhannesson, 2013 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 14 |
| 8 | Lasser & Tharinger, 2003 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 20 |
| 9 | Lasser & Wicker, 2008 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 20 |
| 10 | Morris et al. 2014 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 15 |
| 11 | Robinson 2010 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 17 |
| 12 | Roe, 2015 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 16 |
| 13 | Schimmel-Bristow, 2018 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 18 |
| 14 | Sheriff et al. 2011 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 17 |
| 15 | Taylor & Cuthburt, 2019 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 12 |
| 16 | Toft, 2020 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 17 |

*1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research? 2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate? 3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research? 4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research? 5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue? 6. Has the relationship between the researcher and participants been adequately considered? 7. Have the ethical issues been taken into consideration? 8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous? 9. Is there a clear statement of findings? 10. How valuable is the research?

# Appendix D    Map of analytical themes with descriptive subthemes and original codes

Loss of control over identity

Loss of control — Being 'outed'

Making it a big deal

A continual process

Continual disclosure negotiation — Constant negotiation

The continuum of outness

A fluid process

We constantly negotiate and manage our visibility; it is a fluid process

The stress of hiding oneself

The burden of management — Indirect disclosure

Using social media

Stress of management

Homophobia unchallenged

Testing and Monitoring — Trust

Predicting support

Social environment

```
                                                        ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                                                        │       Changing attitudes        │
                                                        └─────────────────────────────────┘
                                                        ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                                                        │       A non-normative act       │
                                                        └─────────────────────────────────┘
                                                        ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                                                        │      Breaking gender norms      │
                    ┌──────────────────────────────────┐└─────────────────────────────────┘
                    │ Destabilising norms and changing  │┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                    │           culture                 ││     Dressing/acting visible     │
                    └──────────────────────────────────┘└─────────────────────────────────┘
                                                        ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                                                        │       Resisting heterosexism    │
                                                        └─────────────────────────────────┘
                                                        ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                                                        │     Masculinity and femininity  │
                                                        └─────────────────────────────────┘
┌────────────────────┐                                  ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│  We are influenced │                                  │         Gendered spaces         │
│  and oppressed by  │                                  └─────────────────────────────────┘
│  norms; our        │                                  ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│  visibility breaks │                                  │ Cisnormativity encourages       │
│  norms and changes │                                  │ invisibility                    │
│  culture           │  ┌──────────────────────────────┐└─────────────────────────────────┘
└────────────────────┘  │  Compulsory cis-heterosexuality│┌────────────────────────────────┐
                        └──────────────────────────────┘│  Exclusion/lack of participation│
                                                        └─────────────────────────────────┘
                                                        ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                                                        │      Oppressive institutions    │
                                                        └─────────────────────────────────┘
                                                        ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                                                        │    Reflection of societal norms │
                                                        └─────────────────────────────────┘
                                                        ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                                                        │      Coming out is mundane       │
                                                        └─────────────────────────────────┘
                                                        ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                                                        │       Celebrating diversity      │
                                                        └─────────────────────────────────┘
                    ┌──────────────────────────────────┐┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                    │            Inclusivity            ││              Policies            │
                    └──────────────────────────────────┘└─────────────────────────────────┘
                                                        ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                                                        │             Visibility           │
                                                        └─────────────────────────────────┘
                                                        ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                                                        │    Reflection of societal norms  │
                                                        └─────────────────────────────────┘
                                                        ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                                                        │            Staff support         │
                                                        └─────────────────────────────────┘
```

Fear of rejection and ostracisation
- Fear of loss of social networks
- Fear of being judged
- Avoiding rejection through withdrawal
- Staff discrimination
- Continual risk to wellbeing

Fear of victimisation, discrimination & prejudice
- Fear of victimisation
- Avoiding bullying
- Maintaining safety
- Unconsciously maintaining safety

Peer reactions
- Positive peer reactions
- Negative peer reactions
- Bonding over banter
- Expecting the worst
- Disclosing to peers first

Erasure
- Resistance
- Erasure of bisexuality

We are acutely aware and often fearful of social reactions to the visibility of GSD people and to our disclosure

We need school staff to do more to support us
- Support
  - Reactive support
  - Ambiguity of support
- Reactions to prejudicial incidents
  - Ignoring prejudicial incidents
- Knowledge & confidence
  - Lack of knowledge
  - Lack of confidence
- Reinforcing norms
  - Prejudicial and discrininatory school staff

We need a visible community to feel safe and experience belonging
- Representation
  - Visibility of other GSD pupils
- Protection
  - Seeking safety in the community
- Discovering Belonging
  - Lack of community
  - Finding community
  - Sense of belonging in the community
  - New social experiences

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                                                    ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                                                    │        Active coping        │
                                          ┌─────────────────────────┐  └─────────────────────────────┘
                                          │   Becoming an activist  │  ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                                          └─────────────────────────┘  │   Opportunties for activism │
                                                                       └─────────────────────────────┘
                                                    ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                                                    │      The effect on others   │
┌─────────────────────────────┐                     └─────────────────────────────┘
│ We fight for our right be   │                     ┌─────────────────────────────┐
│           visible           │                     │   Supporting the community  │
└─────────────────────────────┘   ┌─────────────────────────┐  └─────────────────────────────┘
                                   │ Being visible is activism│  ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                                   └─────────────────────────┘  │    Guilt and 'going stealth'│
                                                                └─────────────────────────────┘
                                                    ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                                                    │ Bi-directionality of influence│
                                                    └─────────────────────────────┘
                                                    ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                                                    │  Working against normativity │
                                                    └─────────────────────────────┘
```

# Appendix E      Recruitment email with flyer and Twitter text with image

Hello

My name is Cleo Timney and I am a trainee educational psychologist at the University of Southampton. I am conducting a research project that explores factors that promote feelings of psychological growth following LGBTQ+ bullying experiences whilst at secondary school.

I am hoping that some of your service users might be eligible and interested in taking part in this project by sharing their views. I am looking for young people that identify as LGBTQ+, are 16-25 years old and experienced bullying related to their gender and sexuality while at secondary school.

All they would need to do is complete a short, online survey covering questions about, being LGBTQ, their bullying experiences, the people who support them and their experiences of psychological growth. All answers will be confidential and anonymous.

I really hope this project is something your service users might be interested in. If so, please share the attached recruitment flyer with them (there is a link to the survey on the flyer). I am happy to receive any questions that you or your service users may have via this email address.

Link to the survey: LINK HERE
Thank you in advance!

Kind regards
**Cleo Timney**

Trainee Educational Psychologist, DEdPsych

*University of Southampton*

Email: c.timney@soton.ac.uk

# Participate in a research project

Would you be interested in taking part in a research project exploring factors that promote feelings of **psychological growth** following **LGBTQ+ bullying experiences** at **secondary school?**

If you:
- Are **16-25** years old
- Are **LGBTQ+**
- Are attending or previously attended secondary school in the UK
- Experienced **bullying** for being LGBTQ+ during your time at secondary school

Then we would like to hear **your views**!

I am Cleo Timney and I am a trainee educational psychologist, studying at the University of Southampton. I am completing this research because I want to know how secondary schools can better **support LGBTQ+ young people** after they have experienced bullying at secondary school.

What do you need to do?
All you need to do is complete a short, **online survey**. This survey will ask you questions about your bullying experiences, being LGBTQ, the people who support you and about your experiences of growth. All of your answers will be **confidential** and **anonymous**.

Want to take part?
**Click the link or scan the QR code** to access more information and the survey. If you have any questions you can contact me by emailing: c.timney@soton.ac.uk

After completing the survey you can enter for a chance to win an Amazon voucher or a charitable donation for £15, £20 or £30!

# Thank you!

Southampton UNIVERSITY OF

**Cleo Timney**
@EdPsychCT

···

📣🏳️‍🌈Participant request🏳️‍🌈📣

Any school #RainbowAlliances or
#GayStraightAlliances or other #LGBTQ / #Queer
committees/clubs, I would love to hear from your
students for my thesis research!

#TwitterTEPs #TwitterEPs #EduTwitter
Retweet and share 🙏

Survey:sotonpsychology.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV

## Participate in a research project

Would you be interested in taking part in a research project exploring factors that promote feelings of **psychological growth** following **LGBTQ+ bullying experiences** at **secondary school?**

If you:
- Are **16-25** years old
- Are **LGBTQ+**
- Are attending or previously attended secondary school in the UK
- Experienced **bullying** for being LGBTQ+ during your time at secondary school

Then we would like to hear **your views**!

What do you need to do?
All you need to do is complete an **online survey**. Your answers will be **confidential** and **anonymous**.

After completing the survey you can enter for a chance to win an Amazon voucher or a charitable donation for £15, £20 or £30!

**Thank you!**

UNIVERSITY OF
**Southampton**

# Appendix F    Example participant information and consent forms

Hello and thank you for your interest in this research project! Please read the following information before completing the survey.

**What is the research about?**

My name is Cleo Timney and I am an Educational Psychology Doctoral student at the University of Southampton in the United Kingdom.

I am inviting you to participate in a study about personal growth in LGBTQ+ young people that have experienced homophobic and/or transphobic bullying at secondary school.

This study was approved by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) at the University of Southampton (Ethics/ERGO Number: 64760)

Researcher(s): Cleo Timney, Dr Sarah Wright & Dr Cora Sargeant

University email: c.timney@soton.ac.uk, s.f.wright@soton.ac.uk, c.c.sargeant@soton.ac.uk

Study Title: School factors that predict post-traumatic growth in young people that have experienced bullying at secondary school attributed to their open identification as gender and sexuality diverse

**What will happen to me if I take part?**

This study involves completing an anonymous questionnaire which should take approximately 20 minutes of your time. If you are happy to complete this survey, you will need to check the box below to show your consent. As this survey is anonymous, the research team will not be able to know whether you have participated, or what answers you provided.

**Why have I been asked to participate?**

You have been asked to take part because are a **young person (aged 16-25),** who **openly identifies as LGBTQ+** or **gender and/or sexuality diverse** (including lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, transgender, queer, asexual, intersex, gender non-conforming and a spectrum of other identities that fall outside of the heterosexual and gender binary). In addition, **you have**

**experienced bullying or bullying because of your sexuality and/or gender identity while you were at secondary school in the UK**.

I am aiming to recruit around 130 participants for this study.

**What information will be collected?**

The questions in this survey ask for information in relation to your age, sexuality, gender identity, the time since you last experienced bullying related to your sexuality/gender identity and some other demographic information. You will also be asked questions relating to your attitude towards your identity, the attitude your friends have/had towards your identity, how open you are/were about your identity and how you feel/felt about the school community.

You do not have to answer all the questions if you do not wish to do so.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

If you decide to take part in this study, you will not receive any direct benefits; however, your participation will contribute to knowledge in this area of research. This study aims to find out what factors may have a positive impact on young people who identify as sexual and/or gender minorities and have experienced bullying related to this at school. It is hoped that the findings may inform educational professionals so that they can better support young people to thrive at school.

As a thank you for completing this survey you can choose to be entered into a prize draw. If you win, you may choose to receive an Amazon.co.uk gift voucher or to donate the same value to 'atk' (an LGBTQ+ youth homelessness charity). The vouchers/donations on offer are as follows: 12 x £15, 3 x £20, 2 x £30 and researchers aim to recruit approximately 130 participants in total. In order to enter this prize drawn you will need to enter a contact email address at the end of the questionnaire. This email address will not be associated with your survey responses in any way and will be stored separately on a password protected device. You may choose not to enter this prize draw if you wish and this will have no effect on your participation in the study.

**Are there any risks involved?**

There is a possibility that taking part in this study could cause you some psychological discomfort and/or distress. If this happens, you can contact the following resources for support:

Samaritans Call 116 123 for FREE (available 24hrs)
LGBT Foundation  Phone: 0345 3 30 30 30   Website: https://lgbt.foundation/
Stonewall Youth (LGBT+)  Phone: 08000502020 Website: https://www.youngstonewall.org.uk/

Table of Figures

Switchboard (LGBT+ Helpline) Phone: 0300 330 0630 Website: https://switchboard.lgbt/

Mermaids (support/advice for gender diverse young people) Phone: 0808 801 0400

Website: https://mermaidsuk.org.uk/

The Proud Trust (LGBT+ Support Groups and other advice)

Website: https://www.theproudtrust.org/

→     You may also access support, including mental health support and advice, from your general practitioner (GP). You can call your GP surgery to make an appointment.

→     If you are concerned about your participation in this questionnaire appearing in your internet history, you can find out how to delete your internet history here: https://www.howtogeek.com/304218/how-to-clear-your-history-in-any-browser/

**What will happen to the information collected?**

All information collected for this study will be stored securely on a password protected computer and backed up on a secure server. Only the researcher and their supervisors will have access to this information. All data will be anonymous and no identifying information will be collected as part of the main survey.

The information collected will be analysed and written up as part of the researcher's thesis. It may also be published in a journal and presented at conferences.

If you choose to enter the participant prize draw, you will need to provide an email address. This prize draw contact email address with not be associated with your individual survey responses as it will be collected via link to a separate survey and will be stored separately to all study data. However, the submission of an email address will mean that you may be identifiable as having participated in this study to the researcher. The main researcher will be the only individual who is responsible for managing personal data and this personal data will be stored separately to all study data and on a secure and password protected device. All collected email addresses will be deleted once the prize draw has been completed and within one year of completing the survey. The University of Southampton conducts research to the highest standards of ethics and research integrity. In accordance with our Research Data Management Policy, data will be held for 10 years after the study has finished when it will be securely destroyed.

**What happens if there is a problem?**

If you are unhappy about any aspect of this study and  would like to make a formal complaint, you can contact the Head of Research Integrity and Governance, University of Southampton, on the

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following contact details: Email: rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk, phone: + 44 2380 595058. Please quote the Ethics/ERGO number above. Please note that by making a complaint you might be no longer anonymous.

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

○ Please check this box to indicate that you have read and understood the information on this form, are aged 16 or over and agree to take part in this survey

**End of Block: Consent**

# Appendix G     Example participants debrief form

**Thank you for your participation in this research.**

The aim of this research was to establish the school factors that facilitate post-traumatic growth for young people who openly identify as gender or sexuality diverse (GSD) and have been victimised at secondary school because of this. It is expected that this information might be used by educational professionals to better support gender and sexuality diverse young people at school.

If taking part in this survey has caused you psychological discomfort and/or distress, you can contact the following resources for support:

- Samaritans
    - Call 116 123 for FREE (available 24hrs)
- LGBT Foundation
    - Phone: 0345 3 30 30 30
    - Website: https://lgbt.foundation/
- Stonewall Youth (LGBT+)
    - Phone: 0800 0502020
    - Website: https://www.youngstonewall.org.uk/
- Switchboard (LGBT+ Helpline)
    - Phone: 0300 330 0630
    - Website: https://switchboard.lgbt/
- Mermaids (support/advice for gender diverse young people)
    - Phone: 0808 801 0400
    - Website: https://mermaidsuk.org.uk/
- The Proud Trust (LGBT+ Support Groups and other advice)
    - Website: https://www.theproudtrust.org/

- *You may also access support, including mental health support and advice, from your general practitioner (GP). You can call your GP surgery to make an appointment*
- *If you are concerned about your participation in this questionnaire appearing in your internet history, you can find out how to delete your internet history here: https://www.howtogeek.com/304218/how-to-clear-your-history-in-any-browser/*

Once again, results of this study will not include your name or any other identifying characteristics. The research did not use deception. You may have a copy of the research summary, if you wish, once the project has been completed.

If you have any further questions please contact the principal research, Cleo Timney, at c.timney@soton.ac.uk.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel that you have been placed at risk, you may contact the University of Southampton Head of

Research Integrity and Governance (023 8059 5058, rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk).

If you would like to be entered into a prize draw for a chance to win a £15, £20 or £30 Amazon.co.uk voucher or to win a donation to 'atk' (LGBTQ+ youth homelessness charity), you may provide your email address here: https://sotonpsychology.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6LGRTuZBy9PLqVU

Please note that entering your email address is entirely optional and will not affect your participation in this study.

Your email address will not be associated in any way to your responses to the survey you have just completed and email addresses be stored separately to survey data and on a password protected device.

The full list of email addresses will be deleted and no record of these kept upon the completion of the prize draw and distribution of prizes.

# Appendix H      Data Preparation

Data was downloaded from Qualtrics into MS Excel. From here the data was manually checked and participants who did not meet inclusion criteria and those who did not complete key measures (more than three incomplete items per measure) or gave spurious responses were removed (N = 44). Missing data was identified and, where less than three items were missing (per measure), this data was dummy coded using an average of the individual's other responses for that measure. The data was then checked for outliers using scatter plots. No outliers were removed at this stage.

Data was then inputted into SPSS checked to assess whether it passed the assumptions required for a multiple regression. The dependent variable and more than two independent variables were measured on continuous scales. The assumption of independence of observations was met as participants were unconnected to one another. Scatter plots of each predictor variable against the dependent variable confirmed linear relationships. A P-P plot was produced to confirm normal distribution of residuals. Additionally, homoscedasticity was confirmed via a scatter plot of the regression's standardised predicted vs residual scores. The collinearity statistics VIF values indicated the data did not show multicollinearity. Highly influential data points were then assessed using Cook's Distance and a scatter plot revealed six data points exerting unusually high influence on the multiple regression. The rule of thumb for Cook's distances, over $4/n$ (where $n$ is the total number of data points), was considered and these participants were removed from the final data set. The total participants included in analysis was 173.

# Glossary of Terms

YP .........................................Young person

GSD.......................................Gender and sexuality diverse

LGBTQ+ ...............................Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, plus any other sexuality or gender identity outside the heterosexual and man/woman binary

VM .......................................Visibility management

EP .........................................Educational Psychologist

Asexual.................................A person who is not interested or does not desire sexual activity

Bisexual ...............................A person who is attracted to women and men

Cisgender ............................Someone whose assigned birth gender matches their gender identity

Gay .......................................A man who is attracted to other men. Some girls and women prefer to refer to themselves as gay women rather than lesbian.

Gender fluid ........................Having an indefinite line between gender identity, having two or more genders, having no gender, or moving between genders

Gender non-conforming ......A term used by people whose gender expression is different from stereotypical expectations of 'man' and 'woman'. Not all gender non-conforming people are transgender.

Homosexual .........................A person who is attracted to people of the same sex. Nowadays this term is rarely used by members of the GSD community

Intersex ...............................A person who is born with sexual anatomy, reproductive organs and/or chromosome patterns that do not fit into the typical definition of male or female.

Lesbian ................................A woman who is attracted to other women.

Non-binary ...........................A gender that is neither exclusively male nor female

Pansexual ............................A person who is attracted to others regardless of their biological sex, gender identity, or expression

Queer ...................................A person who does not want to have their sexual identity reduced to an either/or term but who is gender and/or sexuality diverse

Questioning..........................A person exploring their identity, whose identity is not established

## Glossary of Terms

Trans ................................... An umbrella term which covers the trans community, encompassing anyone whose gender identity does not match the gender they were given at birth with and/or people who identify as gender variant with regards to gender identity and expression.

Transgender ......................... Often refers to someone who is transitioning (or who has transitioned) from one binary gender to the other, for example, someone who was assigned man at birth but identifies as a woman, or vice versa.

Transman ............................. A person who has been brought up as girl/woman, whose gender identity is a man

Transwoman ........................ A person who has been brought up as a boy/man, whose gender identity is a woman

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