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Negotiating Heteronormativity and Intimacy

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Mixed-orientation marriages (MOMs), in which one partner identifies as lesbian, gay, or bisexual while married to an opposite-sex spouse, remain underexplored in Global South contexts. In Mauritius, where marriage remains a central socio-cultural institution embedded within religious morality, kinship obligations, and communal reputation, LGBTQ+ individuals may enter heterosexual unions due to heteronormative pressure, stigma, and fear of social exclusion. This article explores how such individuals negotiate the norms and conceal their identity by using netnography to analyze publicly accessible Mauritian online discussions relating to mixed-orientation marriages, identity concealment, marital dissatisfaction, and narratives of infidelity. Drawing on queer theory, minority stress theory, stigma theory, and relational authenticity frameworks, the study examines how structural heteronormativity shapes intimate trajectories. The findings suggest that infidelity is not framed as a consequence of sexual orientation per se, but rather as emerging from identity incongruence, emotional isolation, and the psychosocial burden of concealment. Digital spaces function as arenas of confession, resistance, and community validation. The article contributes to research on sexuality and marriage in small-island postcolonial societies and advances methodological discussions on netnography in sensitive research contexts.

Keywords: mixed-orientation marriage, Mauritius, LGBTQ+, infidelity, minority stress, netnography, heteronormativity, queer theory

Introduction

Marriage in Mauritius operates not merely as a private contractual union but as a deeply embedded socio-cultural institution structured by religious authority, kinship networks, and communal expectations. Within such a framework, heterosexual marriage remains the dominant normative pathway into adulthood and social legitimacy. Although recent legal reforms have advanced LGBTQ+ rights, including decriminalization of same-sex relations, social attitudes remain uneven, and stigma persists (Human Dignity Trust, 2023; ILGA, 2023). International research demonstrates that in societies where homosexuality is stigmatized, individuals may enter heterosexual marriages despite same-sex attraction, often as a strategy of concealment or conformity (Buxton, 2006; Higgins, 2006). These mixed-orientation marriages (MOMs) are complex relational arrangements that can involve negotiation, disclosure, secrecy, or eventual dissolution (Hernandez, Schwenke, & Wilson, 2011). While some MOMs function through openness and mutual consent, others are characterized by concealed identity and emotional incongruence (Wolkomir, 2001).

Within the Mauritian context, little empirical research examines how LGBTQ+ individuals experience heterosexual marriage under conditions of heteronormative pressure. Even less is known about how these

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experiences are narrated in digital spaces. Given the sensitivity of sexuality in Mauritian society, online platforms may function as relatively safer arenas for identity articulation and confession (Duguay, 2016; McInroy & Craig, 2015). This article investigates how MOMs are discussed within Mauritian online communities and how narratives of infidelity are framed in relation to identity concealment and relational dissatisfaction. Importantly, this study does not posit sexual orientation as a causal determinant of infidelity. Instead, it examines how structural and psychosocial pressures associated with compulsory heterosexuality may create relational strain within which infidelity is interpreted or enacted.

Literature Review

Mixed-Orientation Marriages

MOMs have been studied primarily in North American and European contexts. Buxton (2006) identified phases common to MOMs: pre-disclosure denial, crisis following disclosure, negotiation, and potential transformation or dissolution. Wolkomir (2001) argued that such marriages destabilize traditional heteronormative gender scripts, creating tension between public marital roles and private sexual identities. Research suggests that when sexual orientation is concealed, relational authenticity is compromised (Mohr & Fassinger, 2006). Higgins (2006) documented how secrecy and compartmentalization often generate emotional distancing. Hernandez et al. (2011) found that concealment correlates with lower marital satisfaction and increased psychological distress. Some couples renegotiate their marriages through open arrangements or companionate partnerships (Buxton, 2006). Therefore, the relationship between same-sex orientation and marital breakdown may be mediated by disclosure, communication, and socio-cultural context.

Compulsory Heterosexuality and Heteronormativity

Rich's (1980) concept of compulsory heterosexuality remains foundational in understanding why individuals may enter opposite-sex marriages despite same-sex orientation. Heteronormativity functions as an institutionalized regime that privileges heterosexual unions as natural, moral, and socially legitimate (Warner, 1991). In religious societies, this norm is reinforced by moral discourses that link heterosexual marriage to divine order (Yip, 2005). In postcolonial societies, marriage is also linked to respectability politics and communal identity (Josephson, 2005). Within small-island settings, social surveillance may intensify normative pressure due to dense kinship networks (Connell, 1995). The Mauritian context, characterized by plural religious traditions and communal structures, exemplifies such dynamics.

Minority Stress and Concealment

Minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) posits that LGBTQ+ individuals experience chronic stress due to stigma, prejudice, and internalized homophobia. Concealment of identity is both a coping strategy and a stressor (Pachankis, 2007). Concealment may protect individuals from discrimination but increases psychological strain and relational incongruence. Studies indicate that identity concealment in marriage correlates with anxiety, depression, and relational dissatisfaction (Frost, 2011). Internalized stigma may exacerbate guilt and shame, particularly in religious contexts (Barnes & Meyer, 2012).

Infidelity and Relational Dissatisfaction

Infidelity research suggests that extramarital involvement often emerges from unmet emotional or sexual needs, relational dissatisfaction, or identity affirmation (Treas & Giesen, 2000; Mark, Janssen, & Milhausen,

2011). Allen et al. (2005) argued that infidelity is frequently a symptom of relational disconnection rather than a primary cause of breakdown. Within MOMs, some studies report that extramarital same-sex relationships may function as identity affirmation mechanisms (Buxton, 2006). However, the framing of such relationships varies culturally. In collectivist contexts, infidelity may be interpreted primarily as moral transgression rather than identity negotiation (Blow & Hartnett, 2005).

Digital Spaces and LGBTQ+ Identity

Online environments offer anonymity, support, and identity experimentation (McKenna & Bargh, 1998) where people can anonymously post about their feelings and opinions without any barriers. For LGBTQ+ individuals in restrictive societies, digital platforms serve as crucial spaces for community formation (Gray, 2009; Duguay, 2016). Netnographic research demonstrates that online forums often function as therapeutic confession spaces (Kozinets, 2015). McInroy and Craig (2015) found that LGBTQ+ youth use digital communities to process stigma and seek validation. Such findings suggest that Mauritian online spaces may provide similar functions for individuals in mixed-orientation marriages.

Theoretical Framework

This study integrates four complementary theoretical lenses to examine mixed-orientation marriages (MOMs) in Mauritius: (1) compulsory heterosexuality and queer theory, (2) minority stress theory, (3) stigma and impression management, and (4) relational authenticity frameworks.

Compulsory Heterosexuality and Queer Theory

Adrienne Rich's (1980) concept of compulsory heterosexuality posits that heterosexuality is institutionalized as both natural and obligatory. Marriage, particularly in religiously structured societies, operates as a key site where heteronormativity is reproduced (Warner, 1991). In Mauritius, where marriage is intertwined with kinship honour, religious doctrine, and communal recognition, heterosexual marriage remains the dominant route to adult legitimacy. Queer theory destabilizes the assumption that sexuality naturally aligns with institutional marital scripts (Butler, 1990). It interrogates how sexuality is regulated and policed through social norms. Within this framework, mixed-orientation marriages are not individual anomalies but structural outcomes of heteronormative regimes. Research in non-Western settings demonstrates that compulsory heterosexuality may be intensified in collectivist societies where family reputation outweighs individual self-expression (Josephson, 2005; Yip, 2005). In small-island societies characterized by dense social networks and high social visibility, such pressures may be amplified (Connell, 1995).

Minority Stress Theory

Minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) provides a psychosocial lens for understanding how structural stigma produces internal stressors such as concealment, internalized homophobia, and vigilance. Concealment, although protective against discrimination, is associated with increased psychological strain (Pachankis, 2007). Mohr and Fassinger (2006) demonstrated that sexual identity concealment within intimate relationships undermines authenticity and increases relational anxiety. Frost and Meyer (2009) further argued that internalized stigma disrupts emotional intimacy and self-acceptance. Within Mauritian mixed-orientation marriages, minority stress may operate through fear of communal shame, religious guilt, familial obligation, and anxiety over social exposure. Such stressors may compromise marital intimacy and satisfaction.

Stigma and Impression Management

Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma conceptualizes identity concealment as a strategy for managing a "discreditable" identity. Heterosexual marriage may function as a "cover" that shields individuals from suspicion. Research shows that some LGBTQ+ individuals enter heterosexual marriages to maintain social legitimacy (Higgins, 2006). However, maintaining dual identities requires continuous impression management, leading to emotional exhaustion and relational distancing (Wolkomir, 2001).

Relational Authenticity and Intimacy Theory

Intimacy requires congruence between internal identity and relational expression (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Authenticity in romantic relationships is associated with higher satisfaction and psychological wellbeing (Impett, Sorsoli, Schooler, Henson, & Tolman, 2008). When sexual orientation and marital role are incongruent, intimacy may become performative rather than experiential. Emotional dissonance may manifest in withdrawal, secrecy, or alternative relational outlets (Allen et al., 2005).

Methodology: Netnographic Design

Research Design

This study employs qualitative netnography (Kozinets, 2015; 2020), an adaptation of ethnography to online communities. Netnography is particularly suited to sensitive topics such as sexuality in conservative societies where anonymity facilitates disclosure (Markham, 2013). Given the limited visibility of mixed-orientation marriages in Mauritian public discourse, digital platforms provide critical insight into lived experiences otherwise concealed offline.

Data Sources

Data were collected from publicly accessible Mauritian online spaces, including:

- Mauritian LGBTQ+ Facebook groups;
- Reddit threads referencing Mauritian marital experiences;
- Public comment sections under Mauritian news articles discussing LGBTQ+ issues;
- Mauritian online forums addressing marriage and identity.

The dataset comprised 50 narrative posts and 425 comment responses spanning 2024-2026.

Only publicly accessible material was analyzed. No private groups were infiltrated, and no direct interaction occurred.

Data Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) guided coding. Coding proceeded through familiarization, initial open coding, thematic categorization, theoretical integration and finally, coding that was iterative and reflexive, acknowledging researcher positionality.

Findings

Five dominant themes emerged from Mauritian online narratives.

Marriage as Social Shield

Participants frequently described heterosexual marriage as a mechanism to satisfy parental and community expectations and avoid suspicion. Marriage was framed as "protection", "under cover", and "proof of normality". This aligns with Goffman's (1963) notion of stigma management and research demonstrating that

marriage can function as camouflage in heteronormative contexts (Higgins, 2006). For example, narratives like the following were seen threading: I had to do as my family expected of me/ I never liked men, but I could never tell my parents/ It was very embarrassing to disclose my identity. No one would have liked or accepted me. I had to live this lie and marry against my wish/ As a LGBT member, I know many people marry opposite sex people to gain acceptance in society, but many of them ultimately seek same-sex relationships outside of their marriage and thus live with more than one identity/ Opposite-sex marriage validates your expected social identity. These narratives/comments on social media represent the voices of those who chose the identity that the society expected from them. Marriage is seen as validating one's heterosexuality and acts as a social shield.

Emotional Isolation and Performative Intimacy

Many narratives described emotional detachment within marriage. Participants referenced "living as roommates", "performing affection", and "routine intimacy". This supports findings by Mohr and Fassinger (2006) that concealment disrupts relational authenticity. The society and community impose certain unwritten laws, to which people are expected to abide. For example, "the pressure to enter arranged, heterosexual marriages is a significant source of trauma and forced concealment for queer individuals". People's reaction to infidelity because of LGBT issues shows that many still think about the society's norms, for example, "I understand maybe he feared the reaction of society and family members and that's why maybe he chose to fit into what was expected from him". People react by condemning this act, for instance, "I would have created a WhatsApp group and add all his immediate family members and then screenshot all his chats history over to them…". But there are also LGBT members who think that people should disclose their sexual identity, for example, "If you are gay or bisexual just tell the truth don't ruin someone's life by getting married to him or her due to family pressure and the fear of coming out. Be true to yourself, love yourself as you are. I know coming out as gay, trans, lesbian, bisexual or queer is challenging because we live in an intolerant society. But getting married, having kids and on top of that you hide your true self and cheat that's outrageous". People are of the opinion that people marry to show normalcy, but many partners feel cheated, confused and in despair when they learn or are informed about their partners' sexual orientation. This becomes more complicated when they have kids and the only reason to live together is because of kids. Hence, many couples live like roommates and have no intimacy at a certain point of their married life.

Infidelity as Identity Affirmation

In some narratives, partners describe their confusion around the normalcy of 'not feeling guilty' as a relationship with a same-sex felt more real. For example, one partner explained how her husband reacted when caught. "He said he was confused. He said it didn't mean he didn't love me. He brushed it off as it's normal nowadays". The next narrative confirms, "...as a gay man, I've met and encountered many married men over the years. Men who love their wives. Men who deeply love and care for their children. Men who didn't wake up one day and choose to betray their families". Importantly, infidelity was rarely framed as opportunistic betrayal. Instead, some participants described same-sex extramarital relationships as moments of "finally feeling real" or "being myself". This resonates with research suggesting that extramarital involvement may function as identity validation under conditions of repression (Buxton, 2006; Allen et al., 2005). However, many participants expressed guilt and ambivalence, especially within religious frameworks. For example, "I don't like the way I feel because I know it is not good", "I know God will punish me, my wife and kids will

never accept or forgive me, but this does not mean I did it on purpose", "when my fiancée disclosed that she feels attracted to women equally, she was confused and could not distinguish if she is bisexual or lesbian. This broke me inside and we decided to go apart". Like these, narratives reveal the pain both partners feel, however, acceptance is very low to inexistent.

Religious and Moral Conflict

Mauritian narratives frequently invoked religious language. Participants expressed fear of divine judgment and communal disgrace. Religious condemnation has been shown to intensify internalized homophobia and psychological distress (Barnes & Meyer, 2012; Yip, 2005). People believe that God decides everything [God creates man and woman. God never fails/ God has never made partner girl to girl, or boy to boy. God put them in the right direction/ I agree with live and let live but I refuse to teach my offsprings that this is right and that this must happen. Live and let live yes but I refuse to accept that this should be a part of our society as I firmly believe that when God created man and woman, He made them to be partners of opposite sex/ May God eliminates this 'fitnah' (misguidance) and immorality in our world today and guide us all. It is very shameful for Mauritius/ Gays have fled Mauritius for decades in order to be able to live freely and more anonymously abroad, without the heavy social stigma/ God created Adam and Eve....not Adam and Adam]. These narratives are beliefs that marriage cannot happen between two same-sex people. Despite more than hundreds of comments from those who have not encountered or lived such experiences and believe that people are free to live the life the way they want, and sexual orientation is a choice which people are free to make, many others condemn this and find same-sex marriage or relationships morally or religiously inappropriate and make fun of people.

Digital Spaces as Therapeutic Arenas

Online communities functioned as spaces of confession and peer validation. Participants thanked anonymous contributors for "understanding" and "not judging". Consistent with McInroy and Craig (2015), digital spaces appear to mitigate isolation and provide emotional support in restrictive environments. The number of people posting anonymously reflected their fear of being judged and they preferred safe spaces to let flow of their emotions around their relationships.

Figure 1 represents a conceptual model arising from the narratives and proposes a multi-layered pathway linking structural heteronormativity to infidelity narratives within mixed-orientation marriages in Mauritius.

- Structural Level

Religious authority, family honour norms, and communal surveillance create heteronormative pressure (Warner, 1991; Yip, 2005; Josephson, 2005). In small-island societies, visibility intensifies conformity demands (Connell, 1995).

- Psychosocial Level

Structural pressure generates identity concealment (Mohr & Fassinger, 2006), which contributes to internalized stigma (Herek, 2009) and minority stress (Meyer, 2003).

- Relational Level

Concealment reduces relational authenticity (Impett et al., 2008), constrains emotional intimacy (Reis & Shaver, 1988), and produces relational disconnection (Frost & Meyer, 2009).

- Behavioural Level

Extradyadic involvement may function as identity affirmation rather than purely sexual opportunism

(Buxton, 2006). These behaviours are narrated online not simply as betrayal, but as expressions of unmet authenticity needs.

- Digital Mediation

Online Mauritian platforms act as counterpublics where identity tension is processed and reframed (Gray, 2009; Kozinets, 2015).

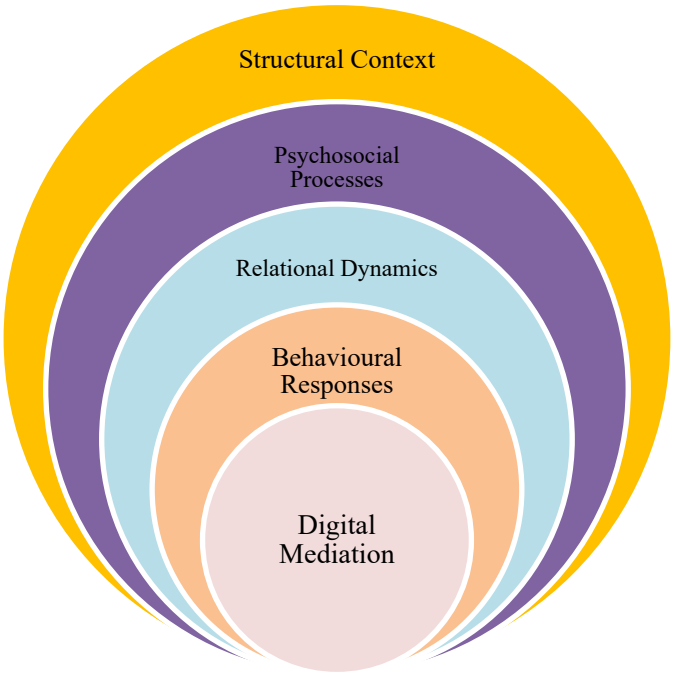

Figure 1. The multi-layered pathway to digital mediation.

Discussion

Structural Heteronormativity in a Postcolonial Island Context

The findings underscore that mixed-orientation marriages in Mauritius cannot be fully understood as individual choices; they are embedded within a broader regime of structural heteronormativity that privileges heterosexual unions as socially legitimate and morally superior (Warner, 1991). In small-island societies characterized by dense kinship networks and communal surveillance, marital conformity is amplified through reputation politics and religious normativity (Connell, 1995; Weeks, 2007). Recent multilevel analyses demonstrate that structural stigma—embedded in institutions, public attitudes, and policy environments—continues to shape the mental health and relational well-being of sexual minorities even in contexts undergoing legal reform. In Mauritius, where religious pluralism coexists with strong familial honour systems, marriage functions not merely as personal commitment but as communal validation. Within such a structure, entering heterosexual marriage may operate as a strategy of social intelligibility (Butler, 1990), even when it conflicts with internal identity.

Concealment, Minority Stress, and Psychological Strain

Minority stress theory continues to provide a robust framework for understanding how LGBTQ+ individuals experience chronic psychological stress due to stigma and concealment (Meyer, 2003; Pachankis, 2007). A recent systematic synthesis of minority stress models suggests ongoing refinement in understanding

how socio-political environments shape mental health outcomes for sexual and gender minorities (Moorhead, Lewis, & Arnull, 2024), reinforcing the idea that macro-level stigma permeates intimate relational contexts. Mauritian narratives of concealment, internalized stigma, and emotional strain reflect these processes, showing how identity suppression affects psychological well-being and relational authenticity. In addition, broader evidence from global surveys indicates that LGBTQ+ discrimination persists despite legal advancements, with legal innovation often outpacing lived experiences of acceptance (de Abreu, António, & Moleiro, 2025). These perceptions of discrimination mirror Mauritian informants' concerns about social and familial rejection, demonstrating how minority stress is embodied in everyday relational negotiations. Recent cross-cultural evidence confirms that identity concealment significantly predicts diminished psychological well-being among sexual minorities, particularly in socio-politically conservative contexts (Grigoreva & Szaszkó, 2024). These processes are compounded where structural stigma persists despite formal rights recognition (Lattanner, McKetta, Pachankis, & Hatzenbuehler, 2025). Mauritian narratives of emotional exhaustion and marital disconnection reflect this concealment burden, illustrating how minority stress cascades into intimate relational domains.

Infidelity as Relational Symptom Rather than Sexual Orientation Outcome

Infidelity research consistently shows that extramarital involvement is multifactorial (Allen et al., 2005; Atkins, Baucom, & Jacobson, 2001; Mark et al., 2011). Emotional neglect, sexual dissatisfaction, attachment insecurity, and unmet intimacy needs predict infidelity across orientations (Treas & Giesen, 2000; Fincham & May, 2017). Attachment theory research suggests that insecure attachment styles increase vulnerability to extradyadic involvement (DeWall, Deckman, Pond Jr., & Bonser, 2011; Allen & Baucom, 2004). Within mixed-orientation marriages characterized by identity concealment, emotional intimacy may be structurally constrained (Reis & Shaver, 1988; Impett et al., 2008). Research on mixed-orientation marriages indicates that extramarital same-sex relationships sometimes function as identity affirmation mechanisms (Buxton, 2006; Hernandez et al., 2011). However, these relationships are often accompanied by guilt and ambivalence (Higgins, 2006). Mauritian narratives reflect similar emotional duality—identity validation coexisting with moral distress.

Importantly, sexual orientation itself does not predict infidelity rates. Meta-analyses suggest that infidelity prevalence is shaped more by relational dissatisfaction and opportunity structures than by orientation (Blow & Hartnett, 2005; Fincham & May, 2017). Therefore, the findings reinforce that structural heteronormativity—not LGBTQ+ identity—is central to understanding relational rupture. Infidelity in mixed-orientation marriages must be interpreted through a relational and psychosocial lens rather than as a function of sexual orientation alone. Within the Mauritian context, narratives of extramarital involvement often reflected search for emotional congruence and identity validation, consistent with research that considers infidelity as an expression of relational dissatisfaction rather than moral failure (Fincham & May, 2017).

The integrative nature of such relational responses interconnects with recent analysis demonstrating how structural stigma affects personal relationships and coping behaviours among LGBTQ+ individuals globally. This work highlights how external pressures, including economic precarity and discrimination, intersect with intimate stressors, underscoring that relational outcomes such as infidelity emerge from intersecting social forces rather than individual orientation differences.

Digital Spaces as Counterpublics

Digital sociology literature conceptualizes online LGBTQ+ spaces as "counterpublics" where marginalized identities can be articulated (Fraser, 1990; Gray, 2009). For individuals in conservative contexts, anonymity reduces fear of exposure (McKenna & Bargh, 1998; Duguay, 2016). Research demonstrates that online LGBTQ+ communities provide psychosocial support and reduce perceived isolation (Craig & McInroy, 2014; McInroy & Craig, 2015). In Mauritian netnographic data, digital forums functioned as spaces of confession, empathy, and identity reconstruction. Moreover, research on LGBTQ+ mental health and workplace discrimination reveals that minority stress extends into digital activity and online discourse, shaping how users express identity burdens and seek social support (Frost & Meyer, 2023). Digital spaces thus serve not only as romantic or sexual outlets, but as critical arenas for psychosocial processing of relational strain and marginalization. This aligns with Kozinets' (2015) argument that digital communities produce collective meaning-making processes. Netnography thus reveals lived experiences often inaccessible through offline interviews in stigmatizing environments (Markham, 2013). Recent empirical research demonstrates that online community engagement significantly mitigates social isolation and psychological distress among LGBTQ+ emerging adults (Charmaraman, Zhang, Wang, & Chen, 2024). In the Mauritian context, such digital forums serve as affective infrastructures where individuals in mixed-orientation marriages negotiate identity tension and reconstruct relational narratives.

Theoretical and Practical Contribution

This study makes five interrelated contributions to research on sexuality, marriage, and social regulation in non-Western contexts:

Extending Mixed-Orientation Marriage Research to the Global South

Research on MOMs has been heavily concentrated in North America and Western Europe (Buxton, 2006; Hernandez et al., 2011; Wolkomir, 2001). Empirical work in small-island postcolonial contexts remains extremely limited. By situating MOMs within Mauritius—a plural, religiously embedded, and socially dense society—this study extends MOM research beyond Western liberal democracies. The findings demonstrate that heteronormative pressure in Mauritius operates through communal surveillance, religious authority, and kinship obligation rather than solely through state policy. This aligns with but deepens prior global sexuality research (Altman, 2001; Weeks, 2007), showing how macro-level social structures shape intimate decision-making.

Reframing Infidelity Through Structural Rather than Individual Lenses

Infidelity literature often emphasizes individual dissatisfaction, personality traits, or opportunity structures (Allen et al., 2005; Mark et al., 2011). This study reframes narratives of extradyadic involvement in mixed-orientation marriages as embedded within structural heteronormativity and minority stress processes (Meyer, 2003; Pachankis, 2007). The data suggest that infidelity is not inherent to sexual minority identity. Rather, it emerges from identity incongruence, emotional isolation, concealment strain and restricted authenticity. This structural framing contributes to both infidelity research and LGBTQ+ relational research by integrating minority stress theory with relational process models (Frost & Meyer, 2009; Impett et al., 2008).

Integrating Minority Stress and Relational Authenticity Frameworks

While minority stress theory has been widely applied to mental health outcomes (Meyer, 2003), fewer

studies integrate it directly with marital relational processes. This study bridges that gap by demonstrating how minority stress cascades into relational dysfunction via concealment and emotional disengagement.

By linking:

Structural Heteronormativity → Identity Concealment → Reduced Relational Authenticity → Emotional Isolation → Infidelity Narratives,

the article proposes a multi-level explanatory model that integrates social theory and intimate relational dynamics.

Methodological Contribution: Netnography in Stigmatized Small Societies

Conducting offline interviews on sexuality in Mauritius presents ethical and recruitment challenges due to stigma and visibility risks. This study demonstrates the viability of netnography (Kozinets, 2015) in small-island conservative contexts, where digital anonymity enables disclosure. The findings support research that online LGBTQ+ spaces function as counterpublics (Fraser, 1990; Gray, 2009), particularly in societies where offline expression carries social cost.

Theorizing Heteronormative Pressure in Small-Island Societies

Finally, this article contributes to sexuality research by theorizing how small population density intensifies heteronormative enforcement. Unlike large urbanized societies where anonymity is possible, Mauritius' tightly networked communities amplify reputation politics, family honour, and religious moral authority. This structural configuration produces distinct pressures shaping marital decision-making and identity concealment.

Recommendations for Counseling and Policy

Heteronormative expectations are still the dominant and prevailing idea that conceptualize relationships in Mauritius. People are still concealing their sexual identity and others still judge those coming out as LGBT+. This becomes more complicated in marriages, and the following are recommended as potential ways to address such complexities:

At the micro level, findings highlight the psychological and relational toll of identity concealment and minority stress on individuals in mixed-orientation marriages. Queer individuals experiencing chronic stressors exhibit diminished psychological well-being, as demonstrated in recent work linking minority stress to negative mental health outcomes among queer populations (Grigoreva & Szaszkó, 2024), underscoring the need for affirming counseling practices attuned to identity congruence and emotional authenticity.

At the mezzo level, digital LGBTQ+ communities function as vital support systems mitigating social isolation and fostering connectedness, consistent with evidence that social isolation exacerbates stress among sexual minorities (Charmaraman et al., 2024). Mental health interventions should therefore incorporate community-based modalities that leverage peer networks. Online platforms can serve as one where people can seek counseling in an anonymous way, without being judged by the public, as seen in many message threads where people make fun of the LGBTQ+ community. The online spaces provided by regularized counselors and NGOs can be a safe haven where one can seek help.

At the macro level, structural stigma and societal discrimination persist as determinants of minority stress in sexual and gender minority populations (Frost & Meyer, 2023). Policy reforms targeting structural heteronormativity, inclusive anti-discrimination protections, and culturally competent healthcare are essential to reduce systemic barriers and improve relational and mental health outcomes for LGBTQ+ individuals.

Conclusions

This study advances understanding of mixed-orientation marriages in Mauritius by situating intimate relational dynamics within the broader construction of structural heteronormativity, minority stress, and postcolonial moral regulation. Drawing on netnographic analysis of Mauritian online social media platforms, the findings demonstrate that narratives of infidelity are not reducible to sexual orientation, but are embedded in processes of identity concealment, relational inauthenticity, and psychosocial strain. In a small-island society marked by dense kinship networks and religiously infused norms, heterosexual marriage operates as both social mandate and moral performance, constraining authentic self-expression. Digital counterpublics emerge as critical sites of identity negotiation and validation, revealing the complex interplay between stigma, intimacy, and resistance. By integrating queer theory, minority stress theory, and relational authenticity frameworks, this study contributes a multi-level explanatory model that reframes infidelity as a structurally mediated outcome of heteronormative pressure rather than an inherent feature of LGBTQ+ identity.

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