


# One minority at a time

**Being black and gay**



I'm always openly gay. It's not easy – shockingly and surprisingly, we don't live in a society where it's easy to be a gay mum and pick up your kids from school, or have two of you at parents' night. I feel a responsibility not to be a namby-pamby person who says, 'I hate labels, and I will never say what I am.' Hating labels is one thing, but it's the reality that we live in a society that understands people by their – literally, now – labels. If we refuse to say what we are, then people wonder what you are hiding. It's the classic catch-22 – yes, I'm black, yes, I'm gay, but does that define everything I write? No, it doesn't.

**Jackie Kay** Poet, *The Guardian* January 2002

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**Being black and gay**

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At 16 or 17, sexuality became interesting to me in terms of: ‘When I’m a human target because of the colour of my skin, why would I volunteer up something else that adds further risk?’ But when Tony Blair put me in the House of Lords I thought: ‘No, you can do something here’. I realised I had a responsibility to make sure that young people, and black people and gay people will continue to be appointed. **Lord Alli** *Role Models: Being Yourself 2012*

# Foreword

There are over 400,000 black and minority ethnic lesbian, gay and bisexual people living in Great Britain. They are Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Black Caribbean and a whole host of other identities. Some are open about their sexual orientation living, socialising and even praying with heterosexual friends and family. Some are not open. Some worry about how they might be treated if people were to know about their sexual orientation. For many, the decision about whether to be open about their sexual orientation is one that requires a great deal of thought and consideration. All gay people consider whether people will reject them when they learn about their sexual orientation. As a society we have decided that our public services should serve all citizens; black, white, straight or gay. This report highlights where we may not yet be getting this right and suggests some actions that service deliverers could take to match our aspirations with the needs and experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual service users from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

This report has been produced by Stonewall, the lesbian, gay and bisexual charity and Runnymede, the UK's leading independent race equality think tank. Researchers from Stonewall and Runnymede have spoken to over 50 lesbian, gay and bisexual people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. They have shared their experiences about being gay as well as their experiences of accessing public services. The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on public bodies to proactively consider the needs and experiences of their lesbian, gay and bisexual service users. A similar duty has existed in relation to race since 2002 and although some progress has been made to understand the experiences of black and minority ethnic people very few public bodies have taken into account the fact that some black people are also gay or disabled or indeed both.

We hope that this report helps public bodies consider the needs and experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds who contribute more than £4.5 billion in taxes to fund those services. We also hope that it prompts organisations focused on race equality and those working to support lesbian, gay and bisexual people to work more closely together to promote equality for all. If the Equality Act prompts public bodies to consider sexual orientation then we hope they will think about how it applies to all citizens, not just those who are white. Both Stonewall and Runnymede will be happy to help with your efforts.

**Ben Summerskill**  
Chief Executive  
**Stonewall**

**Rob Berkeley**  
Chief Executive  
**Runnymede Trust**

# Introduction

Over 50 black and minority ethnic lesbian, gay and bisexual people have shared their experiences of accessing public services in a series of focus groups and in-depth interviews. They paint a clear picture of a network of essential services that often fail to understand the needs of this significant group of people.

Whilst individual participants reported a variety of incidents, almost all experienced at first hand just how sexual orientation and ethnicity can impact the use of public services. People working across public services make a general assumption that all black and minority ethnic people are heterosexual. This assumption can then lead to poor service delivery and inappropriate service responses.

The reasons are complex. At an organisational level it has its roots in the introduction of equality laws in the UK. Many public bodies have well-developed and long-standing policies in place to deal with race, sex and disability discrimination. Staff working across healthcare, criminal justice and education have begun to understand how to respond to these diversity issues. The relatively new laws covering sexual orientation mean that many staff are often less well informed and less comfortable with these issues.

Added to this, many public service workers never consider the possibility of multiple identities and most have had no training to encourage them to do so. Assumptions are therefore made about people who belong to a particular 'equality strand' forming a

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**You're looking at the public services, if you're looking at the BBC, the NHS, all those public services. As a black, gay guy I contribute to them working. I pay my taxes. I'm not getting a service from them. will, 47**

homogenous group. Therefore when someone is black it will define how they are treated. There is little room in the system to consider the needs of someone who is gay as well.

Black and minority ethnic lesbian, gay and bisexual people who took part in this research say that a lack of awareness relating to sexual orientation and ethnicity are key barriers to receiving a good service. This lack of awareness and casual discrimination often causes real practical problems.

At worst, it means that a significant group of people cannot properly access the services to which they are entitled. In practice some parents are uncomfortable going in to school, some patients are reluctant to visit their GP or health clinic and some residents are not confident in turning to the police.

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# 1 Understanding who we are

## Summary

- Public sector workers rarely consider multiple identities and assume that black and minority ethnic people are heterosexual
- There is little, if any, opportunity to disclose sexual orientation when accessing public services
- A tick box culture seems to encourage the idea that if you belong to one group then you cannot belong to any others
- People who have suffered discrimination because of their ethnicity are often reluctant to disclose their sexual orientation as it becomes an extra issue to deal with
- Increased visibility of black and minority ethnic gay people within public services would encourage more open discussions

Most participants in this research tell a similar story about accessing public services. They face an overwhelming assumption that black and minority ethnic people are heterosexual and little opportunity is offered to correct this view.

They feel that their sexual orientation forms an integral part of who they are and that they are shaped as much by ethnicity as by their gender and sexual orientation. The experience of dealing with people in public services who do not understand that these different aspects of identity might co-exist can be difficult.

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I think that I can either be gay or I can be South Asian, or I can be a Hindu. The fact that I can be all three becomes very difficult for people to comprehend. There is very little proactive support or encouragement to actually acknowledge the diversity of identities that do exist within an individual. **Seiki**, 47



Many of the participants agreed that they had at some point felt marginalised and isolated by the general lack of recognition that black and minority ethnic lesbian, gay and bisexual people exist.

**There is a perception 'oh you are Indian, you can't be gay' or 'you are black, you can't be gay' but there are blacks that are gay, there are Indians that are gay.** *Eric, 24*

**It is a case of I am black and they can only deal with one minority at a time. I mean, they can just about deal with a black single parent.** *Chloe, 36*

**A lesbian identity is even one more step removed because I am an Asian woman with children so it's completely outside their box.** *Chandra, 43*

**People's identity should be treated in a way that makes them feel respected and included. And it's unfortunate if schools and colleges or hospitals or the police decide that racism is more important but that's what they do. We must be sure that we are not seen as a hierarchy. Everybody is equal or we're not equal at all really.** *Aisha, 43*

Often, participants felt that the lack of understanding from public service staff mirrored wider societal assumptions that black and minority ethnic people are not gay.

**I think they just need to stop seeing people as one box at a time. When asking those monitoring questions, if you get a yes for one doesn't mean you have to stop asking the others.** *Kevin, 40*

Participants had a broad range of experiences when it came to disclosing their sexual orientation. Some contrasted the lack of choice around revealing ethnicity with the more conscious decision of disclosing their sexual orientation.

**I can't change my ethnicity, you know. I can't take the look off my face, it's right there. So, if I wanted to, I could disguise my sexual orientation and make it disappear – by not talking about it, by not dressing a certain way, by growing my hair longer, and by conforming to a heterosexual stereotype. Whereas with my ethnicity, I have to work with it.** *Usha, 38*

The decision about whether to be open about their sexual orientation was for many participants directly influenced by their ethnic identity. Those who had experienced or who felt vulnerable to racism, for example, worried about what they might experience if people knew about their sexual orientation as well. Many participants explained that being from a black or minority ethnic background meant that they faced a different decision from other lesbian, gay or bisexual people about whether to disclose their sexual orientation.

**I was brought up on a rough council estate where we had nigger lover sprayed on the front door, dog mess through the letter box. You're not going to be so keen on telling people actually, I also belong to another group that you don't really like as a society, or as a community on that council estate.**

*Kevin, 40*

**You know there is a very fine line between being discriminated against because of being black or against being gay. You are going to be down on being black, you're going to be down on being young and you're going to be down on being gay. So some of us are all three of those, so what is someone going to do with it? You're stepping out of the house and something is going to go wrong.** *David, 19*

Others expressed a real, or perceived, concern that people from their own community may hold their sexual orientation against them and consequently felt they had to hide their sexual orientation.

**I'd rather kill myself than bring all the shame and dishonour that I brought on my family because I was gay.** *Emanuel, 39*

**When I do meet Asian people, I actually find that I am more withdrawn about my sexuality because I feel that they really judge me more and react badly to the fact that I'm gay.** *Usha, 38*

**Sometimes our own black people can be funny with us.**  
*Jasper, 27*

Research participants were overwhelmingly clear that being open about their own sexual orientation would be easier if there were more publicly visible gay black and minority ethnic people. Individual participants reflected on the positive impact this could have on their confidence, helping them to feel less invisible and alone.

**I think for me it was black gay people that I met on the gay scene. You just had a conversation and they give you some words of wisdom 'you know what? It's ok, you've got a home, out here'.** *Emanuel, 39*

**I wish there was somebody black that would have guided me in understanding my sexuality.** *Curtis, 25*

**Show me the black gay people! They're invisible and that's part of the problem we have. Because of the victimisation we get when we come out, some of us, we don't want to put our heads above the parapet to be counted.** *Michael, 32*

**I guess when it comes to sexuality and ethnicity it's not just about people in high places or on television it's just about people that we can find accessible or associate with on a day-to-day basis.** *Hafeez, 30*

Participants explained that increased visibility of black and minority ethnic lesbian gay and bisexual people in frontline public services would increase their confidence both in themselves and in knowing that their needs are going to be understood. Many also felt that this would demonstrate an organisation's genuine commitment to addressing their needs.

**Unless we see more people in those public services, black like us and not looking down at us and if they have that kind of awareness, it's going to help us be more confident about who we are and what we do.** *Emanuel, 39*

Participants also felt that public sector organisations should make it clear that they provide a safe and supportive environment for black and minority ethnic service users who are lesbian, gay or bisexual. They felt that taking practical and visible steps to indicate inclusivity was the best way to achieve this.

**If I walked into an office and there was a little rainbow flag sitting on the desk, or on the wall, something to say 'You can talk about it here, it's a safe space,' I would. But there's none of that. There's no indication of that. There's nothing in anybody's language, or the way that anybody addresses me, or addresses issues, that would suggest to me that they'd be open and fine about my sexuality, or issues related to that.**  
*Usha, 38*

**Quite often, I'm still surprised how many times there is no box for me to tick to say that I'm in a civil partnership and then I'm asked 'Am I married or single' and it's like 'unfortunately, neither'.** *Thomas, 22*

**Include black lesbian, gay and bisexual people in services, open up that dialogue, be transparent about how you're doing it.** *Will, 47*

A perceived lack of awareness and training amongst public sector staff on the issues facing black and minority ethnic lesbian, gay and bisexual people was a common concern amongst participants.

**Being black and gay is really tough. You get excluded by your community and people outside can't cope. It seems public services can't get their heads around sexuality. They can't get their heads around how they might discriminate.** *Steebeth, 33*

**Unless the training is delivered to those front line staff it doesn't make any difference at all.** *Aisha, 43*

**There is a lot of services that are lacking. I can see that it's more talking and less doing. I think we need to do more and talk less.** *Emanuel, 39*

## 2 Education

### Summary

- Education establishments work hard to create an inclusive community but fail to extend this to lesbian, gay and bisexual people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds
- Many young black and minority ethnic lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils can't talk about their sexual orientation at school
- Black and minority ethnic lesbian, gay and bisexual parents often feel excluded from the school environment

The education system's failure to address the more complex issues of identity can cause problems for parents and pupils alike.

Our participants were clear that many schools have made some effort to ensure that black and minority ethnic students are reflected in the school culture and curriculum. And they know that schools have come to recognise that a genuinely inclusive school community is beneficial for all pupils.

Previous research shows that gay pupils from black and ethnic minority backgrounds are less likely to plan to go to university or to strive to gain qualifications. Most participants felt that the creation of a genuinely inclusive school community does not always extend to lesbian, gay and bisexual people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

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**The schools don't do enough to address homosexuality full stop. And especially when you look at it in terms of being black and gay as well, they don't address it. Karson, 19**

**I was invited into a school last month to give a talk. They said they needed black role models to come in, I thought ok but if I come in to talk about myself I've got to talk about my sexuality. They said 'well, we're not really sure we want to deal with that yet, so could you not talk about it?'. Jack, 40**

Participants explained that this failure to engage with different identities often means that pupils who are lesbian, gay or bisexual and from black or minority ethnic backgrounds find they cannot talk about their sexual orientation at school, leaving them feeling vulnerable and isolated. This was felt to be particularly difficult for pupils who feel equally unable to talk about their sexual orientation at home.

**I always knew that I was gay but I didn't have nobody I could talk to. Part of me thought it was wrong because when I was growing up, until I was 13, if there was any sexual scene or a kiss on TV and parents were in the room you had to turn your head. And if it was gay, or anything gay, then my parents were 'oh, that's just wrong.' And they would instil how much it was wrong. So straight away being black, my culture, going home to it, I couldn't talk to anyone in my household about it. So the next place you go to is your school – you spend a lot of time in school but there was still nobody at school I could talk to. Even if I knew there was a gay teacher or someone who I could just go to but I didn't understand it. It wasn't until I was 17 that I fully understood. And I still had no-one to talk to. Emanuel, 39**

**My culture is against me, who can I turn to? Someone's coming to teach me about sexual health, I'm gay, this doesn't go for me in terms of what they're telling me. Karson, 19**

Our research found many participants felt strongly that pupils who are lesbian, gay or bisexual and from black or minority ethnic backgrounds should know that they can talk to someone at school about how they are feeling and, like all gay young people, how to

talk to their parents about what they are feeling.

The need to address homophobia in schools was also discussed from the viewpoint of lesbian, gay and bisexual parents from black and minority ethnic communities. Those participants who were parents reported that even schools which had begun to address issues of sexual orientation often struggled to reconcile the idea of a parent who is both lesbian, gay or bisexual and from a black or minority ethnic background.

**I think they have two problems: one, they think of black women as loud, bossy and aggressive and then the other thing is they just don't know how to handle lesbian parents. I think they can cope with the idea of a white lesbian parent because that's what the media shows them. A black lesbian parent confuses them, especially one that's not ashamed.** *Steebeth, 33*

In comparison with their heterosexual counterparts, lesbian, gay and bisexual parents face additional barriers to engaging with their children's education. Many feel excluded from the school environment and have to make a conscious effort to combat this.

**They assume that, in some way, we are massively different to other parents. We have worked it out quite well. We go in and we don't show any signs of physical holding hands or anything like that but we're always very friendly. We smile lots and we try to talk to people but even then, some of the**

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**I haven't come out. I haven't said to the teacher that we are a gay family, this is my partner.** *Chandra, 43*



teachers at parents evenings and things can't cope. They only want to talk to one of us and they find it really difficult to acknowledge the other. And that can be very frustrating because we go in as normal parents and we just want to talk about the issue we are there to discuss.

If I ask the question – because they are talking to me but not my partner – I will then turn to her at the end of the question and say 'Well, what do you think on it?' or 'Is that how it is?' We're trying to force the teacher to incorporate both of us.

*Steebeth, 33*

The lack of understanding from teachers towards same-sex black and minority ethnic parents inevitably extends to pupils, affecting their experience of school and their ability to be open about themselves and their families. Individual participants explained how this in turn impacts negatively on the confidence and well-being of pupils and parents.

We do things like both of us won't ever pick her up from school because we know it's difficult for her having two women come into the playground and all the questions so one of us will pick her up and one of us will wait around the corner. It's the same with school events. We try to only send one of us to parents evening, but it's important that we both hear what's being said so sometimes we just accept it because we want the information. *Steebeth, 33*

## 3 Health and social care

### Summary

- Healthcare professionals appear inadequately trained on issues relating to sexual orientation and ethnicity and often assume that people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are heterosexual
- The assumptions often deter those accessing healthcare from being open with doctors, nurses and other health workers and sometimes stops them from accessing healthcare at all
- Healthcare workers often fail to recognise or acknowledge the existence of same-sex couples
- The culturally appropriate services on offer do not always take sexual orientation or homophobic discrimination from people within their own communities into account

An individual's health needs may differ because of their sexual orientation and therefore all lesbian, gay and bisexual people need to be open with healthcare practitioners. However, participants reported that they often feel invisible and are frequently confronted with inaccurate assumptions about their needs when accessing NHS and social care.

Participants generally agreed that the healthcare sector recognises that patients and service users have unique concerns and require individual care. However they want health services to make sure that this principle extends to lesbian, gay and bisexual people, including those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

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**If you've got a GP who doesn't understand you being black and gay, how are you going to get the service?**

**Will, 47**

**I don't feel that the health system is geared up to really understand my health issues in terms of my ethnicity or my sexuality. Usha, 38**

Participants reported that the NHS frequently assumes people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are heterosexual. Focus group discussions revealed a range of negative experiences stemming from these assumptions. Black and minority ethnic gay men reported that they often feel reluctant to contradict healthcare staff who assume that they are heterosexual. In many instances these assumptions prevent participants from accessing the appropriate information or service that they need.

**You go to the health service, the first thing is they make the assumption that, well, you're black and you're six foot five, so you must be straight.** *Kevin, 40*

**I haven't disclosed to my GP that I am gay. I think the first time I went to a sexual health clinic I was being tested for HIV and the nurse assumed I was getting a HIV test done because I was having sex with girls. I said 'no, I am not sexually with women'. I think that was an assumption based on my ethnicity.** *Hafeez, 30*

Many female participants similarly felt that the uncomfortable experience of having to disclose their sexual orientation, once it has been assumed they are heterosexual, can be a powerful disincentive to accessing basic healthcare. They reported feeling particularly apprehensive about how they could explain to health practitioners that they were not sexually active with men.

**The implication was there straight off that I have heterosexual sex and I felt like 'Oh my God! I'm going to feel such a moron saying I'm over 30 and I've never had sex.' I don't want someone poking around into my vagina and I don't have penetrative sex. They are not making it easy for me to go for the screening because they're assuming that I am heterosexual and that I have sex of a particular kind.**

*Laura, 35*

**I stumbled between saying 'I'm a virgin' and 'I'm not sexually active' and the fact is I have had sex but not penetrative sex so what does that mean? What should I really say?** *Dana, 32*

Previous Stonewall research found that some lesbians and bisexual women are not aware that they need cervical smear tests and that, like heterosexual women, some find the process painful and uncomfortable. Participants in this research reflected similar concerns but also discussed how inappropriate responses from health practitioners created added anxiety.

**I don't know if this is related to ethnicity. I said 'Can I have a small spatula please?' and the doctor said 'Oh, that's what they all say. When you want a man, you want a big one and when you come for a smear test, you want a small one.'** *Kylie, 28*

**I did have that speculum thing and I had my first smear test and the nurse was like 'Oh, think of the size of your man'.** *Ellie, 34*

When accessing health services, participants often faced assumptions about their partners and families as well. Some participants told how they had been denied the same level of care and consideration as would be extended to their heterosexual counterparts in similar situations.

**When the baby was born I was trying to get in the next day. They asked me who I was and what was my relationship with the mother. They were only letting in male partners and fathers. I said I was her partner 'you're her what?' he said. He repeated this several times and then said 'I'll have to speak to the manager'. I said that was fine but I told him he had to let me in. I showed him identification, how my name was the same as the baby's name. He obviously hadn't had his equality training.** *Laura, 35*

**Ruth is my full-time carer as well as my partner and sometimes doctors are quite rude and say 'who's this?' before I have a chance to introduce her. They assume she is my personal assistant.** *Alvita, 63*

Participants acknowledged that the development of culturally appropriate services is a positive step forward in addressing the diverse needs of people who access public health services. However they also pointed out that there cannot be a generic set of services for each cultural group. This would neglect the fact that some lesbian, gay and bisexual people have had negative experiences and reactions from people within their own communities and do not want to seek support from them.

Some participants had experienced responses from healthcare professionals which focused on their ethnicity but did not take into account how this might conflict with their sexual orientation.

**They treated my family as if I was a heterosexual married family. They saw that I was black so they used what they call 'culturally appropriate services'. All the services they offered me were church based because I am black so religion was meant to help me. I wasn't offered any help for my sexuality. They were trying to get rid of it.** *Chloe, 36*

Experiences of homophobic discrimination from people within their own communities made some focus group participants feel wary of health and social care workers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

**I find that I try to avoid black doctors which is terrible but the homophobia you can see straight away. I have had comments where, for example, a doctor will say 'well, you know that's not right, I will pray for you.' and I just don't need that. If I have to go and see my GP I will avoid the black woman because I know that she is going to be much more**

**judgemental about everything than the white doctor, yet, she doesn't do it to my partner.** *Steebeth, 33*

**Historically, if I walked into a clinic and there is a black person there I'd just do a u-turn.** *Curtis, 25*

Part of this anxiety, particularly within local communities, stems from a concern about confidentiality. Often participants did not feel confident that their information would not be shared with others, whether deliberately or inadvertently.

**The African community is very small, regardless of how we live. Yes, there is always a fear that they might know somebody and they might speak.** *Curtis, 25*

**My cousin has joined my GP practice as a doctor. I just feel uncomfortable giving that information because I'm not out to that section of my family. And although he wouldn't be able to see me as a doctor, I guess he'd have that information on his system.** *Hafeez, 30*

## 4 The criminal justice system

### Summary

- Lesbian, gay and bisexual people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are unlikely to report homophobic hate crime
- The police appear to have a limited understanding of issues relating to ethnicity and sexual orientation
- Assumptions about identity create a lack of confidence and trust in the criminal justice system

A complex interaction of challenges makes the criminal justice system difficult to deal with for lesbian, gay and bisexual people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Not only are they more likely to suffer some forms of homophobic crime – they also report facing a difficult experience when dealing with the police.

Previous Stonewall research shows that, despite experiencing double the level of some homophobic hate crime, lesbian and gay people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are unlikely to report such incidents to the police. This is largely because they think that the police will not take incidents seriously and so do not see the point of reporting them. Male participants in this research explained how the added history of their interactions with the police was another barrier to trust and confidence in police services.

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**Eight per cent of all black and minority ethnic lesbian and gay people have experienced a physical assault as a homophobic hate incident, compared to four per cent of all lesbian and gay people.**

*The Gay British Crime Survey, 2008*

**No, I don't feel protected. I feel, especially after the riots, that you can't go into the shops now. It is like everyone is watching me. I feel like a criminal.** *Michael, 32*

**I feel I'm not protected 'cause they always stop Asian people, black people, Caribbean people – they always stop them and do not stop white people.** *Jasper, 27*

**I have been stopped and searched because of how I look. You still feel a bit persecuted. They were looking for a black guy in a hoodie and I was wearing a shirt and trousers and a tie. And you kind of realise they're just picking on you. I don't know why but it was a bit shifty.** *Jorell, 30*

Many research participants felt that their ethnicity and sexual orientation impacted directly upon the way the police interacted with them. They felt discouraged when these interactions felt like knee jerk responses or assumptions based on their identity. These experiences reinforced concerns amongst participants that the police have a limited understanding of issues relating to ethnicity and sexual orientation.

**I always get stopped when I have a New Era hat on but it's really weird, as soon as it happens right, every two or three weeks down my road, as soon as they hear my voice, they hear my soft voice, they just drive off.** *Michael, 32*

**I have been stopped and searched. It was really hard because I had my dance shoes on and they were like 'where are you coming from?'** *Jasper, 27*

**I was talking about the Metropolitan Police. It's not just based on homophobia, but it is based on racism as well really and I think my antennae are up when I'm in those situations about assumptions that might be made, or suspicions that I might be being treated differently.** *Alpa, 44*



These concerns mean that participants generally feel reluctant to report homophobic incidents to the police. Some felt more confident reporting to bodies other than the police.

**I got onto a bus late at night with a friend and the driver made remarks about us both. He kept making remarks about his bag, the way he was dressed. I turned around and said 'you are being extremely rude to me and my friend, what is your problem?' and he told us to get off the bus. I complained to the bus company not the police. They dealt with it well. The police would have handled it completely differently.**

*Hafeez, 30*

Lesbian, gay and bisexual people who work in the criminal justice system have a unique insight into the way the system responds to people who are black and minority ethnic and lesbian, gay or bisexual.

**I sit as a magistrate and they are forever calling me Mrs and I am constantly telling them that I am not married. You make a choice who you want to disclose to and I don't particularly want to tell a room full of people close to retirement my sexuality all the time.** *Chandra, 43*

This participant explained how a lack of knowledge around issues of sexual orientation invariably impacts upon the quality of the service.

**I remember there was a same-sex domestic violence case and the Bench Chair was quite surprised that there were two men. He was quite taken aback. I get a distinct sense they are thinking about lesbian and gay issues but if it is anything to do with immigration or race I doubt that it is that sophisticated.** *Chandra, 43*

Participants feel that there is limited understanding about their experiences of the criminal justice system and of hate crime and consequently feel wary both of the police and of making

complaints. Participants expressed a clear desire to see more and different contact with the criminal justice system. Most of all, they want to know that they will be listened to and taken seriously when they do use the service.

**It's that unwillingness to really listen to how people choose to be defined. Go by how people prefer to be defined rather than what feels comfortable to you.** *Chandra, 43*

Participants want to see the criminal justice system take proactive steps to communicate with them and to demonstrate that the provisions put in place to protect lesbian, gay and bisexual people extend to them too.

## 5 The media

### Summary

- There is an obvious lack of positive role models who are black or minority ethnic and lesbian, gay or bisexual across the media
- The lack of role models impacts across society and does not help raise the awareness of those working in public services
- The BBC in particular and the media in general are not meeting their duty to accurately portray all sections of society

Positive role models are widely recognised as important tools to overcome all levels and types of discrimination. The media was felt by participants to play a significant role in shaping social attitudes and the clear lack of black and minority ethnic lesbian, gay and bisexual people across the media was seen as a major factor in society failing to recognise multiple identities.

**Oh shit, I'm not like Alan Carr. Apparently I'm not the right type of gay for people to want to be interested in. That means I don't like myself, for who I am.** *Thomas, 22*

Our participants understand that the media provides an important opportunity to promote positive portrayals of gay people. They are therefore disappointed and dissatisfied with the fact that lesbian, gay and bisexual people are rarely portrayed in the media, and that black and minority ethnic lesbian, gay and bisexual people are rarely portrayed at all.

**See, I'm 27 and I can't think of anybody black and gay on the TV.** *Jasper, 27*

**As a Pakistani man and as a gay man I don't feel really represented.** *Hafeez, 30*

Female participants pointed out that there are virtually no black or minority ethnic lesbians or bisexual women on television at the moment and suggested that the scant references to white lesbians

are limited and lack imagination. They emphasised a real and urgent need to show that lesbians exist, and that black and minority ethnic lesbians also exist.

**I think the lesbian representation on television is still very, very conventional for me. It was really nice to see Jessie J's video – there were loads of lesbians on there – a real diverse group of women and it was resonant, because you recognised it and it wasn't just one tiny bit of our identity.**

*Chandra, 43*

The lack of black and minority ethnic lesbian, gay and bisexual people on television was felt to perpetuate wider misconceptions that they do not exist. Participants further observed that on the few occasions when we do see lesbian, gay and bisexual people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds on television, the portrayals are predominantly negative.

Whilst it was acknowledged that some people do have negative experiences, participants felt that exaggerated and unrealistic storylines sometimes caricatured the experiences of all lesbian, gay and bisexual people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, particularly in the absence of alternative or more positive portrayals. In this respect, many participants pointed out one of the few representations of a black, gay person currently on television. The Eastenders storyline portrays a young Muslim man, Syed, who is gay and who tells his family he is gay, only to experience repeated hostility and rejection.

**I know Muslim families that have had similar kinds of things come up and have dealt with it so completely differently. In Eastenders it's almost like you have to make a point that there is an Asian family. The thing that stressed me out was how traumatised the mum was by Syed's identity. It was so shameful for the community in Walford and then where was that shame coming from? It was all in her head and she was a**

**crazy Muslim woman who couldn't accept her son. It was beyond a stereotype I think.** *Dana, 32*

Individual participants explained how the situation might easily be improved.

**I think it's about just having more black and Asian men and women on screen and more examples – whether it's in documentaries or news stories – of a black and Asian and a gay perspective on issues. I think there's a whole issue with people just being presented on television programmes, people having their producers or their film makers or their writers or their stories being commissioned so those stories are coming though.** *Alpa, 44*

Participants feel that the media, and the BBC in particular, have a duty to consider how black and minority ethnic people are included and depicted in programming, and that this must extend to black and minority ethnic people who are lesbian, gay and bisexual.

## 6 Recommendations

Participants in this research report a wide range of experiences when accessing public services, from education and healthcare through to the criminal justice system. These combined experiences offer important lessons for those running public services. They are important because they are not devised by top-down policy makers, but lessons drawn from the everyday experiences of those on the ground. They suggest how it could be made much easier for black and minority ethnic lesbian, gay and bisexual people to access healthcare, visit a GP, or talk to a child's teachers at school.

This feedback is important and suggests a number of clear recommendations for public services to help improve the service that lesbian, gay and bisexual people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds receive. For those accessing public services the issue is about much more than equality of treatment. It is vital that public services are targeted at users' needs and that staff delivering the services understand just how to do that.

### 1

#### **Don't create a hierarchy between identities**

Public bodies have historically given more thought to issues of race and disability than to sexual orientation. Participants pointed out that when public bodies have thought about how they can make services accessible to black and minority ethnic people they have often failed to consider lesbian, gay and bisexual people from these communities. The Equality Act creates an opportunity to consider sexual orientation by building on what services already know rather than starting all over again. Participants emphasised that public bodies should avoid creating a hierarchy between different identities: sexual orientation is not more important than race and vice versa.

**People's identity should be treated in a way that makes them feel respected and included. And it's unfortunate if schools and colleges or hospitals or the police decide that racism is more important but that's what they do. We must be sure that we are not seen as a hierarchy. Everybody is equal or we're not equal at all really.** *Aisha, 43*

## **2 Remember people belong to more than one identity**

There is a tendency within the public sector to think about diversity as separate issues – race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion and belief and age. But participants report that this ignores the reality that they belong to more than one of these groups in a way which impacts upon both their needs and experiences.

**I think they just need to stop seeing people as one box at a time. When asking those monitoring questions, if you get a yes for one doesn't mean you have to stop asking the others.** *Kevin, 40*

## **3 Get your monitoring right**

Most monitoring forms and documentation contain references to marital status or include equality questions. Participants want public services to ensure that questions relating to marriage include an option for civil partnership and that all monitoring questions include questions on sexual orientation. When analysing this data, it is useful to cross-reference the sexual orientation data against data on other characteristics including ethnicity. This will help you to find out who your service users are and what kind of services they need. The Stonewall guide *What's It Got To Do With You* explains, in plain English, why monitoring is important.

**Quite often, I'm still surprised how many times there is no box for me to tick to say that I'm in a civil partnership and then I'm asked 'Am I married or single' and it's like 'unfortunately, neither'.** *Thomas, 22*

## **4 Improve staff training**

Public bodies know that through training, staff are able to develop a greater awareness about the needs of black and minority ethnic gay service users as well as establish what constitutes inappropriate behaviour. Participants felt that this training should include explicit reference to the experiences of black and minority ethnic lesbian, gay and bisexual service users and that there should be clear understanding throughout the workforce that no member of staff can discriminate against anybody, regardless of their ethnicity or sexual orientation. Stonewall has training resources and publications for all public sector bodies.

**Unless the training is delivered to those front line staff it doesn't make any difference at all.** *Aisha, 43*

# 5

## **Talk to black and minority ethnic lesbian gay and bisexual people**

This report reflects the experiences of some lesbian, gay and bisexual people from black and minority ethnic communities. Participants felt that the views and voices of black gay people are rarely considered. They suggested that public services should make more effort to talk to gay people who access, or should be accessing, their services rather than speaking only to those who are most prominent or vocal. The Stonewall guide *How to engage gay people in your work* will also help.

**Include black lesbian, gay and bisexual people in services, open up that dialogue, be transparent about how you're doing it.** *Will, 47*

# 6

## **Don't let sexual orientation dominate the discussion**

Participants felt discouraged from disclosing their sexual orientation when that became the main focus of the discussion. They especially regretted disclosing their sexual orientation when this led to them being treated differently.

**Public services need to keep their focus. I can't believe how sidetracked they get by sexuality.** *Kylie, 28*

# 7

## **Signal that people can be open about their sexual orientation**

Participants feel unsure about how staff will respond to them if they disclose their sexual orientation and are anxious about how it will affect the service they receive. They pointed out that there is often nothing to reassure them that they will not experience discrimination or negative reactions. Participants indicated a number of simple ways that public services can signal their understanding of issues relating to sexual orientation. Stonewall has a range of posters, freely available, that can be displayed.

**If I walked into an office and there was a little rainbow flag sitting on the desk, or on the wall, something to say 'You can talk about it here, it's a safe space,' I would. But there's none of that. There's no indication of that. There's nothing in anybody's language, or the way that anybody addresses me, or addresses issues, that would suggest to me that they'd be open and fine about my sexuality, or issues related to that.** *Usha, 38*



# 8

## **Think about discrimination differently**

Participants agreed that many public sector staff have now given thought to what racist behaviour and attitudes might look like, and may have also started to think about homophobia. However they also felt that these staff rarely consider how racism and homophobia may interact together or the fact that black and minority ethnic lesbian, gay and bisexual people might have different experiences and needs than white lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

**Being black and gay is really tough. You get excluded by your community and people outside can't cope. It seems public services can't get their heads around sexuality. They can't get their heads around how they might discriminate.** *Steebeth, 33*

# 9

## **Provide practical support**

Public bodies sometimes spend a lot of time developing action plans and reports. Participants said they would like to see practical interventions too, such as resources, information and opportunities which are targeted at them. They are not necessarily going to read the sexual orientation action plan and the race action plan and hope to see a cross-reference, nor should they be expected to.

**People need practical support. People need mentors. People need someone they can look up to and if you want people to integrate and live like every other person, then you have to make sure that those services are provided. There is a lot of services that are lacking. I can see that it's more talking and less doing. I think we need to do more and talk less.** *Emanuel, 39*

# 10

## **Make openly gay black and minority ethnic people visible**

Participants felt that one of the most powerful signals that black gay people can be open about who they are is seeing other black gay people providing their services. Public services should celebrate black and minority ethnic lesbian, gay and bisexual champions and support staff to be open. Stonewall's Diversity Champions Programme provides resources to help you support your staff.

**I guess when it comes to sexuality and ethnicity it's not just about people in high places or on television it's just about people that we can find accessible or associate with on a day-to-day basis.** *Hafeez, 30*

# 7 Resources

All Stonewall publications referenced in this guide are available to download for free from [www.stonewall.org.uk/publications](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/publications)

For hard copies of any Stonewall publications or resources please visit [www.stonewall.org.uk/resources](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/resources)

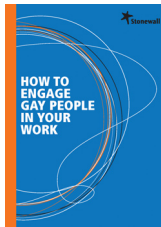
For publications and research by The Runnymede Trust please visit [www.runnymedetrust.org](http://www.runnymedetrust.org)



What's it got to do with you?



What's it got to do with me?



How to engage gay people in your work



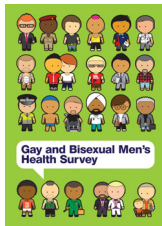
Blow the Whistle on Gay Hate



The Gay British Crime Survey



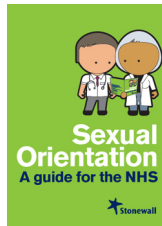
Lesbian health posters



Gay and Bisexual Men's Health Survey



Different Families Same Care posters



Sexual Orientation: A guide for the NHS



Some People Are Gay, Get Over It posters



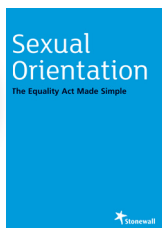
Celebrating Difference DVD



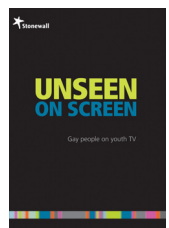
FIT DVD



Spell It Out DVD



Sexual Orientation – The Equality Act Made Simple



Unseen on screen – Gay people on youth TV

## 8 Further information

### **Stonewall Diversity Champions programme**

Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme is Britain's good practice forum through which major employers work with Stonewall and each other on sexual orientation issues to promote diversity in the workplace.

[www.stonewall.org.uk/dcs](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/dcs)

### **Stonewall Leadership Programme**

An intensive and inspirational two-day residential course for rising lesbian, gay and bisexual professionals.

[www.stonewall.org.uk/at\\_work](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/at_work)

### **Stonewall Healthy Lives**

Stonewall's Healthy Lives campaign supports NHS organisations to improve their workplace and services for lesbian gay and bisexual people.

[www.healthyives.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.healthyives.stonewall.org.uk)

For tailored support and advice on improving your workplace for lesbian, gay and bisexual employees contact [workplace@stonewall.org.uk](mailto:workplace@stonewall.org.uk)

For tailored support and advice on addressing homophobia in your school, college or university contact [education@stonewall.org.uk](mailto:education@stonewall.org.uk)

For tailored support and advice on improving NHS services to lesbian, gay and bisexual patients contact [healthyives@stonewall.org.uk](mailto:healthyives@stonewall.org.uk)

For advice and support on all other areas covered in this guide and more please contact **08000 502020** or [info@stonewall.org.uk](mailto:info@stonewall.org.uk)

**One minority  
at a time**

Being black  
and gay