How do British Muslims who have Same-Sex-Attractions negotiate their Identity?

MA Islam in Contemporary Britain

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Abstract:

This dissertation is the outcome of a research project I conducted exploring how five British Muslim males who have same-sex-attractions negotiate their identities. I situate this research within a wider need of amplifying the voices of same-sex-attracted British Muslims (SSABMs) who become marginalised and excluded, both within Muslim communities and within wider media discourses surrounding Islam and homosexuality. Exploring the academic literature on SSABMs, I note that academic discourses are one of the very few means through which the lives of SSABMs are honestly and representatively portrayed. However, I note that the sampling strategies utilised within this research limit the kinds of SSABM populations that can be represented in this research. I thus demonstrate how I have sought to counteract these limitations through the methodologies that I had adopted. The utilisation of these methodologies enabled me to access a diverse sample which included SSABM voices which had not been documented in the academic literature in much detail before. This had implications on the findings that I generated, and therefore affected the significance and implications which my research has for the study of SSABMs more generally.

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Introduction:

Within the past decade, there has been an increased acceptance of same-sex-sexuality within British society (Yip 2008a:3.1). This can be seen, for example, in the passing of important legislations, such as the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientations) Regulations (2003), the Civil Partnerships Act (2004), and the Equality Act (sexual orientations) legislation (2010). These legislations have increased the rights of sexual minorities to adopt their desired sexual lifestyle choices, as well as criminalise discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. These legislations have come after significant socio-political change towards the accommodation of same-sex sexualities. The acceptance of sexual diversity has now largely become a taken-for-granted phenomenon within the public sphere (Yip 2008a:3.1).

Despite this growing acceptance, some communities remain negative towards same-sex-sexualities. The Casey Review, commissioned by the government, draws attention to the homophobia exhibited towards LGBT+ peoples within ethnic minority communities, including Muslim communities (2016:111). The Review references a poll undertaken by the ICM which demonstrates that 56% of British Muslims would like homosexuality to be illegal and 42% agreed that homosexuals should not be teachers (ICM 2016, cited in Casey 2016:111).

Negative attitudes towards same-sex-sexuality within British Muslim communities is largely motivated by interpretations of Islam which legitimate the perpetuation of heteronormativity, heterosexism and homophobia (Siraj 2009). These interpretations include those of verses from the Qur'an regarding the parable of the Prophet Lot and his people, as well as hadiths which encourage the sanctioning of Muslims who commit same-sex-sexual acts (ibid). There have also been high profile Muslim voices which have demonstrated an intolerance towards same-sex-sexuality. For example, in 2006, the general secretary of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), Sir Iqbal Sacranie, was investigated by police due to his comments in a radio interview, stating that homosexuality is harmful and unacceptable according to Islamic strictures (Yip 2008a:3.3). Likewise, Yusuf-al-Qaradawi, a world-renowned Islamic scholar, stated during a TV interview that homosexuality is a threat to the natural order and is pushed by the West for its own project of cultural imperialism (Kugle and Hunt 2012).

These attitudes towards same-sex-sexuality have provided ground for the media to problematise the presence of Muslim communities in Britain. The media utilises a discourse of homonationalism, a concept which draws attention to the ways in which discourses of LGBT+ human rights are co-opted for nationalist purposes (Puar 2007). Thus, Muslims will be framed as antithetical to Western democracies such as Britain because they are essentially homophobic. This can be seen, for example, in the news coverage surrounding the wedding between the openly gay Bangladeshi Muslim Jahed Chaudhury and Sean Rogan, which drew attention to the homophobic backlash which Jahed received from his family and Muslim community (e.g. Boyle 2017, *Telegraph Reporters* 2017). Another example of homonationalism can be seen in British news coverages of the Orlando shootings (e.g. Stanton

et al. 2016). Right-leaning commentators were quick to respond with anti-Muslim rhetoric (Hopkins 2016, Yiannopoulos 2016), cited in Shah 2017:54). Through such news stories and responses, Muslim communities are framed as homophobic, which feeds into a wider narrative that Islam and Muslims are incompatible with the ideals of the Western nation states such as Britain (Rahman 2010). Western democracies and cultures, on the other hand, are portrayed as exceptionally gay-friendly and as bastions of human rights.

Despite this homonationalist discourse, there has been a move within Muslim communities in towards a more sympathetic approach in addressing this issue. There has been a shift away from merely condemning 'homosexuality' to an emphasis on morally differentiating between same-sex-sexual acts and same-sex-attractions, and an emphasis on refraining from discrimination against same-sex sexual minorities. This can be seen in the statements of high-profile Muslim scholars and academics. For example, although Johnathan Brown, an American Islamic scholar, condemns same-sex-sexual acts, he draws attention to the respect and protection for religious and cultural minorities existing under previous Islamic caliphates as evidence for his view that sexual minorities should also be protected and respected by Muslim communities in the West (Brown 2016). Likewise, the 'Islam and homosexuality' conference held earlier this year by the Islamic Institute for Development and Research (IIDR), as part of their Critical Reflections series, has sought to address the question of how Muslims should make sense of 'homosexuality' within British society (2018). The conference host, Shaykh Sharif Al-Banna, provided a theological basis on which sympathy and respect for sexual minorities was advocated for. Although these discourses are useful in addressing homophobia, they remain incomplete because they tacitly overlook the difficult question of how a same-sex-attracted Muslim, who adheres to a heteronormative religious framework, can comfortably deal with the existence of his/her same-sex-attractions in ways which do not contravene this framework. The idea of remaining 'chaste' or celibate may not be a completely fulfilling or even a viable option for those same-sex-attracted British Muslim (SSABM) who perceive their sexualities as core aspect of their identities and lived experiences.

In the above discussion, it is evident how, both within Muslim communities and in wider discourses, there has been very little evidence of attention to the voices of SSABMs in discourses surrounding Islam and homosexuality, in a way which is holistic and is genuinely meant to address the concerns of SSABMs themselves. This leads to the perpetuation of discourses which are, by their very nature of exclusion, incomplete. For example, the homonationalist discourses which characterise media representations of Islam and Muslims are not only reductive, but they do not acknowledge the multiple ways in which Islam and ethnicity become meaningful to SSABMs. Likewise, the discourses within British Muslim communities, which mostly press for ideological explications on the issue of same-sex-sexuality, could benefit from a better understanding of the complex ways in which sexuality becomes a significant factor in the lives of SSABMs. This can better inform Muslim discourses in ways which are helpful for SSABMs, rather than merely serving dogmatic or reactionary purposes.

However, there are initiatives which have sought to address the concerns of SSABMs and are influenced and facilitated by SSABMs themselves. These initiatives are therefore more able to address the needs and concerns of SSABMs. I will outline below several examples of such

initiatives which have been important in my own research. These include Imaan, the Inclusive Mosque Initiative (IMI) and the Straight-Struggle online support group.

Imaan is an LGBT+ Muslim organisation which was initially established within the UK in 1999 as a branch of the Al-Fatiha foundation, a US-based LGBT+ Muslim organisation (Fiaz 2014). Its aim is to provide services to help SSABMs in dealing with the difficulties and challenges of reconciling their religion/ethnicities and sexualities (Fiaz 2014). It also provides a safe space where SSABMs can find a place of belonging. A salient feature of this organisation is its collaboration with other LGBT+ organisations in the running of events. For example, every year Imaan takes part in Pride processions alongside other LGBT+ organisations and groups (Imaanlondon 2016).

The Inclusive Mosque Initiative (IMI) was launched in the UK in 2012. Its aim is to address the experiences of exclusion of minority groups within British Muslim communities (IMI 2012a). The group's ethos is predicated on what it considers 'inclusive Islamic principles', which include the accommodation of people 'regardless of their religious beliefs, race, gender, impairments, sexuality or immigration status' (ibid). The organisation itself fosters a culture of inclusion in ways which differ from traditional Islamic institutional structures. For example, some of their fortnightly congregational prayers are led by female Imams and are not gender segregated (IMI 2012b). Likewise, some of their workshops and lecture series are aimed at disrupting normative Islamic beliefs about gender and sexuality (e.g. Inclusivemosque 2018).

These initiatives are sexuality-affirming in their outlooks. In other words, they endorse the acceptance of same-sex sexual acts and relationships. They rely on liberal, more 'progressive' interpretations of Islamic tradition which challenge heteronormative Islamic strictures and provide avenues for same-sex-sexualities to be accommodated within an Islamic worldview. A good example of this re-interpretation can be found in the works of Scott Kugle (e.g. Kugle 2010). These views, however, remain a pariah within mainstream British Muslim communities. Furthermore, establishing an affirmative stance towards same-sex-sexuality may not seem coherent to all SSABMs, particularly those who retain a heteronormative Islamic outlook. Initiatives which do address the needs of SSABMs from this heteronormative standpoint do exist, although very little is known about them.

One initiative which does address sexuality from this perspective is the Straight-Struggle online support group (StraightStruggle 2003). This initiative was established in 2003 to provide an online resource for Muslims worldwide struggling with same-sex-attractions. The support group, in the character of the mainstream Islamic view, morally differentiates between same-sex-attractions and same-sex sexual acts. Although the group itself does not endorse a specific therapy for same-sex-attractions itself, there is literature present within the files section of the group which is heavily influenced by reparative therapy discourse (Cohen 2000, Nicholosi 1997, Van Den Aardweg 1997)

Reparative therapy is one of many types of conversion therapies, or Sexual Orientation Change Efforts (SOCEs) which are aimed at changing sexual orientation, from same-sex-sexuality to heterosexuality (Bright 2004). Reparative therapy is based on the assumption that male homosexuality represents a reparative drive to fix an impaired male gender identity (ibid:472). Based on this theory, same-sex-sexuality can be overcome through a reclamation of one's own sense of masculinity (ibid). Therapeutic interventions encouraged by reparative therapy seek to readdress this development of masculinity, and help the individual come to terms with

childhood traumas 'allegedly' associated with the development of his impaired gender identity (ibid:473-474).

There have however been socio-political factors which have pushed SOCEs into positions of liminality within British and Western societies. For example, the American Psychological Association (APA) has criticised SOCEs, claiming that no conclusive evidence exists to confirm their efficacy, and studies conducted by NARTH[1], which legitimate reparative therapies, are methodologically flawed (Glasgold et al. 2009:26-34). Furthermore, SOCEs can provide a leeway to encourage homophobia. These standpoints on SOCEs are also echoed by British psychotherapy organisations such as the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) (2017) and the Royal College For Psychiatrists (2014:2). This position is also perpetuated by LGBT+ voices. Stonewall, the UK's leading LGBT+ charity, has signed a memorandum of understanding with the NHS and other medical and psychotherapy bodies to end the endorsement of SOCEs (BACP 2017). Public understandings of conversion therapy have also been dominated by extreme examples of SOCEs. This can be seen in the sensational news coverage of conversion therapy practices being endorsed by a Liverpool church, which encouraged its clients to fast for 24 hours (Parry 2018).

SOCEs are also endorsed by religious peoples and organisations (Bright 2004), perhaps because religious groups have a stake in endorsing a seemingly scientific discourse which frames heterosexuality as natural or normative, and homosexuality as aberrant. Conservative attitudes within Muslim communities towards same-sex-sexuality have also led Muslim clinical psychologists, scholars and leaders to advocate for SOCEs themselves (Jahangir and Abdul-Latif 2016). These may include reparative therapy, fasting, prayer and heterosexual convenience marriage. The full extent to which these SOCEs and sexuality maintenance methods are used within British Muslim communities still warrants further research.

From the above discussion, it is clear how there is a need to bring to attention the multiple ways in which SSABMs negotiate their sexualities, and the enabling and constraining factors that confront them in doing this. Such an understanding can inform how both Muslim and non-Muslim communities respond to the issue of same-sex-sexuality within British Muslim communities. Academic research on SSABMs has been one of the few means through which the voices of SSABMs have been honestly portrayed. I will now provide an overview of the academic literature which has been published on SSABMs.

Literature Review:

The academic literature on SSABMs is mostly concerned with how the intersections of religion, ethnicity and sexuality contribute to the objective and subjective conditions which SSABMs are implicated in. The literature explores both the constraining and enabling potentials of these three aspects of identity.

Religion, namely Islam, plays a huge role in the identity negotiations of SSABMs. Islam promotes gender complementarity, the idea that men and women are dependent on each other through the differences which have been created between them (Siraj 2009:43-45, Yip

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[1] the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality, the leading representative body for reparative therapy, based in the US.

2004:337-338). This idea is made manifest through the institution of heterosexual marriage, where men and women play different, yet complementary, roles (ibid). The sexual roles played between men and women within heterosexual marriage, which are heavily tied to the purpose of procreation, are seen as a manifestation of this gender-complementarity (ibid). Only sex which falls within the framework of a heterosexual marriage is seen as permissible from an Islamic standpoint.

Same-sex-sexuality, therefore, is seen as an aberration from a divinely ordained natural and social order. Because the Qur'an and Hadith literature contain condemnations against people who commit same-sex-sexual acts, they are used to justify heterosexist and homophobic attitudes within British Muslim communities (Siraj 2009:43-45).

Ethnicity also plays a huge role in the lives of SSABMs. Many SSABMs will come from South-Asian ethnic minority backgrounds where the maintenance of Izzat (honour) within families and kinship networks is important (Yip 2004:339). Izzat is predicated on moral frameworks which implicate the performance of gender and sexuality. These frameworks are highly influenced by religion, because they include a strict monitoring of relations between the sexes, from everyday interactions to sexual activities, and the maintenance of sexuality through the framework of heterosexual marriage (Zaidi et al 2014:30-32). Same-sex-sexuality is therefore not only seen as an individual moral deviation, but also one which tarnishes the izzat of a family and an individual's relationship with their kinship network (Yip 2004:339).

Sexuality also plays a huge role in the identity formations of SSABMs. Quite apart from the obvious presence of same-sex-attractions, SSABMs also contend with exposure to sexual identity labels (Shah 2017:6). The socio-political and legal acceptance of same-sex-sexualities within the West has led to the construction of positive LGBQ+ identity labels around which sexual minorities mobilise. These identity constructs may be encountered by SSABMs through direct or mediated exposure to LGBQ+ communities and may be accepted or rejected by them based on a variety of factors (ibid:5-6). Nevertheless, these identity constructs dominantly represent the lives of white, middle-class sexual minorities within British society, and therefore the intersections of religion and ethnicity may not be readily appreciated within these circles (Yip 2008a:4). Moreover, within LGBQ+ communities there is racism and Islamophobia which needs to be contended with (Jaspal 2017).

One can thus see how the religious/ethnic and sexuality positions which SSABMs occupy can be perceived as incompatible with each other. It is this discourse of incompatibility and how SSABMs negotiate this which constitute the academic discussions surrounding SSABMs.

Researchers have approached the study of SSABMs with a variety of theoretical and conceptual frameworks in order to make sense of how SSABMs negotiate their identities.

Jaspal et al., for example, utilise Identity Process Theory (IPT) in their studies of British Muslim Gay Men (BMGM) (Jaspal 2010, 2016, Jaspal and Cinnirella 2010, 2012). IPT has a working definition of identity-threat which can be applied to the lives of BMGM in order to make sense of how the incompatibility existing between their religion, ethnicity and sexuality poses a threat to their identity. IPT also posits the idea that in the face of identity threat, individuals will engage in coping mechanisms to eliminate or dilute the identity threat as much as possible. IPT can therefore be useful in determining the coping mechanisms which BMGM will engage in to deal with identity threat. This socio-psychological approach is useful because

it enables the authors to demonstrate the links between the interpersonal, intergroup and the intrapsychic dimensions of identity negotiation.

Shah utilises social constructionism in his larger study of SSABMs (2017:5-6). Social constructionism posits the idea that realities are socially constructed between individuals and the societies which they inhabit (ibid). There is a middle-ground which Shah's definition of social constructionism draws between structure and agency, and how they both impact each other. Shah is interested in what SSABMs 'do' with dominant discourses of religion, ethnicity and sexuality. In particular, he utilises Beckford's idea of religion as a 'cultural resource' to make sense of how SSABMs may draw on religion in ways which complement their sexualities (2001:233, cited in Shah 2018:192). Shah's utilisation of social constructionism is useful because it enables him to explore the situated nature of the formation of religious, ethnic and sexual identities and is therefore sensitive to the diversity of the SSABM experience.

Other researchers have approached the study of SSABMs by critiquing dominant understandings of same-sex-sexuality which exist within the mainstream Western academic and public discourse. They emphasize the unrepresentativeness of these assumptions because they rely heavily on the experiences of white, middle-class LGBT+ populations. They thus draw on the experiences of SSABMs to challenge and deconstruct these assumptions.

A good example of this deconstruction is in the exploration of the concept of 'coming out from the closet' and how it compares to the lives of SSABMs (Jaspal and Siraj 2011, Siraj 2018). In their studies, Jaspal and Siraj have critiqued dominant theoretical models of (homo)sexual identity formation which privilege the process of coming out as essential to the formation of a coherent sexual identity (Jaspal and Siraj 2011:185, Siraj 2018:32-33). Such paradigms give precedence to the experiences of white, middle-class, gay men and does not consider how the intersection of religion, ethnicity, class and gender in the lives of female and ethnic minority non-heterosexuals may make it difficult or even undesirable to adhere to these paradigms (ibid, ibid). On the one hand the authors depict the negative consequences of staying within the closet which affect SSABMs, such as feelings of distress, isolation and disempowerment (e.g. Siraj 2018:34-36). However, they also note how the closet remained an effective means through which their multiple religious, ethnic and sexual identities could be strategically negotiated (e.g. Siraj 2018:36-37). Moreover, the act of coming-out for SSABMs was situated and contextualised, rather than a predictable inevitability, which meant that SSABMs were out to some people in their lives whilst not to others, and some SSABMs suspended the act of coming-out to a time when they perceived the conditions were right for this (Jaspal and Siraj 2011:191-192, Siraj 2018:36-37). The authors thus expressed the need of considering more nuanced ideas of coming-out which may be overlooked by dominant Western understandings of this concept.

Another example is in Yip's critique of dominant understandings of contemporary family dynamics and how non-heterosexuals negotiate these (2004). Academic studies typically portray the family as being influenced by processes of detraditionalization and individualisation, which have meant that family roles have become less fixed and more open to negotiation (ibid:336-337). The individual is less bound to traditional familial structures in the negotiation of his/her identity (ibid). Non-heterosexuals are seen as exemplary of this model. The typical non-heterosexual comes out to his family at some point, and in the face of rejection leaves his family and joins support networks revolving around the acceptance of his sexual identity (ibid). (Sexual) identity is the result of reflexive thought and practise rather than

the transmission of familial tradition (ibid). Yip argues that these understandings are influenced by the experiences of white middle-class populations (ibid). Ethnic minority communities are excluded from these understandings. Through his studies, Yip demonstrates that familial, religious and ethnic identities are very important to SSABMs. Although socio-cultural processes of detraditionalization and individualisation influence the lives of SSABMs, these processes are mediated through religion and ethnicity (ibid). Consequently, Yip demonstrates how SSABMs carve-out spaces for the expression of their sexualities, whilst upholding familial and kinship responsibilities (e.g. 345-346). These examples upset dominant western paradigms of identity formation which do not appreciate the importance of religion, family and kinship relations in some people's lives.

Researchers also deal with dominant assumptions regarding (same-sex)sexuality within the ethnic minority Muslim communities which SSABMs belong to, and how the ways in which SSABMs negotiate their religious and ethnic identities may uncover the unrepresentativeness of these assumptions. An example of this can be seen in the depictions of 'queering Islam' which many SSABMs engage in (Siraj 2016b, Siraj 2016c, Yip 2005, Yip and Khalid 2010). The queering of Islam denotes the ways in which many SSABMs reinterpret Islam in order to religiously legitimate their sexualities, and to disrupt heterosexist and homophobic assumptions existing within British Muslim communities. This process has two dimensions: The first dimension involves the reinterpretation of Islamic texts in order to reclaim them from heterosexism and homophobia and to posit more queer-friendly interpretations of these texts (Siraj 2016b, Yip 2005). This leads to the accumulation of theological capital which empowers SSABMs to integrate their religious and sexual identities together (Yip 2005). The second dimension involves creating a distinction between the dominant, institutional understandings of Islam and more personal, individualistic understandings, giving preference to the latter over the former (Siraj 2016c, Yip and Khalid 2010). These instances of queering Islam challenge the idea that the Islamic tradition cannot accommodate for non-heterosexuals.

A major strength in the research carried out on SSABMs is the consideration of reflexivity in the implementation of academically and ethically sound research. Examples of reflexive thought and practice can be seen in Siraj and Yip's reflexive accounts focussing on their previous research experiences (2016a, 2008a), and Shah's reflexive insights into his own research on Malaysian and British LGBT+ Muslims (2017).

Siraj situates her reflections into the insider/outsider debate (2016a). She concludes that the insider/outsider distinction is too simplistic. Although as a heterosexual Muslim she could not 'empathise' with the experiences of her participants, her Muslim and ethnic minority (Pakistani) identities allowed her to appeal to their linguistic idiosyncrasies. However, as a heterosexual Muslim, she reported having to be self-conscious about her heterosexist bias in the analysing of data.

Yip situates his reflections into the wider need of acknowledging the sensitive nature of the topic which renders the SSABM population marginalised and vulnerable (2008a). Drawing on his own biography as a Malaysian gay man, who had to negotiate his sexuality vis-à-vis religious and cultural heteronormativity, he critiques the dominant Western theoretical paradigms existing in the study of sexual minorities which privilege processes of individualism and detraditionalization over the experiences of religion and ethnicity. He therefore emphasizes the need to be theoretically and culturally sensitive in studying SSABM

populations. He also emphasizes the need for researchers to negotiate between their research motives and the political motives of gate-keepers and participants in a balanced, sensitive ways.

Shah's insights deal with his ethnographic research on Malaysian and British SSABMs (2017:19-52). He notes that as a middle-class gay Muslim man, although he had 'predisposed access' to certain participants and LGBT+ Muslim spaces (ibid:27), he experienced difficulties accessing other spaces, such as female spaces (ibid:26). Furthermore, he also recounted having to contend with his 'unexamined assumptions' about the LGBT+ Muslim world in conducting his research (ibid:23). He also situates his reflections into a wider personal journey coming to terms with his intersectional experience. This was one reason why he joined Imaan and became personally invested in the organisation. He valued the 'emotional reflexivity' this experience allowed him to engage in, which constituted a 'rich analytical resource' for his research (ibid:31).

From these reflexive insights, in can be observed how researchers in this field are contending with the various issues surrounding reflexivity in their own research.

Although the literature on SSABMs has produced many insights, there are certain limitations to this literature. For one thing, most of the samples which are recruited for studying SSABMs are recruited from LGBT+ Muslim organisations and networks, even though some consideration has been given to recruited participants from other contexts (Siraj 2016b:93-94, 2016c:191-192, 2018:33, Yip 2004:339-340, 2005:51). This has the potential to exclude those who do not join these organisations or networks. For example, there may be SSABMs who do not have the resources to access urban LGBT+ Muslim spaces and networks. Although there are online LGBT+ Muslim support forums to deal with this difficulty, some SSABMs may still be unwilling to join these networks. This is because the reliance of these networks on liberal, progressive interpretations of Islam may not seem coherent to those SSABMs who choose to remain within heteronormative Islamic strictures.

This does not mean that non-sexuality-affirming[2] SSABMs can never be found in such support groups. Siraj, in one of her studies which depicted how religion influences the lives of British Muslim lesbians, recruited all of her participants from the Imaan LGBT Muslim support group (Siraj 2012). Despite this, some of her participants were non-sexuality-affirming in the beliefs and attitudes they expressed.

There is, however, benefit in gaining samples outside of sexuality-affirming contexts. Jaspal et al. gain most of their participants through snowball sampling from personal contacts (Jaspal 2010, 2016, Jaspal and Cinnirella 2010, 2012). They have noted how individuals recruited from these contacts negotiate their identities differently from those who are affiliated with support groups, since the strategies to religiously legitimate their sexualities which exist within these support groups are not available to these Muslims (Jaspal 2016:75). Such sampling strategies could be adopted even more in research conducted with SSABMs.

Moreover, sampling strategies used for research on SSABMs are mostly geared towards recruiting participants who self-identify as LGBQ, or research is framed around LGBQ Muslims (lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer). This strategy is limiting since it does not consider

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[2] Just as I had defined a sexuality affirming SSABM as somebody who affirms the moral viability of same-sex sexual acts and relationships, a non-sexuality-affirming SSABM is somebody who does not affirm the moral viability of these actions. The difference between these standpoints pivots on mainstream Islamic injunctions regarding same-sex-sexuality which do not condemn same-sex-attractions but condemn same-sex sexual acts.

the possibility of such identity labels being rejected by SSABMs. For one thing, these identity labels are associated with mainstream Western LGBQ+ communities who are more sexuality-affirming in their standpoints. Their identity configurations are also generally not accommodating of religion and ethnicity, since they are both perceived as bastions of heteronormativity which need to be confronted and overcome (Yip 2008a:4.3). These identity markers are also limiting since they may not be perceived by individuals as capturing the entirety or complexity of their sexual experiences (Shah 2017:160-165). From these explanations, it is clear how SSABMs may have many reasons to reject the use of Western LGBQ identity constructs, and researchers should therefore acknowledge this possibility in their sampling strategies.

These exclusions of course do not happen intentionally. Part of the issue has to do with the fact that SSABMs remain a hidden population, because the intersections of their religious and ethnic identities create the objective and subjective conditions compelling many of them to remain within the closet (Yip 2008a:3.6). Thus, the ability to access them for research purposes will also be affected by this (ibid). This fact raises some important questions about the possibility of creating any representative samples of SSABMs, or whether conclusions regarding SSABMs can be deduced from studies with complete certainty. Researchers in this field have recognised the hidden nature of the SSABM population and have therefore sought to address these concerns. A good example can be seen in studies conducted by Yip, who uses a variety of sampling strategies in order to maximize the variability of representation (2008a:5.2-5.6). He uses support networks, LGBT press, personal contacts, snowball samplings and engagements with LGBT+ spaces (ibid). The variety of sampling strategies he engages in enables him to access a diversity of SSABM standpoints which are not always in concordance with each other (ibid). Likewise, for some of her studies, Siraj had utilised asynchronous interviews via email exchanges with participants recruited from an online support group (2018). This method allowed her to access a population which would not feel comfortable in conducting one-to-one interviews with her. These examples show how researchers within the field have already recognised the hidden nature of SSABM populations and are therefore being methodologically reflexive in the sampling strategies they use.

However, research methodologies need to take further steps to ensure that they acknowledge the uncertainties which *still* exist in our knowledge of SSABM populations. This can be done, for example, through the careful use of terms and phrases in the recruitment of participants. Especially in the field of same-sex-sexuality, terminologies can become highly contested, and the use of some terms over others may lead to some SSABMs being included whilst excluding others. This can be demonstrated in the sampling recruitment form which Siraj uses for her forthcoming research on self-identifying lesbian and queer Muslim women (Appendix 1). Although she includes lesbian and queer Muslim women in her form, the variability of her potential sample could be improved if she also includes bisexual Muslim women, and those who do not utilise these terms at all.

I would like to end the literature review with some reflections on the place of SSABMs within British Muslim studies more generally. The representation of SSABMs within this field remains marginal. Gilliat-Ray for example does not mention SSABMs in her monograph at all (2010). This may be because her monograph was concerned with synthesizing the main body of academic literature and research on British Muslims over a period of three decades, which was limited in the extent to which it explored SSABMs. Ansari makes a brief reference in his conclusion to how the internet has allowed for 'deviant' voices, such as those of queer Muslims,

to flourish (2003:401-402). He also makes reference to the establishment of the Al-Fatiha foundation within the UK, which later becomes reinstituted as Imaan. However, these references are brief and further elucidation on the existence of SSABMs could be given. Likewise, monographs on young British Muslim identities give little consideration to SSABM youth (e.g. Lewis 2008, Mondal 2008). Lewis and Hamed's monograph mapping the historical and contemporary contours of British Islamic thought and activism only gives a marginal reference in the conclusions chapter to the need of exploring the existence of LGBQI Muslims. However, the responses of LGBQI Muslims to religions institutions and their activisms are not elaborated upon (Lewis and Hamid 2018). These marginal references perhaps are reflective of the marginal status of SSABMs within British Muslim communities which becomes reflected within the academic field itself.

Above, I have outlined the limitations which exist in the academic literature surrounding SSABMs and why these limitations may exist. However, another reason for these limitations existing is the fact that there is not much research conducted in this field. More research which constantly seeks to expand in scope and variability of SSABM experiences is necessary. I have not attempted to address every limitation within my own study. Nevertheless, I will demonstrate below how I have attempted to address some of these concerns through the methodologies I have adopted for my study.

<h2 style="text-align:center"><u>Methodologies:</u></h2>

Much of the inspiration for my methodologies comes from Yip's reflections on studies he has conducted with LGB British religious (Christian and Muslim) peoples (2008a). Because of the sensitive context which SSABMs are implicated in, it becomes challenging to access them for research purposes and to manage research conducted with them. Yip outlines a few strategies to tackle these challenges. I will outline these strategies below and how I have aimed to consider these in my methodologies.

Theory:

Yip emphasizes the need for researchers to be theoretically and culturally sensitive when studying SSABMs (2008a:4.2-4.6). He situates this need in a critique of the dominant theoretical paradigms which govern the study of sexual minorities (ibid). These paradigms privilege the social processes of individualisation and detraditionalization and privilege the pursuit of sexual identity construction. They overlook how religion, ethnicity and sexuality intersect in the lives of some populations, such as SSABMs (ibid). This intersectional experience affects the socio-structural conditions which SSABMs are confronted with, and also contribute to the complexity of their subjectivities. Therefore, theoretical paradigms need to take intersectionality seriously. I will outline below how the theoretical paradigms I have adopted take intersectionality and the situatedness of identity construction into account.

One theory which has influenced my interpretations of the SSABM experience is social constructionism. Social constructionism is concerned with the idea that realities which are taken-for-granted within society are social and cultural constructs (Beckford 2003:13). Individuals internalise these social constructs through processes of socialisation (Berger and Luckmann 1967). However, these constructs are not merely predetermined by society and internalized by individuals, but are dialectically negotiated by individuals in relation to the social worlds and reality definitions they encounter throughout their lives (ibid). Negotiation

thus refers to the ways in which social realities are contested on both the subjective and interpersonal levels (Beckford 2003:13).

Applying an explanation of social constructionism to SSABMs, one can argue that SSABMs have to contend with dominant Muslim and Western/LGBQ constructions of same-sex-sexuality (Rahman 2010, Shah 2017:5-6). These constructions affect how their religious, sexual and ethnic/familial identities are constructed. Although religion, ethnicity and sexuality are social constructs, they are negotiated by SSABMs who lie at the intersections of these reality definitions, and take on manifestations which bear relevance to the their socio-temporal and biographical circumstances.

One can thus see how social constructionism puts emphasis on the situated nature of identity negotiation. This situated emphasis is a consequence of the suspension of ontological assumptions related to social realities which helps us to appreciate how these reality definitions become manifested in various contexts (Berger and Luckmann 1967:34). This approach has huge benefit in the study of SSABMs, because their identities are negotiated at the intersection of discourses which are typically understood to be incompatible with each other (Rahman 2010). This means that their identities will defy the taken-for-granted assumptions related to these dominant discourses of incompatibility existing between Muslim and Western/LGBQ+ communities (ibid:952). These discourses are deconstructed in order to accommodate for the intersectional experiences of SSABMs. Thus, there is also scope within social constructionism to take intersectionality seriously.

Another benefit of social constructionism is its emphasis on the dialectical nature of identity formation (Berger and Luckmann 1967:78-79). Emphasis is equally given to the social structures which SSABMs have to contend with, and the agency which they enact in negotiating these structures. This dual emphasis is important in formulating comprehensive and accurate understandings of how SSABMs negotiate their identities.

Intersectionality also plays a huge role in understanding the experiences of SSABMs. Intersectionality is a way of understanding the complex nature of human experience (Collins and Bilge 2016:2). Intersectionality theory stipulates that the social conditions an individual is implicated in cannot be understood as influenced by one factor alone, but by many factors. The identity negotiations of SSABMs have to thus be understood in the context of multiple identity markers intersecting to influence their objective and subjective conditions.

SSABMs will be affected by this intersectional experience in different ways, ranging from psychological dissonance to experiences of homophobic discrimination. An intersectional approach also helps us to understand why SSABMs choose to negotiate their identities in some ways whilst not in other ways. Intersectionality is thus heuristically useful in the study of SSABMs because it takes into account the complex processes and multiple situational factors involved in their identity negotiations.

Since my research project was concerned with the identity negotiations of SSABMs, I needed a working definition of identity which could help me 'frame' my approach to conceptualising their identities. I found Brubaker and Cooper's analytical framework useful in this regard (2000). They argue that, because the term 'identity' is used heuristically within the social sciences to denote a variety of things, it loses its value as an analytical category (ibid:1). They therefore pose a threefold delineation of what is often considered identity in order to provide more analytically meaningful categories. The first dimension of identity they outline is that of

identification/categorisation which is concerned with how individuals identify/categorise themselves and are identified/categorised by others (ibid:14-17). The second dimension, which involves self-understanding and social location, is concerned with how individuals understand themselves in relation to their social locations, and how they are thus prepared to act (ibid:17-19). The third form, which is known as commonality/connectedness/groupness, deals with how individuals identify with others and feel a sense of identification with others (ibid:19-21). Although Brubaker and Cooper reject the use of the term 'identity', their threefold definition can instead be used to understand different dimensions of 'identity' itself (Shah 2017:191).

Reflexivity:

Yip has also emphasized the importance of taking reflexivity into account in the study of SSABMs in order to determine how the 'partial locations' of the researcher affect the research process (2008a:2.2). Since the reflexive turn within the social sciences, there has been an increased shift away from striving to achieve objectivity, towards recognising that the researcher's self affects how the research is carried out and how knowledge is produced. It is therefore important for researchers to be 'methodologically self-conscious' about the ways in which they produce knowledge (Finlay 2008:4). Researchers need to make explicit how their own selves affect the production of knowledge through their research.

For these reasons, I will now outline my own biography and how this has impacted my research. As a British Muslim, I have become acquainted with the 'debate' surrounding Islam and same-sex-sexuality within the British context, and how Muslim communities have responded to this debate. However, the lack of representation of SSABMs within this debate really confounded me, since it is they who have to contend with the intersectional experience of religion, ethnicity and (same-sex) sexuality within their daily lives. I therefore approached this research project with the aim of amplifying the voices of SSABMs, with a view that the insights and experiences of SSABMs can better inform this debate.

As a Muslim myself, I hold a heterosexist standpoint towards same-sex-sexuality. Although I believe that same-sex sexual acts are prohibited within Islam, I do not believe that same-sex-attractions themselves constitute a sin. However, the question which arose for me was how this impasse between religious obligation and sexual attraction is to be negotiated by a same-sex-attracted Muslim, in a way which is healthy for him/her and is in concordance with heterosexist Islamic strictures. It was this line of questioning which brought me to the Straight Struggle Online Support Group, a forum which provides same-sex-attracted Muslims worldwide support and advice to help them make sense of their sexualities and live lifestyles which conform to heterosexist Islamic strictures (Straight Struggle 2003). I joined this group to learn from other SSABMs the various possibilities they explored to negotiate their identities from this standpoint. The support group made me aware of issues affecting other SSABMs, which to some extent influenced my research trajectories. For example, there were debates on the group regarding reparative therapy and sexual orientation change efforts, which have not been systematically dealt with in the academic literature on SSABMs. These concepts therefore feature in my research and are relevant to at least one of my participants' experiences. There were also debates on the group about the implications of same-sex-attracted Muslims employing Western sexual identity constructs. This prompted me to critique existing sampling strategies utilised within SSABM research, which did not adequately consider the possibility of such identity constructs being rejected. In these instances, I have attempted to utilise my

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standpoint and past experiences as a 'resource' (Collins and Gallinat 2010) to contribute to the academic discussion on SSABMs.

However, having a heterosexist standpoint meant that I had to be reflexive about how I approached this research. The academic literature exposed me to the experiences of those SSABMs whose identity negotiations defied and challenged the heterosexist assumptions I adhered to. I had to be constantly reflexive throughout the research process to ensure that my ideas and attitudes did not contribute to the distortion or exclusion of the diverse voices within my research sample.

Methods: Sampling Strategy:

Yip has emphasized how SSABMs remain a hidden population which makes them less identifiable for social research (Yip 2008a:5.2). For this reason, previous researchers have used certain sampling strategies to mitigate the barriers to acquiring decent samples. For hidden populations more generally, link-tracing sampling strategies have been used rather than more controlled methods, which have the advantage of drawing on other people's resources in accessing hidden populations (ibid). Yip advocates for the utilisation of multiple sampling methods and contexts to maximize the possibility of gaining participants, and to ensure that the research is as representative as possible (ibid:5.4).

In order to maximize the representativeness of my samples, I advertised my research using an information sheet (Appendix 2) on the Straight Struggle support group which was non-sexuality-affirming in its approach, and on the Imaan WhatsApp support group which was sexuality-affirming in its approach. I also utilised snowballing through personal contacts. In order to aim for variability and inclusivity, I emphasized on the information sheet that individuals could participate if they identified as LGBQ or did not use these terms at all, as long as they have some experience of same-sex-attraction.

My research sample consisted of 5 British Muslim males who have same-sex-attractions. My sample consisted only of 5 participants because my research was qualitative in nature and I was interested in the depth rather than the breadth of SSABM experiences. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, conducting qualitative research was necessitated to capture the complexities and nuances of my participants' experiences (Weeks et al. 2001:201, cited in Yip 2008a:4.8). Furthermore, because of time constraints, as well as the short word-limit of this dissertation, I was not able to study a large number of SSABM experiences.

Trust:

Because of the sensitive nature of the research topic, Yip has emphasized the importance of gaining the trust of potential participants and gatekeepers (2008a:5.7-5.9). A big part of this is bearing the personal and political motivations of potential participants and gatekeepers in-mind when advertising research to them (ibid). My own motivations to raise awareness about the experiences of SSABMs was a huge factor which helped me pitch my research in a convincing way.

I also surmise that my personal contacts would have also established some level of trust with the SSABMs they contacted regarding my research, which may have led to their trust in me.

Furthermore, I felt that emphasizing the academic integrity of the research would have been a key factor in gauging the trust of potential participants and gatekeepers. For example, I emphasized that the anonymity of my participants would be maintained, and that the research was approved by a university institution.

Limitations to my sample and sampling recruitment method:

Although the utilisation of personal contacts was useful in some respects, there were limitations to this method. For one thing, there could have been biases in the participants my personal contacts selected, which could have jeopardised the variability of my sample (Yip 2008a:5.4). I attempted to mitigate this risk by utilizing various contexts to access participants with a variety of standpoints.

Another issue was that no female SSABMs expressed interest in my research. Male researchers who have conducted research with same-sex-attracted Muslims express difficulty in obtaining female participants (e.g. Abraham 2009:81, Shah 2017:26). I surmise that some female SSABMs may not feel comfortable talking to a male about their very personal experiences.

Another limitation was the fact that my sample was self-selected. Given the sensitive nature of the research topic, participants may have personal or political agendas in taking-part in the research. This could have the potential of skewing the research towards particular standpoints whilst excluding others. I thus felt that it was important to maximize the variability of the samples to minimise the effects which self-selection could have. I attempted to do this by conducting the sampling strategy within various contexts.

Data Generation Methods:

I conducted qualitative in-depth interviews with my participants (Johnson 2001:83-102). This interview method entailed the use of a series of open ended questions, which were changed or slightly modified in relation to the answers my participants gave to me (ibid:104). This method is used in studies of sensitive topics, because it allows participants considerable freedom in expressing the complexities of their insights and experiences, as well as allowing a deeper rapport to be established between researchers and interviewees (ibid:103-104, Edwards 1993:183-184). This trust and rapport lead to increased self-disclosure on the part of participants (Johnson 2001:103-104).

In order to structure my interview, I created an interview schedule (Appendix 3). The interviews lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. The questions I asked my participants were in relation to Brubaker and Cooper's threefold manifestations of 'identity' (2000), as well as the situatedness of the identity negotiations of my participants in social contexts throughout their lifetimes. I asked questions related to 1) How they identify themselves in relation to their sexualities? (identification/categorisation) 2) Their past experiences in realising their same-sex-sexualities and in dealing with them (self-understanding/social location). 3) Experiences of 'coming out' to others regarding their sexualities (Self-understanding/social-location). 4) Any support groups or networks they had joined (commonality/connectedness/groupness). 5) What were their opinions about the dominant ways in which same-sex-sexuality is dealt with in both Muslim and public Western understandings/LGBQ+ discourses. (commonality/connectedness/groupness).

Before I began my interview, I explained the research and interview process to my participants, answered any questions they had and asked them to sign a consent form. I then began asking my participants short, preliminary questions to ease them into the interview process. I initially asked my participants about their age, gender and ethnicity.

I then asked them the main questions, letting the participant answer as much as they could. I asked them more specific questions based on the answers they gave me in order to clarify certain concepts.

Although the level of intimacy required of in-depth interviewing is for the purpose of gathering sensitive information from participants (Johnson 2001), I also believe that this fulfilled an ethical requirement of ensuring my participants felt comfortable during the interview. To ensure this, I adopted Bergen's approach of 'validating' the participants' experiences, regardless of the standpoint I held towards same-sex-sexuality (1993:197). Even in instances where my participants' statements conflicted with my own viewpoints, I felt it was important to express my acknowledgement of their insights and experiences. After the, I talked about my own emotional and personal involvement in this particular research topic, as well as my standpoint on this issue. Following Bergen's reasonings, I felt self-disclosure was important on my part in re-balancing the power dynamics between myself and the participants, as well as establishing solidarity on addressing social concerns related to same-sex-sexuality (Edwards 1993:191-195).

I gave the option to my participants to decide whether they wanted to do the interview online via Skype or in person. There were a few reasons why I had given this option. During the fortnightly online Skype meetups conducted by the Straight-Struggle group, some of the members would keep their web cameras turned off in order to maintain their anonymities, or because they did not feel comfortable showing their appearance to other people whilst talking about same-sex-sexuality. I thus felt that it was necessary to conduct the interviews in this way in order to maintain the level of anonymity my potential participants would be comfortable with.

Although various participants expressed interest in having an online interview, only one participant, Amir, followed through with this. The online interview with Amir was beneficial for me since it saved me time and resources in travelling to conduct the interview. Furthermore, the verbal and non-verbal cues which exist in an onsite interaction were preserved during the online interview. I could see where Amir was feeling (un)comfortable and I was therefore able to adjust my interview technique accordingly. However, there were a few challenges I encountered in conducting the online interview. Although I used my smartphone to record the interview, there were some words and phrases which were unintelligible to me in the recording because of the streaming quality of the Skype call. The second issue I contended with was whether my potential participants would possess enough technical ability to take part in a skype call (Hooley et al 2012:51). Abid, for example, decided it was better to meet me in person since he did not feel capable in using Skype.

Another issue I was confronted with was how to secure consent from Amir whom I conducted the online interview with him. Given that I was not meeting him in person, I could not ask him to sign the consent form in hard copy. Instead, I asked him to sign the consent form online via email. I then saved the consent form on my laptop, password protected it and deleted the email.

However, I was also concerned about the consent forms of the rest of my participants as well. The signed consent forms contained the real names and signatures of my participants which could reveal their identities. In order to protect my participants' identities, I took photos of the

signed consent forms, destroyed the hard-copies and password-protected the digitised consent forms.

The interviews were spread-out to fit the timing constraints of my participants. For the participants I met in person, I allowed them to choose an appropriate location for the interview.

I recorded the interviews on my smartphone. I then transcribed the interviews verbatim and anonymised the transcripts. I then deleted the videos immediately afterwards.

After I recorded the interviews, I transcribed them verbatim, anonymised the transcripts and password-protected them. I also deleted the recordings as soon as I transcribed the interviews.

Data Analysis Methods:

For the purposes of my research, I took the view that the interview process is a social interaction. I also believe that the interviewee is conveying information that is meaningful in relation to his/her life experience and the social world more generally (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:97-99). Therefore, the interview data should be analysed both as a situationally constructed social product, and the participant's accounts should be taken as constituting true information about the participant him/herself and the social world. These assumptions affected how I analysed my data.

In order to analyse the data, I subjected my transcripts to qualitative thematic analysis (Boyatzis 1998). I read through the transcripts a few times, made marginal notes and created categories. My categories were based on a number of influences, rather than a particular theory. They were influenced by the questions I asked, the theoretical assumptions I outlined earlier in this chapter, knowledge established from previous research on SSABMs, and close readings of the transcripts, In this way, I used theoretical triangulation, namely the use of multiple theories and assumptions, to make sense of the data (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). In certain cases, I also made note of how the participant conveys information to me and what this tells me about his identity negotiation and the social influences behind this.

Ethical Approval:

This research was approved by the Cardiff University School of History, Archaeology and Religion (SHARE) Research Ethics Committee.

Findings:

For my research project, I interviewed 5 British Muslim males who have same-sex-attractions. I outline their biographies below.

Amir is 38 years old and was born in the UK. His parents are from Pakistan. He currently works full-time in the retail industry. I met Amir through the Straight Struggle Support Group after advertising my research on the group (Straight Struggle 2003, see pg.3). During the interview, Amir told me his ideas are informed by the works of Joseph Nicholosi (1997) who, during his lifetime, was one of the main proponents of Reparative Therapy in the United States. Thus, ideas of Reparative Therapy feeds heavily into what Amir tells me.

Peter is 20 years old and is a white British convert to Islam. He converted within a year since I interviewed him, and he is from an agnostic family background. Peter currently studies in the UK. However, his place of residence in the UK has a very small Muslim population. I had met Peter through a personal contact.

Andrew is 22 years old and is a white French convert to Islam. like Peter, he also converted to Islam within a year since I had interviewed him, and he is also from an agnostic family background. Andrew is currently studying at a London university. I had met Andrew through the same personal contact who introduced me to Peter.

Sajid is 41 years old. His parents are from Pakistan. He currently lives and works in London. His work involves dealing with LGBT+ issues. I had met Sajid through a personal contact.

Finally, Abid is 31 years old. He was born in Bangladesh yet moved to the UK when he was very young. He currently lives and works in East London in the charity sector. He is also involved with the LGBT+ Muslim charity Imaan (see pg.5-6). Abid had contacted me after I had shared my research on the Imaan LGBT+ WhatsApp group.

Below, I will first elaborate on the beliefs and attitudes of my participants towards same-sex-sexuality before outlining the themes I had deduced from the interviews I conducted. These include: 1) Sexual identification/categorisation 2) Negotiating same-sex desire, conduct and relationships 3) Negotiating family and community dynamics 4) support group and networks 5) critiquing wider discourses.

Beliefs and Attitudes towards same-sex-sexuality:

During the interviews, I asked each participant what their beliefs and attitudes were towards same-sex-sexuality. These beliefs and attitudes affected how my participants responded to my questions, and I thus refer back throughout the course of this chapter.

Being part of the support group, Amir held a non-sexuality-affirming stance towards same-sex-sexuality. This is demonstrated from the answer he gave to me about what he believes regarding same-sex-sexuality:

And so my core self has physically been male and my body works in a certain way because its designed to procreate. And the more I have read about SSAs[3], the more I have seen them as a psychological thing layered on top of my core self.

Here, he draws on scientific and religious understandings of gender and sexuality in a way which defines right/good sexuality as that which concords with one's anatomical sex and serves a procreative function (Rahman and Jackson 2010:115-116). This explanation is heavily influenced by reparative therapy discourse which considers same-sex-attraction within a male to be the result of traumatic experiences during childhood, which cause him to develop an impaired sense of masculinity (Nicholosi 1997). Same-sex-sexuality is therefore considered a perversion from a natural order and is explained as a 'psychological thing layered on top of my core (male) self'.

Peter, however, held a more affirmative understanding towards same-sex-sexuality, as follows:

Peter: So I don't see it as wrong, it's natural. As for whether it's inborn or in the womb, I don't think it's necessary to know that. it's not something a person has control over…Qur'anically, I don't see any reason to be against it

Just like Amir does, Peter also draws on the legitimating potentials of science and religion. His claim that same-sex-sexuality is natural can be interpreted either in a literal, biological sense, as he considers whether sexuality is determined in the womb. It can also be interpreted as an attempt to assert its moral viability on the grounds that it is 'natural'. He also justifies the moral viability of same-sex-sexuality by claiming that it is something which an individual has no control over. Peter's justification for same-sex-sexuality on religious grounds may be influenced by voices within the Progressive Islam movement (e.g., see Kugle 2010), which draw on the Qur'an to legitimate same-sex-sexuality from an Islamic standpoint.

Although Amir and Peter had conclusive beliefs regarding same-sex-sexuality, Andrew, Sajid and Abid struggled to articulate definitive stances on this issue. Andrew expressed how his views regarding same-sex-sexuality had not yet been formulated, since he had just recently converted to Islam. Nevertheless, when I asked him what he would expect from his religion, he stated the following:

I expect that certain sex acts are not permitted and to be honest having had a past as a non-Muslim, I didn't really have qualms about that. I'm fairly sure that anal sex is not permitted. But from that to go to…any kind of homosexual sex act is a huge stretch. Gay sex isn't anal sex. Anal sex isn't gay sex…

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[3] Shorthand for Same-Sex-Attractions.

Despite the possible condemnation of anal-sex, he is still willing to pursue the question of whether or not other, non-penetrative acts are permitted. However, his willingness to accept anal sex as forbidden is based on his past experiences. During the interview, he expressed how converting to Islam was helpful for him since it enabled him to end patterns of sexual conduct which were 'genuinely quite harmful'. This may explain why he has no qualms about some sex acts being forbidden.

Sajid also maintained the idea that anal-sex is forbidden. However, just like Andrew, he still is searching for sexual possibilities which may concord with his religious standpoints:

when it comes down to anal sex…I still feel that's not right. From the back of my head there's always this thing of…it's not right…And that's really impacted my whole life and that's been the subconscious discourse when I am having relationships and why relationships broke down and where I struggle, and I don't fit in the gay world, and I don't fit this world, because I belong neither. And I'm still trying to find this central voice. ive got to find out a way long term you know having physical relationships…

Here, the condemnation of anal sex is not only a belief, but a 'subconscious discourse' which has affected the patterns of sexual relationships Sajid had previously engaged in. These experiences have led to a feeling of tension whilst 'struggling' between the Muslim and gay worlds, since his sense of belonging in either world is hugely predicated on whether/not he can perform anal sex. Nevertheless, his persistence in trying to find a 'central voice' in pursuing a relationship shows how both his sexual *and* religious identities will be important to any future relationship configuration he pursues.

Just like Sajid, Abid also experienced difficulties in negotiating between his religious and sexual identities:

Yes it does say in Islam that it is wrong. But what can I do? I can't change myself. But from day to day I pray to Allah to change me. Some people say that, Shaytaan[4] has made me gay. Its forbidden in the Quran. I am conflicted between gay and Islam. Some people say sexuality is natural, other people say it's not. I don't know.

Abid does adhere to conservative Islamic restrictions. However, these religious convictions contrast with the actual impossibility to 'change' himself, which contributes to his feeling of 'conflict'. He is also confronted with unresolved debates, such as whether/not sexuality is natural, which adds to his confusion. Of course, as we have seen in Peter's case, the question of the naturality of sexuality feeds into whether/not same-sex-sexual acts are morally viable. However, this experience of conflict is complicated with his following remarks:

All I can say is Allah knows best when it comes to sexuality, whether you're gay or straight it should not matter. You should be happy with who you are.

I have been following Islam my whole life and I believe that Allah has given this to me as a gift

In these latter statements, Abid is forging more personalised, affirming interpretations of his sexuality. His belief that his sexuality is a gift from God is an attempt to break away from the institutional and interactional manifestations of Islamic heterosexism which troubles him. He

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[4] The Arabic term for 'Satan'.

draws on a discourse of individualism and equality in dealing with his sexuality, when he says: 'you should be happy with who you are'. Abid's reliance on an omniscient God regarding his sexuality enables him to form a relationship of trust with God and to suspend the confusion these matters were causing him.

1. Sexual identification/categorisation:

During the Straight Struggle support group discussions, I had observed how the issue of adopting LGBT+ identity constructs was a huge point of contention, with some individuals on the group rejecting sexual identity categories. I therefore discussed in the literature review how researchers studying SSABMs need to take into account those SSABMs who do not identify as LGBQ+ in their samples (see pg.11-12). In light of this, I will demonstrate below how two of my participants reject sexual identity constructs.

Out of the 5 participants, Peter, Sajid and Abid all self-identified as gay. For them, being gay simply meant having same-sex-attractions. Andrew and Amir, however, did not identify themselves as gay, bisexual or queer.

Amir self-identified as straight despite having same-sex-attractions. He identified as biologically male and religiously as created to fulfil a reproductive function. He therefore belittles the idea that same-sex-desire represents a core part of an individual's self and instead sees it as a psychological layer over a core male biological self.

I would say I'm straight, from a biological point of view. I don't really identify with gay. As Ive gotten older and have understood about the attractions, the less I see it as an orientation and more as a psychological thing layered on top of a core male self. Deep down, I'm male, and biologically I'm male. I'm designed to work in a certain way. And I see myself as the creation of Allah.

Given that the gay identity label has been popularly utilised by homosexual peoples and movements who affirm their sexualities as essential aspects of their identity, it is understandable why Amir would reject the term. Instead he affirms that he is straight. His internalised assumptions of reparative therapy have contributed to the references he made to psychology and biology, since reparative therapy is influenced by the idea that an individual's natural sexuality serves a reproductive function and is largely determined by his/her biological sex (Rahman and Jackson 2010:115).

Andrew also contested the use of a sexual identity label:

The way I have experienced my sexual orientation is very much based on the individuals I've met, and the way each situation is played out in very different ways. It's really difficult for me to say, there's a word that can describe all of that. it's just my life.

One can see from this account how a big factor which affects sexual selfhood is the reflexive sexual/intimate engagements one has with others (Rahman and Jackson 2010:170-171). Unlike Amir, his conclusions regarding sexual identity categories were not so much based on his beliefs as much as they were based on his reflections on past experiences.

2. Negotiating Desire, Sexual/Intimate relationships and sexual/intimate conduct:

Exploring the experiences deemed 'sexual' or 'intimate' in my participants' lives in more detail did not occur to me until I read Gagnon and Simon's Sexual Conduct (1973). They centralise the study of sexuality as a social phenomenon. They argue that sexuality is organised and maintained between social actors though sexual 'scripts', which are configurations of sexual conduct and desire. These scripts exist at the social, interpersonal and intrapsychic levels and affect the interpersonal and intrapsychic negotiations of sexual desire and conduct. Here, I will thus be concerned with the social 'scripts', or discourses, informing the negotiations of sexual/intimate conduct and desire of my participants.

All of my participants attempted to or had pursued at least one relationship or sexual/intimate encounter. Religion played a huge role in the scripting of these interactions.

As we had previously explored, Sajid believes that anal sex is wrong, which has always been a pivotal factor in the breakdown of previous relationships, and his lack of sense of belonging within both the Muslim and gay worlds (pg.22). This 'subconscious discourse' influences how he reflexively deals with sexual encounters. This is demonstrated in the following account of his initial sexual encounter:

… I mean we never had anal sex but we had sex and I remember when he came 'round, and I knew it was gonna happen and…I was shaking all night, I couldn't sleep, I was nervous but I was also excited as well, so when it did finally happen, I was like paralyzed and didn't go to work for two days, I was like oh my god what have I done? I'm gonna go to hell…

The internalised religious injunctions condemning same-sex sexual acts caused him to have feelings of intense guilt and fear for transgressing religious boundaries (Jaspal and Cinnirella 2010). His mixed feelings of excitement and nervousness exemplify the psychological dissonance arising because of the conflict between his religious beliefs and the sexual activity he engaged in (ibid).

Although Amir believed that same-sex sexual acts are forbidden, he did at one-point attempt to engage in a non-sexual relationship with a non-Muslim gay man. This was during a time when Amir self-identified as 'gay':

I met someone at university, and we went out a couple of times…and he wanted to do a lot more than what I was comfortable to do. And when I was in that situation I was thinking well this is what the lifestyle is like. They want to have sex, and they want to do things that aren't Islamic.

I think that the mixture of my religion made me quite unique to the gay community. In that because of my religion, my wants my goals were slightly different. And because of that i would probably never meet someone who would have a similar outlook.

The intersection of his religious identity meant that his motives and goals in pursuing a non-sexual relationship conflicted with the sexual motives of the gay man. He then generalised from this experience about the gay-lifestyle as affirming same-sex-sexual acts. His religious adherence thus affects his self-perception as unique to the gay world and his sense of belonging

to it. I was however confused as to his reason for pursuing a non-sexual relationship. When I enquired about this, he said:

I looked at peers in my community getting married and having children and not being alone. And I did not want to be alone.

What is clear from Amir's answer is that he draws on the heteronormative familial configurations surrounding him to articulate his same-sex desire.

A similar kind of non-sexual configuration was also pursued by Andrew. He describes the interactions he has with other men since his conversion to Islam:

……what has happened persistently like ive tried to be as clear as I can that its not going to be anything beyond a friendship and for some reason….i don't pick up on the signals that they don't really get it. And then I still try to be friends with them and then that gets ambiguous and then im like oh…have I led you on? And then I feel bad…

Andrew did not explicitly tell me what kind of desire he was attempting to fulfil. However, he does emphasize at another point that he used to engage in sexual relationships that were 'genuinely harmful' for him because he felt lonely, which was similar to Amir's fear of being alone. It seems that he is skating the condemnation of sexuality, whilst trying to fulfil a need for intimacy to deal with loneliness. During these interactions, he tells the men he meets that he cannot be involved in a relationship 'right-now'. This final condition may be a way in which he suspends the question of a relationship until a time he is completely sure he can pursue it (or not!) from a religious standpoint. It is also clear from his account that the conflicting motives between himself and these other men leads to interactional glitches in navigating the fulfilment of desire.

Nevertheless, Andrew did experience positive outcomes to his sexual experiences since his conversion; Andrew told me that his whole conception of sexuality changed. He briefly compares his pre-convert and post-convert experiences of sexuality:

I wouldn't have called myself a hedonist but that's what it was just like, when you don't feel there's anything beyond your current existence, it's really hard not to fall into hedonism…even if you know it's bad…even if it doesn't fulfil you. And to be honest converting has helped me deal with my relationship choices…and (before I converted) I would have sexual encounters with people and a lot of it was genuinely quite harmful…I would just overlook those things to be like oh I'm just lonely, I just want company I want contact. And the rest of it (harmful sex) is ok because these things are somehow going to help, they're gonna relieve me and since ive converted like…ive had to break those thought patterns because it just doesn't make sense anymore.

The Islamic concept of a hereafter helped Andrew put his life into perspective since he no longer felt this is the only life, which helped him overcome hedonism. What is ironic about this experience is that conversion helped him with his *same-sex* relationships. Islam has helped him in ways which do not fully rely on conventional readings of scripture (i.e. the prohibition of same-sex relationships). This indicates how he draws on religion as a cultural resource (Beckford 2001:233) to help him negotiate his same-sex desire.

Andrew was not the only participant who had experienced harmful sexual encounters. Both Abid and Sajid had experienced sexual abuse. Sajid experienced sexual abuse when he was younger. Abid, however, purported to have experienced rape at the age of eighteen from his first 'boyfriend'. This was during a time when he was in the closet from his family and the wider community, yet exploring LBGT+ groups for help and support coming-to-terms with his sexuality:

When I first met my boyfriend, I got raped because I didn't know anybody else. I felt lonely, isolated, depressed. It's like somebody saying if you don't have sex with me, I can't help you, I can't love you…

It is interesting to note that there is some level of consent on Abid's part in this encounter, particularly where he gives the reasoning for his rape: 'because I didn't know anybody else'. However, it seems from the second line that the 'rapist' was exploiting Abid's emotional and psychological vulnerability resulted from his marginalised position as a same-sex-attracted individual. It was clear during the interview that he had internalised homophobia which may have contributed to this emotional/psychological vulnerability. When he initially experienced same-sex-attractions, he told me that he 'hated himself'. One could thus argue that the power dynamics in this interaction were not in Abid's favour, even if consent was seemingly given. Both Abid and Andrew's experiences of harmful sexual encounters seem to have resulted from the marginal positions they occupied which resulted in their feelings of loneliness or isolation, which lead to their exploitation.

3. Negotiating Family and Community Relations:

The importance of family and community relations cannot be overestimated in the identity negotiations of SSABMs (Yip 2004). It was thus inevitable that I ask my participants about their experiences with their families and the Muslim/ethnic minority communities they belong to. I initially began with the question of 'coming-out', since my participants' families and/or communities could only be actively involved in the negotiation of my participants' sexualities, if their sexualities were known to them. Furthermore, given that the concept of coming-out typically applies to Western understandings of sexual identity construction (see pg.9-10), I wanted to explore how this concept manifested in the lives of my participants and how this compares to dominant notions of coming-out.

Amir, Sajid and Abid, who were all from ethnic minority south Asian backgrounds, did not voluntarily come-out to their families. Amir, for example, articulates his reasons for not coming-out:

(when I was younger) sometimes people would make funny jokes about me, … when I was a kid and kind of being mistaken as a woman, I can laugh about it now, but it's quite kind of traumatising as a kid to go through that…so in terms of telling my family, no. no….I wouldn't expect them to understand

Here, the fact that his family stigmatized him because of his deviant gendered behaviour meant that they most probably would not understand his 'deviant' sexual experience.

However, both Sajid and Abid were involuntarily outed to their family members. When Abid's family found out about his sexuality, they were in shock and his sexual identity became hugely politicised within a wider family dispute:

my dad's family tried to kill my mum and dad over money over business and everyone in my distant family knew I was gay, so they had a fight over me being gay. Apparently, my sister is a slut.

Because sexuality is heavily regulated through a discourse of Izzat (honour) within South Asian ethnic minority communities (Zaidi et al 2014:30-32), deviant sexualities of family members may become hugely contested if they are revealed. In this case, Abid's same-sex-sexuality and the allegation against his sister were used as leverage in the other family's favour.

After their sexualities became known, Abid and Sajid were confronted with family pressures to engage in heterosexual marriage. Sajid, for example, was pressured into marrying twice.

I was engaged twice to girls. The second time, I felt like I was walking into a prison sentence, and I was going crazy. Everyone around me was like no it'll be ok. And no one was understanding me, and I was thinking am I gonna physically have sex or do anything?

Heterosexual marriage within Muslim communities can be perceived as a way to cure same-sex-attractions (Jaspal and Cinnirella 2014:428). This assumption was embedded within the community to such an extent that Sajid's concerns regarding whether/not he would be able to fulfil heterosexual marital roles, as well as the intense distress he was experiencing, were not being considered. Instead, there was an overemphasis on the performance of heterosexuality rather than questioning its viability for a non-heterosexual like Sajid.

Because of the pressures which Sajid and Abid had suffered, they both eventually left their families. Abid's case of moving out exemplifies some of the repercussions which can affect SSABMs once their families reject them:

I lost the right of the family,…you know when youre Asian, whatever belongs to your father, after he dies, it carries on to you. So I lost that. The house. The family. And then when I first left home my family tried to kill me.

Here, it can be seen how Abid's 'failure' to perform heterosexual masculine roles led to his loss of social, economic and symbolic capital associated with patrilineal systems which normatively exist within South Asian communities (Deepak 2005:595). However, Abid still tried to stay in touch with his family:

Ten years later, I got back into contact. Yes, it is contradicting, they have been difficult. But I've got nobody else.

Abid's loss of social and economic capital rendered him helpless to the extent that he had to reach-out to his family again.

In order to avoid marriage, Sajid tried to cross generational barriers with his mom by appealing to her cultural sensitivities whilst telling her he did not want to get married:

Cos she's from an older generation, she finds it uncomfortable. So, once I had approached this conversation, I was like mum you know the reason why I can't get married. She said ok then don't get married then. And then I said mum you do know what I'm talking about, don't you? And she said 'yes'. And I thought brilliant we reached a breakthrough I didn't have to use the word gay or anything like that…

Here, Sajid did not use the word 'gay' with his mother, in order to remain sensitive to her cultural idiosyncrasies.

Although Amir did not come-out to his family, he was able to negotiate around the communal obligation to get married by emphasizing his familial duty to look after his ill mother and his little sister. These duties acted as a buffer for him to postpone the obligation of heterosexual marriage.

as I got into my late twenties and early thirties, my mum got quite ill, and I was at home with her, looking after her…..that kind of pressure to get married and move out…..was less so for me? Because everyone was like you're looking after mum and so it's, we understand.

Amir describes how this experience acted as a 'security blanket', to hide the real reason for not getting married, namely his same-sex-desires. However, the fact that he had same-sex-attractions was particularly helpful, as he later mentioned that the desire to not be in a heterosexual marriage allowed him to look after his family. In this sense, he described how his same-sex-attractions were a 'blessing'. Here, he draws on religion as a 'cultural resource' (Beckford 2001:233) to validate the existence of his same-sex-attractions as serving a purpose.

As converts to Islam, both Peter and Andrew demonstrated an experience which is unique to the academic literature on SSABMs. As well as contending with the question of coming-out to the Muslim communities about their sexualities, they also had to contend with the question of coming-out to their families about their Muslim identities.

Both Peter and Andrew had already come-out to their own families about being gay before conversion. They had come out to certain members of the Muslim community as well. Although neither of them reported to have experienced any homophobia directed to them, Peter did encounter some confusion from members of the Muslim community about his conversion to Islam:

One friend, out of confusion, he genuinely did not understand why anyone gay would think about becoming Muslim. And I think a few people I initially encountered had this confusion.

Here, Peter had to navigate the perceived impossibility of there being a gay Muslim identity in common perceptions of Islam and same-sex-sexuality (Abraham 2009).

Although it was the case that they did not experience homophobia themselves, both Andrew and Peter were still concerned that coming-out in certain situations could risk their identities being threatened. This was demonstrated when Peter gained increased awareness of views and attitudes which existed beyond the university environment:

I went to an Imam from my local mosque…and because I'd only really seen Muslims either on college or in UNIVERSITY, I wasn't too sure what it would look like outside that..so I asked, if I came to this mosque…openly gay what would happen? And he just basically said that people

would stop sitting next to you, they'd stop talking to you…and he suggested that I'd just lie about it. …so I think it became more of an issue of how I would interact with other people and how this would be perceived.

Hence, for Peter and Andrew, coming-out is a situational process which happens after a consideration of the benefits and drawbacks of disclosure within certain situations (Jaspal and Siraj 2011). This experience also exemplifies how social location is a major factor determining Peter's willingness to come-out. The university environment fosters a kind of equality and diversity politics which protects the rights of openly gay people like Peter, whereas the mosque environment could potentially foster heterosexist attitudes which would be excluding towards him.

This situational nature of coming-out was also true for how Peter and Andrew negotiated coming-out to their families about their religious identities. Both of them felt that, for the time being, coming-out to their families would be threatening to their familial and religious identities. Peter in particular did not come-out to his family about his Muslim identity because of the anti-Muslim prejudice exhibited by his father:

…he described Islam as evil on multiple occasions. I have a particular memory of putting Al-Jazeera (An Arab News Channel) on. And he was asleep, and he woke up and was like 'why are you watching this? Remember, you are us, not them.' I think in his head, if I became Muslim. I would be leaving the family a bit, or rejecting his tradition.

…um I think the way it calmed down was…again they don't know I'm Muslim. I will tell them eventually. But I think a lot of work needs to happen before that.

What is interesting about this experience is that attitudes exhibited by his father towards Peter's (potential) Muslim identity are similar to those exhibited by ethnic minority Muslim families to SSABM family members, in the sense that Peter's identity would be considered a threat to family tradition, and in the sense that Peter's father otherizes Muslims in a 'them-and-us' fashion.

A strategy which Peter adopted to make the religion of Islam more amenable to his parents was articulating Islamic concepts to them in a way which would be appealing to their cultural idiosyncrasies. Peter explained the process of 'secularising religion' to his parents by explaining the benefits of adhering to Islamic practices. One example he gives is of comparing Salah to Yoga:

And part of (making Islam more attractive to my family) is…also reaffirming that its not an issue for me. Like ive found praying calming. Ive made it analogous to yoga before, which can have secular benefits even though it was originally Hindu. …like it's good for balance, its good for calming. If you look at Salah I think you can make analogies. You have to say certain things in certain times. I think it could have the same calming out-come…

In doing this, Peter hopes to 'emphasize similarity' between Islamic injunctions and what is deemed good from a secular standpoint. As Peter remarks, 'If I want to explain why I do certain things I can't just say the Qur'an says this', since this would not appeal to his family's own ontological assumptions. Just as Sajid had to negotiate inter-generational barriers to appeal to his parents' idiosyncrasies, Peter had to negotiated inter-faith barriers in order to do the same.

As white British converts to Islam, Peter and Andrew brought a unique experience of dealing with religious and cultural homophobia within the Muslim community. Although Peter and Andrew had not experienced homophobia directly, there were situations they encountered where homophobia was either said or done. However, they felt that they were able to exercise considerable agency in navigating around this homophobia because of their social locations as converts to Islam who were not tied to closely knit familial and communal structures, and as university students who were temporarily residing in a certain area. Peter articulates his insights on this issue:

because I'm living in London, going to university, if there's a homophobic imam, I could just never go back to that mosque. If that was the one that you live near to and you have connections with, I could imagine that would be a lot harder. if I lived in that area, if the parents knew the Imaam, that's a very different case. So to a certain degree I don't think its fair to take everything that happens against gay Muslims because of where I'm coming from.

This is markedly different to Abid's situation, since his connections with his family, as well as his dependence on them for socio-economic capital, stifles his ability to negotiate family structures in ways he wanted to (See pg.27). Thus, Peter was more privileged to a certain extent than Abid in the ways he could negotiate around homophobia.

4. Support Groups and Networks:

Previous studies have shown how many SSABMs find a sense of identification and belonging with others who engage in mutually supporting each-other (e.g. see Shah 2017, Yip 2007). This section deals with how my participants have established a sense of commonality, connectedness and/or groupness (Brubaker and Cooper 2000) with others, both SSABM and otherwise, through the exploration of support groups and networks, and how affected their identity formations.

All of my participants, except for Sajid, are involved with SSABM support groups or networks to some capacity. Amir is currently a member of the Straight Struggle yahoo support group. Peter and Andrew are not formally part of any support groups, although they do attend events which are held by the Inclusive Mosque Initiative. Abid has been involved with support groups and networks which are geared towards ethnic minority and/or Muslim SSABMs, such as the Dost support group, the Naz Project, Positive East, and the Imaan group which he is currently involved in. Sajid did not purport to be actively involved in support groups, although he has interacted with the inclusive mosque initiative for the purposes of professional networks. I thus do not elaborate on his experiences here.

One of the benefits my participants expressed in being involved in these support networks was that their standpoints were validated through the commonalities they established with other SSABMs. Amir outlines his experience below:

it was the first time I could write to anyone and be completely honest about things from an Islamic point of view

Amir's need to feel validated and understood was the result of the marginalisation he had experienced. As an ethnic minority SSABM, he found it difficult to come-out to his family and close community about his sexuality (see pg.26). Likewise, as a non-affirmative SSABM

within a wider climate of the acceptance of same-sex-sexualities, there were very few networks or support groups he could approach which could validate his standpoints. Thus, the online support group provided a platform where his intersectional standpoint could be acknowledged by other SSABMs who shared in his opinions and experiences.

Peter also felt a sense of validation and belonging in exploring the Inclusive Mosque Initiative (IMI). Although he was convinced that there is no theological conflict between religion and sexuality, he was concerned that the identity configuration of a 'gay Muslim' would not be socially possible within the Muslim community. He thus felt that the Inclusive Mosque Initiative helped him in this regard:

...at least when I saw IMI, it felt very much like gay and Muslim were consistent. Like they could exist together and you could live fulfilling lives, and it didn't necessarily matter.

Given that Peter was confident within himself that being a gay Muslim is not a conflicting identity configuration, Peter's perceived need of finding a socially acceptable manifestation of the gay Muslim identity should be further explored. This was perhaps influenced by LGBT+ discourses which proclaim that genuine liberation can only be attained if one's (non-hetero)sexual identity becomes socially accepted (Siraj 2018:31). This was a big reason why some of the British Muslim lesbians whom Siraj had interviewed felt they were living 'inauthentic lives' whilst remaining within the closet. Given that Peter's self-identification as gay aligns him with wider LGBT+ community, Peter may have internalised this assumption as well. Otherwise, he could have remained fully content with the knowledge that his 'gay' identity is acceptable in the eyes of God. He thus felt that IMI had established this social possibility for him, from his own observation of other LGBQ Muslims within these spaces 'living fulfilling lives'.

Furthermore, the fact that he felt It 'didn't necessarily matter' in these settings that religion and sexuality came together shows how support groups such as IMI provide a 'respite from the heteronormative reality that many of its members are submerged in' (Siraj 2012:462). Andrew also expressed a similar experience regarding his interactions with IMI, stating that if he did experience homophobia, 'there is always a place where I can go and worship with other people' in order to feel safe and a sense of belonging.

Another benefit which my participants had expressed was the practical support they gained in times of need. Abid joined a range of support groups which catered for SSABMs of South-Asian background as well as BME non-heterosexuals. They provided him with counselling services when he was raped, when he was struggling with his family and when he left home:

So when I was raped, I went to counselling.

The first group was positive east. I didn't accept myself then, I was living with family. I was still seeing my support worker on and off. It started to affect me I started to have counselling. After I left home I started going there more often.

The fact that Abid 'didn't accept himself' when he initially began to attend Positive East sessions probably indicates that this was a main reason behind his accessing of support networks. He recounts how the groups helped him come to terms with and accept his sexuality, by providing the knowledge base to help him understand the complexities of his intersectional experience:

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For me, the groups helped me understand myself, accept myself, understand conflict of Islam and myself and Allah, society and religion, family and religion, sexuality and religion.

The support groups Abid attended provided workshops, circle-group discussions and opportunities to socialise with other SSABMs. These helped him acquire the knowledge base to understand the conflicting discourses associated with his identities and to help him process these conflicting tensions within himself.

Amir's experience of receiving practical support from the support-group is insightful to explore since it represents an example of non-sexuality-affirming negotiation of sexual identity. Every time sexual feelings would come to his mind, Amir would 'rationalise' these feelings. Typing these feelings to a friend on the Yahoo group helped him do this:

....and I would say I felt like this, and it must have come from here, not because I want to be with that guy but because I feel insecurity within myself, and as I would type that out, I would understand it more for what it was

Here, Amir's intrapsychic negotiation of same-sex-sexuality is based on the reparative therapy discourse assumption that male same-sex-attractions represent a drive to repair the unmet psycho-emotional need of internalising a full sense of masculinity (Nicholosi 1997). Amir thus felt that the group helped him process these feelings to uncover the 'insecurity' these feelings actually represented within his own sense of masculinity and thus 'understand it more for what it was'. The group thus helped him confirm and solidify his own assumptions regarding his sexuality through processing his feelings with others, and to maintain his sexuality in-line with his religious and psychological assumptions.

5. Critiquing Wider Discourses and Social Structures:

During the course of the interviews, I asked my participants what they think about the ways in which Muslim and Western/LGBT+ communities respond to the question of same-sex-sexuality, the existence of SSABMs and Islam. I asked these questions because the identities of SSABMs are influenced by the wider discourses and social-structures which exist within Muslim and Western/LGBT+ communities (Rahman 2010). Since these discourses and social-structures may exclude or marginalise SSABMs in different ways, I wanted to explore how my participants critiqued and deconstructed these discourses and social structures in order to unearth how they are incomplete by virtue of excluding the experiences of SSABMs.

One thing my participants emphasised was that Muslim communities lack adequate knowledge of same-sex-sexuality in the constructions of their discourses. Peter, for example, refers to an article he encountered on an Islamic website, criticising how it conflated sexual fluidity with the idea that sexuality is a choice:

...it's a really weird inference to make if someone says fluid means choice. Cos they aren't the same. your hair can grow grey...its fluid its changing...but it's not something youre causing to happen. I think that's a very important distinction to make. I feel that they weren't considering that gay Muslims' lives were being damaged so heavily by this...they weren't bothered to actually talk to any gay Muslims. It was just this is half, badly-interpreted bit of research that was attached to a verse in the Qur'an.

The above example shows how dogmatic standpoints adopted by Muslim voices may motivate the construction of discourse in ways which ignores evidence-based conclusions and thus can be harmful for SSABMs. This is done so that Islamic injunctions on sexuality may seem complete, particularly if they are 'seemingly' proven by scientific evidence.

Amir's standpoint differed from Peter's, in that he agreed that Muslims should condemn same-sex sexual acts. He therefore critiqued juristic discourses which utilise the term 'homosexuality', and talk about whether or not 'homosexuality' is sinful, because 'to anybody here that means anyone who has the attractions, so anytime you say homosexuality is a sin, you have told that person that they are sinful for who they are.' He thus felt that juristic discourses should go beyond Western terminologies of sexuality 'because you can't give an Islamic ruling on something there isn't an Islamic word for'. He felt that a distinction between actions and attractions should be made. However, even where he felt this had happened, he still felt that the SSABM faces another degree of marginalisation, in that no support is given to a person who has same-sex-attractions, other than being told that 'you're stuck with this so deal with it' and the 'only people who they (SSABMs) feel they can talk to are the gay community and Imaan or that sort of thing'. Here, he positions Imaan as a sexuality-affirming outlier to the correct stance of the Muslim community and assimilates it with the gay community to indicate this. He sees it as a misfortune for SSABMs to join these groups.

Some of my participants also critiqued the LGBT+ communities. These critiques had to do with the Islamophobias and racisms existing within these communities. Sajid, for example, narrates his experience looking for relationships on a gay dating app:

…Asians are just looked down upon. It's like- In the gay pecking order, the Thai Chinese, I don't know why, they get worst, and then there are some who are fetishized black, not quite black, and then there's you know I can't explain it its just…It's deep in the mind, it's not conscious.

He also emphasizes how there is Islamophobia within the LGBT community as well:

firstly, people are just Islamophobic in general. The gay community are even more Islamophobic because they are like oh this religion hates us. Because they hate their own religion as well.
you know when London pride was going on there was an Imaan float on Muslim lgbts. They were getting smeared at by mainstream lgbts. So interesting right? So this is gay pride. And you have gay Muslims celebrating pride and a lot of the kind of mainstream pride were being Islamophobic…that says a lot to me.

Sajid's elaboration of the 'gay pecking order' signifies how sexual preferences and desires within the gay community are dominantly constructed by white, middle-class gay men, in ways which construct non-white gay men as the sexual objects of white gay men, or as sexually available for them (Teunis 2007). However, as Jaspal and Cinnirella have noted, the lack of preference exhibited towards Asians may reflect how Asians are associated with a culture and/or religion which is deemed homophobic or retrogressive to LGBT+ rights (2017). LGBQ Asians, particularly if they self-define as Muslims, will thus experience rejection or discrimination within LGBQ spaces.

Sajid's recounting of the Islamophobia which took place in Pride 2017 is exemplary of this. Sajid indicates how Islamophobia may become amplified, within LGBQ communities because

of the heterosexism and homophobia they may perceive within 'their own religion', which makes them suspect of religious institutions more generally as bastions of heteronormativity (yip 2008a:4.3). Sajid, however, unearths the contradictions in this Islamophobic rhetoric by comparing it to the apparently inclusive ethos associated with Pride. Sajid thus draws a distinction between 'mainstream pride' and 'gay Muslims' to indicate the marginalised position which the latter occupy to the former through the experiences of Islamophobia.

Discussion: Significance, Implications and Contributions to the field:

Now that I have outlined the findings of my research, I will proceed to discuss the significance and implications of my findings.

My sample was diverse and contributed to the research in various ways. Sajid and Abid had backgrounds typical of participants studied in previous research, as individuals who were from south Asian ethnic minority communities, and who self-identified as 'gay' (pg.?). However, Andrew and Peter, who are white British converts to Islam, contributed insights and experiences which are unique to the field. This was the same for Amir, who was recruited from a non-sexuality-affirming support group, adhered to reparative therapy discourse and did not self-define as gay.

Sexual Identification and Categorisation:

In the section 'Sexual Identification and Categorisation', I explored how two of my participants, Amir and Andrew, rejected Western sexual identity constructs. Amir's rejection was based on his religious and scientific assumptions regarding the proper place of sexuality within his life. Andrew rejected these categories since he felt they could not encompass the complexity of his sexual experiences. These findings are unique to the academic literature, given that researchers studying SSABMs generally do not consider within their sampling strategies individuals who may reject Western sexual identity constructs (see pg.11-12). Although my findings establish the obvious fact that some SSABMs choose to reject these constructs, they also establish how SSABMs reflexivity negotiate these constructs in relation to other subjective and objective factors (Shah 2017:5-6). There is thus a need for researchers to not take these constructs for granted in their sampling strategies. It is better to interrogate the taken-for-granted assumptions associated with these categories instead. A good example of this interrogation is Massad's critique of international LGBT+ human rights organisations. Massad argues that LGBT+ paradigms are predicated on 'Western sexual epistemologies' which are integrated into human rights discourses and perpetuated by international LGBT+ human rights organisations, which he collectively calls the Gay International (2002). The Gay International claims to campaign for the liberation of non-heterosexuals from supposedly oppressive Islamic regimes. They attempt to liberate them by 'transforming them from practitioners of same-sex contact into subjects who identify as homosexual and gay.' (ibid:362). They thereby 'produce homosexuals, gays and lesbians, where they do not exist, and repress same-sex desires and practices that refuse to be assimilated into their sexual epistemologies' (ibid:363). Massad's critique is important since he reminds us that assuming

the universality of LGBT+ identities can exclude the (sexual) identity configurations of individuals who are unwilling to adhere to such paradigms. Given these constructs are predicated on Western sexual epistemologies, it is important to examine how these constructs are reflexively dealt with by SSABMs, whose religion and ethnicities are typically understood to be opposed to the Western acceptance of same-sex sexualities (Rahman 2010). As I have established in the literature review, researchers within British Muslim studies have begun to explore how SSABMs who are Muslim and LGBQ disrupt dominant understandings of what it means to belong to both Muslim and LGBQ categories (pg.9-10). However, as my findings have shown, researchers should take further steps in acknowledging the possibility of these Western sexual identity paradigms being rejected.

Negotiating sexual/intimate desire, sexual/intimate relationships and patterns of sexual/intimate conduct:

My findings suggest that religion plays a huge role in how SSABMs negotiate desire, relationships and sexual/intimate conduct, both at the intrapsychic and the interpersonal levels. At the intrapsychic levels, Sajid's experience of fear and guilt mirror similar experiences of other SSABMs who engaged in same-sex sexual contact (jaspal 2010, Jaspal and Cinnirella 2010).

At the interpersonal level, my findings suggest how SSABMs may encounter interactional difficulties in navigating the fulfilment of their desires within LGBQ+ communities, because their intrapsychic constructions of sexuality/intimacy may be motivated by religious/cultural assumptions which conflict with the sexual configurations of other LGBQ+ individuals. These difficulties indicate how religion is not the only factor which contributes to the 'regulatory contexts' (Beckford 2003:211) which SSABMs have to contend with in the fulfilment of sexual/intimate desire. The 'sexual social worlds' which my participants interacted with also contribute to these regulatory contexts. From the experiences of the four participants, we observed how the gay individuals and communities they interacted with could not accommodate for their religious/cultural idiosyncrasies, Previous researchers have also drawn attention to similar difficulties. Jaspal and Cinnirella's study documents the hesitations which British Asian (including Muslim) gay men have in forging relationships with British white gay men because of the latter's inability to understand the cultural constraints the former have to negotiate (2012). My findings are unique, in that they explore the interactional difficulties experienced on the more sexual/intimate level by SSABMs as sexual/intimate actors.

The experiences of Amir and Andrew in negotiating non-sexual/intimate relations are also very unique to the academic field. I surmise that such configurations are linked to the religious reservations which both Amir and Andrew held towards engaging in same-sex sexual acts (pg.20-22). This may indicate the need of approaching participants in non-sexuality-affirming contexts to explore such experiences. Moreover, it would be interesting to explore the kinds of same-sex-desires which are being fulfilled in these configurations, since they defy conventional understandings of what sexual/intimate relationships entail within the LGBQ+ communities.

Another novel finding was how Andrew interpreted the concept of the life hereafter within the Islamic faith in order to help him overcome his hedonistic mentality and develop healthier same-sex relationships. Here, Andrew utilises religion as a 'cultural resource' (Beckford 2001:233) to benefit his formation of same-sex relationships. This was in contradiction to dominant ways in which Muslim discourses condemn same-sex-sexuality.

Finally, the instances of harmful sexual interactions which Abid and Andrew had experienced add unique insights to the literature on SSABMs. From my own readings, I did not come across any reference to harmful sexual experiences. From Abid and Andrew's accounts, I surmised that their marginalised social positions caused them to develop feelings of isolation, depression and loneliness. They were thus in a state of emotional and psychological vulnerability which compelled them to engage in harmful sexual conduct. In Abid's case, the individual who raped him exploited his emotional vulnerability. Therefore, as well as contending with the heterosexism and homophobia which may eventually lead some SSABMs into experiences of emotional vulnerability, it is also important to acknowledge the possible existence of individuals, within LGBT+ social worlds, who may exploit the vulnerabilities of people like Abid.

From the above discussion, it is clear that a more centralised focus on the experiences of the sexual/intimate conducts and intrapsychic negotiations of sexuality can elucidate further on the identity negotiations of SSABMs. What was clear was that religious discourses were drawn upon to construct same-sex-configurations in ways which were meaningful for my participants.

Negotiating Family and Community relations:

My findings related to the negotiation of family and community relations confirm previous critiques of dominant Western discourses of coming-out. These discourses are ethnocentric since they are heavily influenced by the experiences of white British males (Jaspal and Siraj 2011:185, Siraj 2018:32-33). They therefore do not consider how the intersection of gender, ethnic minority status or religious identity may affect the extents to which coming out is possible. The fear of experiencing religious and cultural homophobia within ethnic minority Muslim communities compels many ethnic-minority SSABMs to remain within the closet (Siraj 2018). This was why neither Abid, Sajid nor Amir voluntarily came-out to their families or the wider Muslim community about their sexualities.

The plights which both Sajid and Abid experienced after they were outed exemplify the repercussions which SSABMs may experience once their same-sex-sexualities become known within their ethnic minority Muslim communities. These may include experiences of homophobia and the tarnishing of family honour, leading to severed family relations and ostracization from family and community (jaspal and Siraj 2011:185, Yip 2004:342).

The process of being pressurised into heterosexual marriage, experienced by Sajid and Abid, has been explored by Jaspal and Cinnirella, although they argue that more sociological studies are needed on this issue (2014:441). What was established from Sajid's reflections on his experience was the importance placed on the public performance of heterosexuality within these communities, which overlooked concerns which SSABMs themselves may have, such as the question of whether or not such relationship configurations could be viably performed on the sexual/intimate level.

One particularly unique insight which my findings provide is into the convert SSABM experience of 'coming out twice'. Because of their statuses as converts to Islam, both Peter and Sajid had to face the challenging question of not only coming-out to the Muslim community about their sexualities, but also coming-out to their families about their Muslim identities. Very little research has been conducted on this experience. Further research in this regard is thus warranted.

Another factor which was established from my findings is the need to consider how the social locations, demographic factors and social identity markers of SSABMs intersect to determine the extents to which some SSABMs can enact agency in negotiating their identities more than others. This was demonstrated in the differing ways Peter and Abid negotiated the homophobia they encountered. Peter was able to exercise more flexibility and manoeuvrability to avoid homophobic instances. This is because he is a temporary student with no long-standing relationship with the local Muslim community. This was different for Abid, whose sexual identity was heavily contested due to the ethnic minority background he was from. Furthermore, he did not have the social and economic resources to be independent of his family's support.

Previous researchers have considered how socio-demographic, material and biographical factors affect how SSABMs negotiate their identities. Jaspal and Siraj, for example, consider how some of their participants waited until a time they were financially independent of their families before coming-out in-case they were rejected by them (Jaspal and Siraj 2011). However, more comparative work between the experiences of different SSABMs from different backgrounds, as I have demonstrated here, can elucidate on the privileges and disadvantages which exist within the SSABM population itself.

Support Groups and Networks:

My findings related to my participants' exploration of support groups and networks confirm the fact that SSABMs gain many benefits from interacting with support groups, and establishing commonality and connectedness with others sharing in their standpoints (Shah 2017, Siraj 2016b, Yip 2008b). Amir found that the Straight Struggle Group validated his standpoints on the issue of sexuality. Peter felt that the Inclusive Mosque Initiative (IMI) gave him confidence in the social possibility of being a 'gay Muslim' within the British Muslim context. For Andrew, IMI provided a safe space where he could be protected from homophobia. For Abid, the groups he explored enabled him to develop a knowledge base to help him come to terms with his intersectional experience. These examples establish how support groups and networks catering for SSABMs provide a sense of belonging, validation and support in instances of experiencing marginalisation and exclusion.

Amir's experience of gaining support from the Straight Struggle group needs to be situated in the wider SSABM context. Within the academic literature on SSABMs, I have not come across any depictions of non-sexuality-affirming support groups, nor have I encountered instances of reparative therapies or sexual-orientation change efforts (SOCEs) being utilised within the British Muslim context; my study of Amir here is the first time where this has happened. Where the administration of such therapy is, if not illegal, politically regulated, and pushed to a position of liminality within British society (see pg.6-7), the Straight Struggle support group provides a space where individuals like Amir can express their standpoints. Whilst the more sexuality-affirming groups such as Imaan and IMI do support SSABMs who are marginalised, because of their largely sexuality-affirming trajectories, they are able to integrate themselves into a wider LGBT+ diversity politics which mainstreams them. Thus, for example, organisations like Imaan take part in Pride events which mainstream them in this way (Imaanlondon 2016). These support groups are privileged in terms of the social and economic capitals they can draw upon to establish their efficacies as the go-to organisations for SSABMs who are 'struggling' with their religious, ethnic and sexual identities. This may make it difficult for non-sexuality-affirming SSABMs to find the support they need to come-to-terms with their

sexualities from a more conservative religious standpoint. Networks such as the Straight Struggle support network become side-lined in this wider political landscape.

Critiquing Wider Discourses and Social Structures:

In exploring how my participants critiqued Muslim and Western/LGBQ discourses and social-structures, which marginalised and subjugated them in different ways, I explored how my participants revealed the incompleteness of these discourses and social-structures since they did not pay attention to the voices of SSABMs.

Each of my participants contributed to this critique in different ways. Peter's mentioning of the article which associated sexual fluidity with the possibility of voluntarily changing sexual orientation is an example of how dogmatic, heterosexist, religious standpoints may motivate how Muslim communities interpret the nature of same-sex-sexuality. Jahangir et al. have explored how some Muslim scholars, leaders and professionals make claims regarding same-sex-sexuality which are not based on grounded scientific evidence, but which either wrongly interpret scientific evidence, or draw on pseudo-scientific discourses like Reparative therapy which are not taken seriously within mainstream psychotherapeutic and scientific discourses (2016).

It should be noted, that Peter holds a sexuality-affirming standpoint. Therefore, he draws on the mainstream scientific and public understanding that sexual orientation cannot be voluntarily changed, and any form of sexual-orientation change effort should be avoided. Somebody like Amir, however, who is not sexuality-affirming, will bring a different standpoint to this issue. Amir believed that the Muslim community was correct in condemning same-sex-sexual acts. Thus, his interpretations of how SSABMs are marginalised was different to Peter's. Whereas Peter felt that SSABMs are marginalised because Muslim communities perpetuate the idea that SSABMs should either change their sexualities or repress them, Amir felt that some Muslim communities marginalised SSABMs through co-opting the term homosexuality into their juristic discourse which assimilates both actions, attractions and identities. In this way, individuals would be condemned for having same-sex-attractions which is not their fault at all. He also felt that SSABMs were marginalised within Muslim communities because they are not provided with the support mechanisms to help them understand and regulate their sexualities within a heterosexist Islamic framework.

From the differing conceptualisations of marginalisation and oppression which both Amir and Peter had given, it is clear that SSABMs will critique dominant Muslim discourses based on the standpoints and agendas which influence them.

Another interesting inside came from Sajid. His critique of racism and Islamophobia within the LGBT+ communities encourage us to think more reflexively about ideas of inclusion, progress and liberation associated with Western LGBT+ discourses (Rahman 2010). We have seen how dominant LGBT+ understandings of sexuality do not take-into-account how experiences of religion and ethnicity may be important to some non-heterosexuals. Thus, for SSABMs who define themselves as LGBT+ and seek to integrate themselves into such identity categories, their identity configurations may seem unviable to mainstream LGBT+ communities (Rahman 2010:952-953). This is especially since religion and ethnicity are seen within mainstream LGBT+ discourses as perpetuating heterosexism and homophobia as bastions of heteronormativity (Yip 2008a.4.3). Furthermore, the sexualised culture within the gay community in particular has led to the sexualisation of gay men of colour (Han 2007:55-57, Teunis 2007). This is indicative of the fact that sexual configurations within the gay community

are dominantly defined by white, middle-class male populations (Teunis 2007). Here, the intersection of ethnic, racial, sexual and Islamophobic prejudices can contribute to the discriminations which LGBT+ Muslims may experience when traversing LGBT+ spaces. Given that LGBT+ communities are predominantly white-centric within the Western context (ibid), LGBT+ Muslims occupy minority positions within these minorities, and therefore the discriminations they face will be less visible.

There is currently very little research dealing with the discrimination Muslims may face within LGBT+ spaces. Jaspal's study on the perceived ethnic prejudices experienced by British Asian (including Muslim) gay men is an exception in this regard (2017). They portray how racial, ethnic and Islamophobic discrimination intersect to affect how LGBT+ Muslims are otherized within these gay spaces (ibid). The particular experience of being an LGBT+ Muslim and how anti-Muslim discrimination become manifested within LGBT+ communities needs further exploration within the British context.

Conclusions:

Reflections on the Data:

From my findings, it can be observed how SSABMs negotiate their religious, ethnic and sexual identities in various ways. This involves reflexively contending with dominant Muslim and dominant Western/LGBQ discourses and social structures (Rahman 2010). Because of the perceived incompatibilities existing between Muslim and Western/LGBQ discourses and social structures, SSABMs may encounter difficulties in negotiating their identities. Whilst their sexualities may become contested within Muslim communities, their religious and ethnic identities may contested within Western /LGBQ communities. SSABMs will thereby negotiate identities in ways which disrupt dominant discourses and social structures existing within these communities. SSABMs may also experience marginalisation, exclusion or discrimination either within Muslim or Western/LGBQ communities. However, support groups and networks catering for SSABMs provide a platform where they may feel a sense of validation and belonging alongside other SSABMs, who share in their intersectional standpoints and find support to come-to-terms with their intersectional experiences.

Out of the 5 participants I interviewed, three of my participants in particular held standpoints which have had little mention within previous academic discussion regarding SSABMs. The fact that Amir, for example, was recruited from a non-sexuality-affirming support group, and the fact that he was influenced by reparative therapy discourse, made him unique to previous academic depictions of SSABMs. The insights which were deduced from his findings exemplify the further need of exploring non-sexuality-affirming contexts. We also explored how the Straight Struggle support group catered for his marginal standpoint as somebody who adheres to reparative therapy discourse and is non-sexuality-affirming. Given that mainstream medical and psychiatry associations have rejected SOCEs and endorse a more sexuality-affirming approaches in their therapeutic practices (pg.6-7), it would be insightful to explore how non-sexuality-affirming SSABMs may manage and regulate their sexualities in relation to this wider climate.

Peter and Andrew's experiences as converts to Islam are also unique to the academic literature. There are a number of questions which can be further pursued in the study of convert SSABMs.

For example, how do they deal with the discourse of incompatibility between Islam and same-sex-sexuality in their experience of converting to Islam? How do they deal with the question of coming-out to other Muslims about their sexualities, and their families about their religion? It would also be worth exploring their sexual configurations and patterns of sexual conducts, and particularly whether or not pre-convert experiences change at all after conversion.

Reflections on the Project:

In this research project, I explored how same-sex-attracted British Muslims (SSABMs) negotiated their identities. This research was situated within a wider need of amplifying the voices of SSABMs amidst dominant Muslim and Western discourses which are constructed as incompatible with each other on the issue of same-sex-sexuality. Within these discourses, there is very little consideration of the various ways in which religion, ethnicity and sexuality are simultaneously significant in the lives of SSABMs themselves. These discourses thus remain incomplete through their exclusion of SSABMs. Drawing attention to the voices and experiences of SSABMs can therefore disrupt these dominant discourses of incompatibility to unearth how religion, ethnicity and sexuality are simultaneously meaningful to the lives of SSABMs.

I explored how academic studies on SSABMs have already drawn attention to their voices and experiences (e.g. Shah 2017, Siraj 2016a, Yip 2004). However, the research remains limited in its overriding focus on recruiting participants from LGBT+ Muslim support groups and networks, as well as framing its sampling strategies in ways which privilege those who self-identity as LGBQ. The literature also mostly focusses on ethnic-minority SSABMs. I thus advocated for a sampling strategy which is wider in scope and variability.

I sought to address this concern through my methodologies, particularly by adopting a variety of sampling methods which were aimed at different contexts. This included a sexuality-affirming context (the Imaan LGBT+ support group), a non-sexuality-affirming context (the Straight-Struggle support group), as well as personal contacts. This contributed to the variability of my sample. My participants thus portrayed a variety of standpoints and contributed to the research in various ways.

My sample was diverse, which was also reflected in the findings that I produced. I felt that the theoretical assumptions of intersectionality and social constructionism were very useful for me in making-sense of these findings. These theories encourage the researcher to go beyond taken-for-granted assumptions within social discourses and to explore the diversity of experience which exists beyond them. These theories draw our attention to marginalised voices who fall between the cracks of dominant discourses and social structures. I thus felt my theoretical assumptions helped me make sense of the variability of my participants' standpoints and experiences.

My research was also heavily influenced by the reflexivity I engaged in throughout the research process. Had I not reflected on my past experiences on the Straight-Struggle support group, and had I not encountered non-sexuality-affirming SSABMs who reject Western sexual identity paradigms and adhere to reparative therapy discourse, I may have not been able to contribute to the research the way I did. This exemplifies how developments within the academic study of SSABMs will to a great extent be determined by the reflexivity which researchers engage in.

Although my findings have yielded various insights, there are also limitations to my research. For one thing, there were no female participants in my sample. Their gendered experience of contending with patriarchy and sexism could have added further insights to my research (Siraj 2016a). Another limitation within my research was the scope of my research methodologies. I did not carry-out ethnographic research, particularly into the support groups which my participants engaged with. This could have further illuminated on how my participants benefitted from the support groups interactionally with others, and how collective identities were formed within these support groups. Online ethnographic observation of the straight-struggle support group could have supplemented the interview data with more 'immediate' data from the field, which is of a different quality since it is not produced with the conscious presence of a researcher (McDermott et al 2013:130-131).

My research not only demonstrates the further need to study SSABMs, but it also signifies the importance of studying other minority sub-groups existing within British Muslim communities. These may include religious minorities, such as the Shi'a communities and the Ahmadiyya communities in the UK. However, they can also include racial and ethnic minorities, such as Black British Muslims and Turkish-Cypriot Muslims. Studying these groups as well as others as distinct sub-groups can give us a unique purchase on understanding their histories, cultures, identities, and the socio-political issues they have to contend with, which cannot be portrayed in as much depth or nuance through more general studies on Muslims in Britain (e.g. Ansari 2004, Gilliat-Ray 2010). Hence, investing in this academic trajectory can really contribute to the study of British Muslims more generally.

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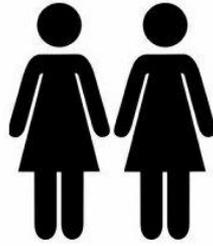
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Appendix 1:

RESEARCH STUDY

BRITISH LESBIAN AND QUEER MUSLIM WOMEN

I am undertaking a study on the lives of British Lesbian and Queer Muslim Women aged between 18-55, who identify as Muslim and lesbian/queer, to gain an understanding of their life experiences. The study will broadly be based on a number of themes: how do queer Muslim women and lesbians manage their sexual and gender identity within a heterosexist and homophobic society; does their sexual orientation exclude them from fully belonging to their ethnic and religious 'community'? As women from a minority ethnic and religious background are there social spaces that enable them to connect with the mainstream lesbian/queer 'community'.

Please note that I am interested in speaking to women who identify as being Muslim and lesbian/queer women, irrespective of their level of religiosity and/or openness with regards to their sexuality.

Participation in the study is voluntary and will involve completing a questionnaire and taking part in a face-to-face audio recorded interview (approx. 60-90 minutes). I can arrange to meet wherever is most convenient for you and I am able to travel across the UK. Complete confidentiality and anonymity will be guaranteed and a pseudonym will be used to protect the participant's identity. If you are interested in taking part or would like more information please contact me via email or mobile, thank you.

Dr. Asifa Siraj

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Mob.: 0785 7786 451
www: http://lsbu.academia.edu/AsifaSiraj

Appendix 2:

Cardiff University

School of Religious & Theological Studies

INFORMATION SHEET FOR A RESEARCH PROJECT ON
<u>**How British Muslims who have Same-Sex-Attractions negotiate their identity?**</u>

What is the purpose of the study?

o   This research project will explore the lived experience of being a British Muslim with Same-Sex Attractions (SSAs). I want to explore how such Muslims understand and deal with their sexualities within the boundaries of an Islamic framework and/or a Muslim culture which prohibit(s) the expression of same-sex-sexuality, whilst living in a society which promotes it.

Who will take part in this study?

o   For this research project, I am looking to interview 5 British Muslims who have SSAs about their opinions and experiences. You can participate whether you self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, homosexual or do not use any of these terms at all.

o   Those who reply to me the earliest will be contacted further regarding the research.

o   The project aims to explore the following questions:

1.   How do British Muslims who have SSAs understand their SSAs? How do they think they should deal with them?
2.   What difficulties and challenges do they encounter whilst trying to understand and come-to-terms with their SSAs?
3.   To what extent do they explore the idea of coming-out to other people about their SSAs? If they do come-out, what are the reactions they get and how does this impact them? If not, why not?
4.   What do they think about the dominant ways in which the issue of same-sex sexuality is perceived and framed, both by Muslim communities and non-Muslim communities? Do they think these perceptions need to change? If so, why and how?

What do I have to do?

o   You will be invited to take-part in an interview with me for 60-90 minutes. You can choose to have the interview with me online (via Skype) or in-person. I will be more than happy to visit you in person wherever you feel is comfortable.

What will happen to the information about me that you gather?

o   With your permission, I will record the interview we have. The recording of the interview will be written up into what is called a 'transcript'. This will allow me to read what you have said again. The original recording and the transcript will only be available to you and myself.
o   When I create the transcript, I will change the names of yourself and everyone you mention. Personal information you give to me about yourself, which can make you

identifiable to others, will be concealed or be made vague. **Nothing in the written outputs of the project will identify who you are.**

o The recordings and transcripts will be held in password protected files, and kept securely in strict accordance with the Data Protection Act. All the recordings will be destroyed immediately after the transcripts have been written out. The rest of the data will be destroyed at the end of the project.
o As a participant in the project, you can give as much or as little information as you wish.
o An analysis of the transcripts will form the basis of my dissertation at the end of the study. The dissertation will be published on the Islam UK Centre website (accessed here: http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/islamukcentre/).

Do I have to take part?

o It is up to you to decide whether or not you wish to take part. If you do decide to participate you will be given this information sheet to keep and will be asked to sign a consent form.
o You will be free to withdraw from the research at any time if you feel uncomfortable with the research process or you feel that your interests are being jeopardized. You are also free to ask me for more information before deciding.

Who are the researchers?

o I will be conducting the research myself. I am based at the Islam UK Research Centre, located in Cardiff University.

Who has reviewed the research?

o The project has been reviewed by the Cardiff School of Religious and Theological Studies (SHARE) Research Ethics Committee.
o Dr Maria Fragoulaki is the chair of the School Research Ethics Committee. Her contact details are below:

o Tel: +44 (0)29 208 70558
Email: fragoulakim@cardiff.ac.uk

o If you have any questions or concerns about the research project, please do not hesitate to contact me:

Hasnan Hussain, email: hussainh6@cardiff.ac.uk, Tel 07389138032

Thank you for reading this information sheet.

Appendix 3:

<u>Interview Schedule: How do British Muslims who have SSAs negotiate their identity?</u>

INTRODUCTION TO INTERVIEW/PRE-INTERVIEW PROCEDURES

I introduce myself, and identify as from Cardiff University, Islam-UK Centre

Introduction to the project (the five main questions)

- Exploring how Muslims who have SSAs make sense of being Muslims who have SSAs?

- How do they deal with it personally? In relation with other people? Also, how do they respond to the way SSAs are talked about both in the Muslim and non-Muslim communities?

Explanation of the interview procedures:

Time involved (about 1 hour 30 minutes maximum)

Will be recorded (with your permission) and transcribed. Transcript and recording kept private (explain how – identifiable information removed, pseudonym, etc).

Right to withdraw from interview or project at any time. Recording will be deleted

Check that information sheet has been read

Opportunity to ask questions

Sign consent form

Turn off mobile phone/s

Complete simple one-page quick-response questionnaire

Check willingness to continue with interview

Preliminary Questions: Ask participant about age, ethnicity and occupational background.

1. In terms of your sexuality, do you define yourself as anything?

How do you understand your SSAs? (Make notes).

How do you think you should deal with them? (Make notes).

2. Your past experience (up until the present) dealing with your SSAs?

When did you first find out when you had SSAs? How did you feel? What did you do?

How have you coped with having SSAs since? Up until today?

3. To what extent do they explore the idea of coming-out to other people about their SSAs? If they do come-out, what are the reactions they get and how does this impact them? If not, why not?

Have you ever come out to anybody? Outside of the Support Group?

If so, to whom?

What were their reactions?

(Were there any conversations?)

If you did not come out, why did you not come out?

(Would you have liked to have come out?)

4. The Support Groups?

Why did you join the support group? (when did you join it and what situations were you going through?)

What did you expect from the support group? Was it what you expected?

Do you feel that the support group has been beneficial/effective? What has it provided you with?

Do you feel that the support group can be improved in anyway? If yes, in what way?

5. What do they think about the dominant ways in which the issue of same-sex sexuality is perceived and framed, both by Muslim communities and the Western/LGBT communities? Do they think these perceptions need to change? If so, why and how?

What do you think about the ways in which Muslims talk about the issue of SSAs?

How has this made you feel?

(Probe: Do you think Muslims are homophobic?)

What affects/implications do you think these opinions have?

(How may it affect Muslims who have SSAs? Or the way Islam/Muslims is perceived?)

Are you satisfied in the ways in which SSAs and people who have them are characterised/understood?

If not, what would you suggest as improvements?

What do you think about the ways in which British society talks/understands/ frames the issue of SSAs?

How does this make you feel?

What affects/implications do you think these discourses have?

Are you satisfied with the ways in which SSAs and people who have them are characterised/understood?

If not, what would you suggest as improvements?

CLOSURE

Anything else interviewee would like to add?

Invite to contact us again, if other thoughts arise

Interviewer to 'summarise' the most important things that have come out of the interview.

Thanks.

Ask if the interviewee would like to keep in touch with the project? If YES:

- You will email him/her about the research once it is published.

Instructions for after interview: Download file to pc, back-up, password protect files.

90 minutes:

10 minutes: opening

70 minutes: Timing for interview.

14 minutes for each part.

10 minutes closing.