Acknowledgments

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore the lives and identities of gay Arab Muslim men living in the U.K., a group that has not been specifically or exclusively researched in any previous study within the British context. The thesis aims to demonstrate how various identities such as sexuality, race, ethnicity, gender and social class intersect with each other within three different contexts: in an intra-personal context, in the context of relationships with family and kin, and in the context of interactions in white-dominant gay and non-gay spaces. The thesis investigates the outcomes of these intersections and how these outcomes are managed and negotiated. The study's epistemology aligns in a broad sense with feminist epistemological approaches in making subjugated voices and marginalised experiences heard. A qualitative research methodology is adopted involving individual interviews with 35 men. Intersectionality is utilised as a theoretical framework, and the thesis asserts that concepts such as intra-categorical and inter-categorical intersectionality are extremely useful for achieving an in-depth understanding of the complexities and nuances of the lived experiences and identities of these men, illustrating both the diversity of experience subsumed within supposedly homogeneous ethnic categorisations, and uncovering how these men's interlocking identities may be characterised by experiences of multiple discriminations, including homophobia, racism and Islamophobia.

Contents

CHAPTER ONE: WHY A STUDY OF GAY ARAB MUSLIM MEN?

1.1. Introduction

In recent years, Muslims appear to have become ever more frequently the subject of media, public and political debate and discourse in the U.K. and time and again, similar narratives are being constructed. In 2014, the *Daily Mail* journalist Richard Littlejohn wrote an apparently satirical column concerning an alleged radical Islamic cleric who had hired out the *Legoland* theme park for a Muslim social event. Littlejohn imagined how the group's day trip would unfold, describing how '[t]he quartermaster of the Hounslow branch of Al Muhajiroun will be handing out leaflets showing how to disguise Semtex as bricks of Lego' and there will be 'a practical demonstration on how to make an execution block out of Lego, for use when making Internet videos showing beheading of infidels and apostates' (Littlejohn, 2014). On the 23rd November 2015, following terrorist attacks in Paris, the *Sun* newspaper published a front page headline based on an opinion poll that screamed: '1 in 5 Brit Muslims' sympathy for Jihadis' (the Independent Press Standards Organisation, later labelled the *Sun*'s interpretation of the poll as 'significantly misleading' [Julian, 2016]). The media, have frequently used the words 'fundamentalist', 'extremist' 'radicalised' and 'terrorist' when referring to young British Muslims when focusing on cultural and religious differences, and have often published stories about those who have gone to fight, or are willing to go and fight for the so-called Islamic State in Syria (Awan, 2017; Carter, 2017; Hamid, 2017).

Beyond media representations, in April 2016, a *ComRes* opinion poll of 2,000 people investigating the wider British public's attitudes towards Islam, found that 43% of those questioned agreed with the statement that Islam was a negative force in the U.K., and only 28% agreed that Islam was compatible with British values (Comresglobal, 2016).

Regarding political discourse, in the recent British General Election, the manifesto of the right wing United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) outlined plans to prevent *Shari'ah* (Islamic law) councils from operating in the U.K.; to ban Muslim women's face coverings such as the *niqab* and *burkha* since they are, in the words of the manifesto, 'dehumanising symbols of segregation and oppression' and 'security risks'; and vowed to tackle what they term 'Islamist extremism' in schools

(UKIP, 2017). Media, public and political discourses in the U.K. constantly convey highly negative representations of Muslims and seem fixated on the connection between Islam, Muslims, radical extremism and terrorism (Kilby, 2017), often seeming to conflate Islam and terrorism. The religion and its practices have therefore been both greatly politicised and pathologised (Roy, 2010; Nadal et al., 2012), and 'a climate of fear and moral panic' surrounding the veil and *Shari'ah* law (Awan, 2017), viewed as symbolic of an alien and threatening culture (Ahmed and Matthe, 2016), has been fostered. Veiled women are depicted as victims of 'oriental patriarchy', their veiling often seen from a non-Muslim perspective as indicative of their inferior social status and oppression within Muslim communities (Ahmed and Matthe, 2016; Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem 2008). These public, political and media narratives appear to singularly focus on the religious identities of Muslims, whilst ignoring all other facets of Muslim identity and culture.

It is within this broader social and cultural context that the present study on gay Arab Muslim men is located. But it attempts to go beyond the emphasis of popular discourses on just the religious identity dimension of Muslims in the U.K. by exploring multiple identity dimensions. In doing so, it aims to create a less one-dimensional and more complex and complete understanding of contemporary Muslim identities than the simplistic, crude and offensive stereotyping that characterises popular representations. More precisely, the thesis aims to explore the identities and lived experiences of gay Arab Muslim men in the United Kingdom in the 2010s, and how their sexuality, religion, race, ethnicity, gender and social class intersect and inform how they experience and understand their identities at both a personal level in the construction of self-identity, and at an interpersonal level in how they negotiate their sense of who they are and who they are not through interaction with, and identity ascription by others. These others are family and kin in the domestic sphere, but also fellow gay men and heterosexual people that they encounter in the white-dominant spaces of their wider social networks. The study does not privilege any one of the aforementioned identity elements but rather is interested in how these dimensions are experienced as criss-crossing and interlocking, and the enabling potentials and constraints that these intersections bring. The study uses intersectionality as an underpinning theoretical framework to interpret the empirical data collected over a 19 month period in 2012-2013, data obtained in one-to-one interviews with 35 Arab Muslim men.

The chapter begins by describing how I came to consider conducting a PhD study into this topic to illustrate how the personal and professional can be closely inter-connected. After that, I stake a claim for the substantial academic significance of this study by illustrating how it contributes to filling various lacunae in or adds to the existing literature on lebian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) Muslims/gay Arab Muslims. Then, the research aims and questions are presented, before the chapter concludes by outlining and previewing the subsequent chapters.

1.2. Constructing the Research Topic: The Intertwining of the Personal and the Academic

Living and working in large multicultural British cities for 16 years, I have long been interested in the history and cultures of diasporic ethnic communities (for my Master's dissertation in the subject of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, I focused on the Turkish speech community of North London, a research study that was quite sociological in content), and thus, when I began to think about undertaking a PhD in Sociology, I decided I also wanted to concentrate on minority ethnic communities living in Britain and aspects of ethnic identity. Then, while teaching English for Academic Purposes to international students at a university in London one day, an extremely thought-provoking, unsettling incident occurred. The class were watching a documentary about the effects of immigration, and the presenter explained that one interviewee was a gay Muslim who had fled to Britain to escape persecution in his home country. When the film finished, one of my female students from Saudi Arabia, became very agitated and asserted there were no gay Muslims in her country, while a male Algerian Muslim student said, in all seriousness, that he would kill his son if he turned out to be gay. This encounter started me thinking about whether other Arab Muslims shared their views, and piqued my curiosity to know more about gay Arab Muslim men's relationships with family and kin (indeed, this topic comprises the focus of Chapter Four of the thesis). I wondered how many Arab Muslim men would be able to disclose their homosexuality to family with such potentially negative consequences. Disclosure has been an important consideration in my own life. Growing up in the U.K. in the late 1970s and early 1980s (a different era regarding social attitudes to homosexuality), on realising my own sexuality, I was made aware of, and had to find ways to cope

with the dominant societal values of hegemonic heterosexism and heteronormativity, subtly or not so subtly sanctioned on an everyday basis through institutional structures such as the education system and media. I experienced a sense of shame on realising that I was someone who the heteronormative society at large vociferously disapproved of, made humiliating jokes about, and physically attacked. Long conditioned to hiding my sexuality through the stigma associated with it, throughout my life I have not openly disclosed it to any family members and kin, though I am sure many know, and there has generally been a 'don't ask, don't tell' approach. To this day, the act of disclosure in a heterosexist world creates feelings within me of discomfort and embarrassment. Silencing my sexual identity in front of others has become such an engrained, taken-for-granted aspect of my *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977) that only very rarely do feelings of regret surface that I have not been more open with people like my family about this important aspect of who I am.

Between my mid-twenties and early forties I participated in British 'gay' culture as an outlet for releasing the pent up frustrations of being otherwise unable to express my sexuality. I visited gay bars and clubs, where I felt comfortable to construct an identity as a gay man, and discovered how valuable social capital could be acquired through a sense of belonging, solidarity and community. When developing the thematic areas to research for this study, I took inspiration from personal experience, deciding I would like to explore my subjects' relationships with and views of gay spaces.

The focus on researching the sexual identities of Arab Muslim gay men in particular, was chosen because, as a gay man myself, I wanted to feel some personal connection and potential commonality with a subject I would be studying in-depth over several years, and in order to feel sufficiently intrinsically motivated to cope with the ups and downs of the arduous PhD study process. I felt I would have little personal interest or motivation to research Arab Muslim lesbians, for example (notwithstanding potential practical gender-related difficulties of accessing this group as a white British gay male). In addition, research, being not just an intellectual pursuit but also firmly rooted in the personal, can be 'a tool for self-exploration' (Yip, 2005a, p. 273), and, as such, in deciding on a research topic, the focus on men of Middle Eastern heritage and their sexual lives and identities was generated by reflections of my own lived experience of sexual desire and subjectivity that has contributed towards my experience of what it is to be human, something which

fundamentally involves one's sexuality and sexual attractions. My awareness of, and subsequent interest in researching the gender-inscribed system of sexual interaction that commonly exists between males in Middle Eastern/Muslim societies as an aspect of sexual identity arose out of the five years I lived and worked in Turkey (where the vast majority of the population are Muslim), where, in sexual experiences with Turkish men, I began to discover and become interested in an organisational system of 'gendered' sexual behaviour between men that was quite different to what I had previously known.

The interest in researching Arab Muslim communities was also connected to my leisure pursuits, which involved frequent holidays to Arab Muslim countries over the years, where I developed an interest in the culture of these lands.

These personal experiences and their strong influence on deciding the main research topic and themes for my PhD study very clearly illustrate how the quest for knowledge is not a 'disinterested pursuit, disconnected from everyday concerns' (Code, 1993, p. 17). Indeed, many of the finest scholars do not separate their intellectual research from experiences and observations in their personal lives, as they can be mutually enriching (Mills, 1959). I similarly feel that one's personal biography can be fused with one's professional projects as a PhD researcher in a form of methodological intersectionality, with the former providing an important spark of inspiration in formulating a quest for particular knowledge. The initial topic areas or themes generated from my personal interests/experiences as a gay man also needed to be set around 'anchor points…general statements of the shape and trend of the study' (Mills, 1959, pp. 201-202), and these anchor points were identified by looking at themes and gaps in the existing empirical literature on gay Muslims, evaluating what already had/had not been researched in this area, and refining the study focus more precisely, so as to be able to make a contribution of academic value to the field. The next section therefore focuses more on these anchor points, helping further illuminate the rationale for and academic value of the study.

1.3. Research into LGBT Muslim Identities and the Gaps in Knowledge

Before outlining the current state of research knowledge about LGBT Muslims I would mention that the references cited in this section will be developed more fully in Chapter Two, where a detailed literature review is undertaken.

For years, there seemed to have been almost no research exploring homosexuality as an element of Muslim identity in Great Britain. But since the first decade of the twenty-first century, there has been a small and steadily growing literature on British LGBT Muslims, mainly the work of scholars Rusi Jaspal, Asifa Siraj and Andrew Yip. The vast majority of these empirical research studies have focused exclusively, or almost exclusively, on people of a South Asian ethnic heritage (Indian, Pakistani and Bengladeshi). One of the reasons for this has been because South Asians make up the overwhelming majority of the 2.8 million Muslims in the U.K.(Office for National Statistics, 2012), and more particularly, due to their seemingly large presence in LGBT Muslim support organisations such as *Imaan*[1] and *Naz Project*[2], which researchers have used to recruit their samples. I felt that my own research would make a much more novel and therefore valuable contribution by focusing on an ethnic group that had been largely overlooked in academic research hitherto, hence my decision to conduct a study on gay Arabs.

In some previous studies of LGBT Muslims, whilst identities may have been described as intersecting, explicit connection to the theoretical aspects and conceptual literature of intersectionality has often been lacking. My study of gay Arab Muslim men's identities adds theoretical depth to its empirical analysis by making an explicit and detailed consideration of the link to intersectionality theories. If one accepts that identities can be understood as intersectional, as reflected in the analytical approaches explicitly or implicitly taken by researchers on LGBT Muslim identities, it is highly surprising then that much of the existing literature on South Asian LGBT Muslims has not addressed, for example, what their ethnic identity as Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi means to them at a personal level, and how salient this identity dimension is in their lived experiences.

Gay Muslims' contact with white-dominant gay social spaces in the U.K. has been extremely under-researched, and no research study has specifically focused

[1] *Imaan* is an organisation that advises LGBT Muslims on issues concerning homosexuality and Islam. It facilitates the exchange of experience and institutional resources. It aims to promote what it calls Islamic values of peace, social justice and tolerance and to reduce discrimination against both Muslims and LGBT people. It was founded in the U.K. in 1998 (originally called *Al Fatiha*) and is an independent organisation that receives no external funding www.imaan.org.uk

[2] *Naz Project* is an organisation specialising in giving sexual health advice, testing and counselling (particularly about HIV) to black and minority ethnic (BAME) communities. The organisation is also actively involved in research work aiming to influence and contribute to policy formulation by promoting the sexual health needs of BAME communities to government, health providers and Third Sector organisations www.naz.org.uk

on the experiences of gay Arab males and their contact with these spaces, and thus my study is unique in this respect. Often in previous studies, LGBT Muslims' contact with the gay 'scene' has been discussed only in relation to their management strategies for reconciling their religion and sexuality, or there has been somewhat cursory reference to their contact with it. There is certainly a need to update and expand on previous research relating to this topic, which my study attempts to do. No study appears to have investigated the attitudes of gay Arab male Muslims towards relationships with non-Muslim gay men, other Arab Muslim men, or the prominence within these relationships of issues involving race, ethnicity, age and power relations. In terms of the role of the intersection of sexuality and ethnicity with respect to gay male attraction and dating, whilst there has been some writing on the (un)desirability of the black and Chinese male, for example (Green, 2008a; Han, 2006; 2008), there has been a paucity of literature on how Arab men's ethnic identity is considered in gay spaces.

It has been said that the traditional spaces where gay men meet have been changing in recent years, with more and more people forsaking gay scene venues and instead using dating websites and applications (Mowlabocus, 2010; Rosenfeld and Thomas, 2012; Rosser, West and Weinmeyer, 2008). While there have been many studies concerning gay men's use of such websites, these have mostly been quantitative studies within the field of sexual health and medicine, and largely centred on HIV risk behaviours and sexually transmitted diseases. There appears to have been a broad lack of qualitative sociological perspectives on this topic, and my study helps make up for such omissions. In addition, there seem to have been no research studies that have specifically investigated gay Muslim men's use and opinions of gay dating websites.

In general, very little has been written about the work of LGBT Muslim support groups in both their online and offline versions or the specific reinterpretive approaches that go on in support group meetings, and my study aims to add to this literature by, among other things, illuminating potential issues that may deter people from joining/attending than have been previously documented.

Much of the writing on social class and sexuality has been from a heteronormative perspective, and little has been written on the intersection of LGBT sexuality and social class (Taylor, Hines and Casey, 2011). And it would seem that just as scant attention has been given to how the identity dimension of social class

intersects with other identity dimensions within the lives of LGBT Muslims. There appears to have been no discussion within the extant literature of any outcomes of the intersection of ethnicity and social class, for example. My study therefore aims to explore the salience and effects of the social class positions occupied by the participants.

Experiences of racism and Islamophobia experienced by gay Arab Muslim men in the U.K. have, to the best of my knowledge, never been researched before, and there has been a lack of detailed exploration of the racism that non-white LGBT Muslims experience, so my study contributes to expanding the limited knowledge we have of this issue. More studies seem to have addressed LGBT Muslims' experiences of cultural racism or Islamophobia, though empirical evidence concerning these experiences, and especially the kind of strategies used to deal with Islamophobic incidents, has been greatly lacking in the literature. My study helps to address these issues.

The research questions that emerged out of the combined process of bringing my personal interests to the research and reviewing the literature on LGBT Muslims centre largely on perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and feelings: on how my participants understand and give meaning to their identities and how they interpret their interactions with others. For example, I want to know how they perceive their sexual identities, how important they feel these are compared to other elements of their identities, why they felt they needed to come out to family and kin, or to hide their sexuality, how they manage family relations and homophobia, and what their views are on 'gender roles' and 'gay identities' within male-male sexual relationships. I also want to find out their opinions on LGBT Muslim support groups, and, for those who have joined them, the extent to which they are perceived as helpful in allowing them to reconcile their sexuality and religion. Other research questions focus on participants' attitudes towards white gay spaces, their views on dating white, non-Arab Muslims and other Arab Muslims, and experiences in these spaces of racism and Islamophobia. The next section gives more detail about the research aims and questions.

1.4. Research Aims and Questions

Having identified the gaps in existing research knowledge about LGBT Muslims, the next step in the research design was to devise the specific research aims and research questions to best address those gaps and meet the study's concerns. Three main research aims were devised with a series of associated questions, as follows:

Aim 1: To explore gay male Arab Muslims' personal identities, experiences of their sexual, ethnic and religious identities and outcomes of the intersection of these.

Research questions:

a) To what extent are there differences in the relative salience of identity dimensions such as ethnicity and religion in participants' construction of their identities at an individual, personal level?
b) To what extent, and in what ways, do participants' religious and sexual identities mutually interact and influence each other?
c) What kinds of strategies are used to manage the outcomes and consequences of the intersection of participants' religious and sexual identities?
d) How successful are such strategies?
e) What different forms of social support are available to help gay Arab Muslim men who may experience difficulties reconciling their religion and sexuality?
f) What is the nature of participants' contact with, and opinions of any available support?

Aim 2: To explore gay male Arab Muslims relationships with their families and kin and how they manage these.

Research questions:

a) In terms of the intersection of participants' sexuality with family relationships, what are the factors which have influenced participants to disclose or not disclose their sexuality to their families and relatives?

b) What have been the outcomes, in terms of both immediate and longer term reactions from family members, when participants have disclosed their sexuality?
c) What have been the outcomes for both participants and their families of participants' decisions not to disclose their sexuality to their relatives?
d) What strategies have been adopted by participants to manage the consequences of disclosing/not disclosing their sexuality to family and kin?
e) What particular strategies have been adopted by participants to manage outcomes in cases where disclosure has been non-voluntary?

Aim 3: To investigate the extent and nature of gay male Arab Muslims' contact with predominantly 'white' gay and non-gay spaces and the issues arising from this contact.

Research questions:

a) What is the nature and frequency of participants' contact with offline gay spaces (e.g. bars and clubs) and online gay spaces (e.g. gay dating websites)?
b) What do participants perceive to be the benefits and drawbacks of involvement with these spaces, especially regarding the process of living out and managing intersecting and potentially conflicting identities?
c) What specific role(s) does the intersection of participants' sexual, ethno-racial and religious identities play in their interactions within, experiences of, and attitudes towards these spaces?
d) What are participants' views and experiences of sexual/romantic relationships with both non-Muslim white gay men and fellow gay Arabs/Muslims?
e) To what extent have gay male Arab Muslims encountered racism and Islamophobia when their racial and religious identities intersect with white-dominant gay and non-gay spaces?
f) How have they attempted to deal with any such experiences of racism and Islamophobia?

1. 5. Chapter Outline

I conclude this introductory chapter by outlining the structure of the thesis and previewing the chapters that follow.

Chapter Two is a literature review. It firstly discusses the conceptual literature about 'intersectionality', which forms the basis of the theoretical framework underpinning the entire study. It illustrates how an intersectional analytical frame has been applied explicitly or implicitly to empirical research studies of LGBT and LGBT Muslim identities, and how it can be effectively utilised to explore Arab ethnic identity. The chapter next discusses the important role of gender and specifically masculinity and how it is constructed in Arab Muslim communities, since gender is an underlying theme throughout much of the empirical part of the study. Then, background and context is provided concerning the religiously and socio-culturally engendered axis of heteronormative oppression, which is important to know about if one is to understand the intersectional lives of gay Arab Muslim men. The bulk of the literature review focuses on depicting the conflict that arises at the intersection of LGBT Muslims' religion and sexuality, and explains how this tension is managed through various strategies. The chapter moves on to examine what the literature says about LGBT Muslims' interpersonal relationships. This is relevant since the study explores gay Arab Muslim men's relationships with their families. Next, as I am interested in aspects of disclosure, literature is reviewed on the following: the concept and models of 'coming out' to others, how LGBT Muslims have managed issues around disclosure, and family reactions to disclosure. Because I am researching the contact that gay Arab Muslim men have with white-dominant gay spaces, the extant literature concerning LGBT Muslims' involvement with such spaces such as their reasons for participation/non-participation is reviewed, and the role of 'erotic capital', which will play a significant role in the study, is discussed. Finally, I review literature on racism and Islamophobia more generally and as themes present in the empirical studies of LGBT Muslims, since these themes are empirically explored in the form of the impact of axes of oppression on the participants in Chapter Six.

Following the literature review, Chapter Three concentrates on methodological considerations by highlighting the approaches chosen that were felt best to meet the study's philosophical concerns, fulfil its research aims, and answer

its research questions. In this chapter, I firstly justify the feminist-aligned intersectional epistemological approach taken. Then, I proceed to discuss methodology at a more practical level by documenting the sampling strategies used. I next provide details of the sample itself, the specific research method used, an evaluation of this method, and an account of the data collection and data analysis process. Finally, I examine the role of ethics and their influence on this particular study.

Chapters Four, Five and Six form the study's empirical centre. The organising principle that has shaped its structural analytical logic is as follows. I begin, in Chapter Four, by examining the identities of gay Arab Muslim men at a personal level, before moving the focus gradually outwards, from intra-personal aspects of identity construction to those at an interpersonal level by, firstly, in Chapter Five, exploring relationships with those of most immediate significance – family and kin, and then, in Chapter Six, by expanding the analytical lens still further to examine how these men construct and manage their multi-dimensional identities with respect to white-dominant spaces in the wider social world. Thus, there are three main levels of analysis which may usefully be imagined as a set of concentric circles, with the smallest circle representing the narrowest context, and the next two larger circles symbolising increasingly broader social contexts.

Chapter Four, exploring how the participants manage the intersection of their religion, sexuality and ethnicity at a personal level, begins by focusing on their identification with and the salience of their Arab ethnic identity, and the term 'Arab' will be problematised. After that, the bulk of the chapter discusses the intersection of participants' religious and sexual identities and the largely negative outcomes that are produced here. I also problematise the way that Islamic discourses are invariably and incontrovertibly seen as condemnatory of homosexuality with little scope for alternative interpretation. The chapter devotes considerable attention to documenting the diverse strategies that are adopted to manage the outcomes at the religion-sexuality intersection.

Chapter Five concentrates on the participants' relationships with family and kin and how religious and socio-cultural factors shape these relationships. The Chapter has, as its central theme 'sexual silence', which refers to situations where participants have not disclosed their sexuality to their closest relatives. The chapter analyses the reasons for this silence, how it is preserved and the consequences for

family relations. Silences can always be broken, of course, and the second part of the chapter engages with the range of family reactions and consequences for both the participant and family members that result from either a voluntary or involuntary disclosure. Some attention is also given to discussing gender roles, and the theoretical 'stage' models of coming out created to document parental reactions to disclosure.

The empirical part of the thesis concludes in Chapter Six by examining the participants' interactions with white-dominant spaces, including both gay and non-gay ones. The chapter begins by exploring the characteristics of the men's contact with gay spaces which may be offline such as bars and nightclubs and the online spaces of gay dating websites. The attitudes of the participants towards these locations in terms of what they see as the advantages and disadvantages of participating in them is detailed, and how the intersection of their sexual, racial, ethnic, religious and classed identities influences the interactions they have here with white British gay men and other Arab Muslims. I will make particular reference to Green's (2008a) notion of 'sexual fields' and 'erotic capital' to explain the characteristics of these relationships. The issues and experiences of racism, anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia are also investigated to examine the role they play in the lived experiences of gay Arab Muslim men. I also discuss the use of 'accounts', strategies which are used to manage negative Islamophobic experiences.

Chapter Seven, the concluding chapter, attempts to draw everything together. It sums up the study's main findings and highlights, with reference back to the literature that has been discussed throughout, the thesis' main contributions to the field of academic knowledge. It does this by asserting theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions. Finally, it presents some suggestions for further research to expand our knowledge about the intersectional lives and identities of gay Arab Muslim men in the U.K., in the course of which, some of the limitations of the study will be pointed out.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEWING THE LITERATURE: INTERSECTIONALITY AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND EMPIRICAL STUDIES OF LGBT MUSLIMS

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the main theoretical and empirical themes that have informed and are directly related to the research aims discussed in the introductory chapter. The first aim concerns gay male Arab Muslims' experiences of the intersections of their sexual, ethnic and religious identities and the outcomes produced, and, more specifically, how they attempt to reconcile their religion and sexuality at a personal level when their religion is said to strongly condemn homosexuality. The second and third aims relate to examining intersections at a broader interpersonal context, by firstly exploring participants' relationships with their families and kin, focusing especially on the issue of disclosure or 'coming out', and then, investigating the extent and nature of their contact with white-dominant spaces and the issues arising from this contact such as racism and Islamophobia.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the main theoretical framework I utilise in the study, intersectionality. After that, masculinity and sexuality within Islam and the wider Muslim culture are discussed; crucially, the religion and culture provide norms and values that guide and shape attitudes of heterosexual Muslims towards homosexuals, and such a discussion therefore helps to better contextualise the position of gay Muslims in Muslim communities. The relevance and consequences of the intersections of their religious, gendered and sexual identities are discussed, and how these intersections are managed both at an intra-personal level, and with potentially homophobic others such as family and kin. This leads logically on to a review of what the extant literature has to say about the specific strategies that gay Muslims use both intra- and interpersonally to manage religious and sexual identities they perceive as dissonant, identities also often viewed as contradictory and therefore impossible subject positions within the religion and the discourses taken up by many of its adherents.

I give special attention to one of these management strategies, 'coming out', in its own chapter section since the topic of disclosure moves the discussion beyond how the individual attempts to reconcile their religion and sexuality into the area of identity management within other-focused relationships. I explore coming out

because I am interested in how Arab Muslim men's sexual identities intersect with family relationships, the outcomes for both the gay son and family members when the latter learn of his homosexuality, and the reasons for (non) disclosure. Indeed, how these men manage/preserve/struggle with family relationships in light of disclosure/non-disclosure of their sexuality is a key concern of this thesis. I will also demonstrate that this literature has relevance to the theoretical concept of intersectionality in that the importance of coming out in Western societies should not be homogenised across cultures since the experience may well be very different for Muslim gay men compared to their white British counterparts.

After discussing 'coming out', I examine what the literature says about racialised gay spaces because one of my research aims is to explore the intersection of participants' racial and ethnic identities with off-line and online white-dominant spaces, and the nature, effects, and perceived benefits and drawbacks of this contact. For example, I wish to know the extent to which contact with such spaces assists gay Muslims to reconcile their religion and sexuality, and the role race/ethnicity plays in sexual or romantic relationships and interactions that develop from contacts within these spaces.

Finally, since I will explore the extent to which racism and Islamophobia (culturally-based racism) contribute to forming gay Arab Muslims' experiences of multiple oppressions in circumstances where their racial/ethnic identities intersect with white-dominant spaces more generally, I review theoretical and empirical literature on these issues.

Having outlined the main thematic areas to be covered in the chapter, let us proceed by firstly discussing the theoretical concept of intersectionality, the central analytical framework of the thesis.

2.2. Using Intersectionality as a Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality as a theory came into academic use in the late 1980s and early 1990s within black feminist thought/writing (largely the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins), focusing specifically on the lives and identities of African-American women, and highlighting how they were different to their white counterparts in that, in academic, legal and social contexts, they experienced a marginalisation and duel oppression due to their race and gender, a gendered

racism that often went unrecognised by society, and which was inseparable from the systems of power that shaped it (Collins and Bilge, 2016; Taylor, Hines and Casey, 2011). Moreover, while there might be some commonality in the experiences of black women's oppression, such experiences could also diverge significantly due to the intersection of particular identity dimensions such as their sexuality, class and religion (Collins and Bilge, 2016). In addition, Collins (2000) emphasised the need to contest negative stereotypical social representations of black women, and to uncover and give prominence to the perspectives of hidden or silenced subgroups such as black lesbian feminists. Overall, black feminist academics argued that, through revealing and clarifying black women's unique standpoint and experiences, social issues could be better understood and rectified, and alternative perspectives on knowledge creation that challenged white male hegemonic thinking could be opened up.

Collins and Bilge (2016, p. 2), in defining intersectionality, contend that 'when it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race, or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other' to 'differentially position each individual' (p. 8). Grzanka (2014a, p. xiii) similarly views intersectionality as 'the study of how…dimensions of inequality co-construct one another'. As Weston (2011, p. 15) states, 'gender is about race is about class is about sexuality is about nationality is about an entire range of social relations'. McCall (2005, p. 1786) explains that this approach, which she terms the '[inter]categorical approach', thus focuses on the complexity of relationships among multiple social groups within and across analytical categories. Indeed, little meaningful occurs when identity dimensions are analysed in a single axis, additive fashion (Weston, 2011). Taylor (2011) highlights that theories of intersectionality are therefore interested in the nuanced way that identity dimensions develop, change, are highlighted or downplayed according to context, rather than viewing them as static categories.

Collins (2000) coined the term the 'matrix of domination' to emphasise how various axes of oppression intersect, producing multiple oppressions, and that different intersections may be more/less salient for different people. She argues that, for many black women, the important axes will be gender, race and class, whereas for other groups, the axes may be different, for example, age, sexuality and religion.

Collins also importantly points out that there is an 'and/or' aspect to the matrix, in that each group will experience different degrees of 'penalty' and 'privilege' since, depending on the context, one is rarely solely a member of a dominant or subordinate group. She gives the example of white women who are privileged because of their ethnicity, but penalised due to their gender. According to Collins, the matrix of domination is structured as operating on three levels of the social world: the micro-level of lived biography, the meso community level and the macro level of social organisations. Dominance is produced and contested at each level.

Collins and Bilge (2016) have identified six key themes of intersectionality: power, relationality, social inequality, social justice, social context and complexity. An intersectional analysis has to take into account the role of 'power' and how it operates and generates inequalities such as racism, homophobia and gender and class discrimination across four domains, namely, the 'structural, disciplinary, cultural and interpersonal' (p. 27). The structural domain involves the influence of social structures that shape the way peple think and act; the cultural domain centres on the propagation and dissemination of ideas that emphasise people's relative positions in society, reinforced through messages that circulate within, for example, the media; the interpersonal is where disadvantage is made visible through social interaction, and the disciplinary domain refers to the 'social rewards and punishments' (p. 27) that are meted out within everyday interactions. 'Relationality' entails a rejection of '*either/or* binary thinking' and an adoption of 'a *both/and* frame' of analysis (p. 27, emphasis in original) – as mentioned above – to concentrate on investigating interconnectedness rather than difference. Relationality also concerns how oppressed identities are more properly understood through relating them to privileged ones and emphasising the need to problematise hegemonic categorisations (Glenn, 2002). Intersectionality may also be concerned with ethics through highlighting 'social inequality' and attempting to right this by campaigning for 'social justice' through a critical praxis and activism. In addition, an awareness of 'social context' is of importance since social inequality, relationality, and power relations are related to 'a specific set of concerns in a specific location' (Collins and Bilge, 2017, p. 28). According to Collins and Bilge, the interlinking of the previous five themes creates a certain 'complexity' in the process of intersectional analysis, but this is neccessary to comprehend the complexity of our social worlds.

In addition to the six key themes described by Collins and Bilge (2016), intersectionality also includes the concept of 'inclusivity', by which is meant making 'social locations and experiences visible that are occluded in essentialist constructions of categories when the effects of the power of forces such as heteronormativity and elitism are considered' (Carasthatis, 2016, p. 56). Related to this, Fish (2008) writes that the usefulness of intersectionality is that it can counter a tendency to impose similarities and homogenisation onto communities and issues: the needs of LGBT people should be understood as different to those of their heterosexual peers. Taylor, Hines and Casey (2011) claim that a further strength of intercategorical intersectionality is that it can bridge existing gaps, since all the writing on class tends to be from a heteronormative outlook, while almost all the writing on sexuality has neglected the issue of class.

Using an intercategorical intersectional approach is not without difficulties however. For example, it is important to recognise that a challenge for intersectional thinking, according to Carastathis (2016), is we cognitively do not view categories such as race and gender as enmeshed and fused because we still theoretically use essentialised, monist constructs and categories largely defined by privileged subgroups. Indeed, Bowleg (2008) makes the valid point that the difficulty with intersectionality is that there are no specific words that adequately describe or give meaning to multiple oppressions, and the absence of such language that describes specific intersections helps to contribute to the invisibility of people and their experiences.

McCall (2005) has expanded intersectionality's theoretical framework by adding two other types to the intercategorical intersectionlity described above: anti-categorical and intra-categorical. The former 'is based on a methodology that deconstructs analytical categories. Social life is considered too irreducibly complex – overflowing with multiple and fluid determinations of both subjects and structures – to make fixed categories anything but simplifying social fictions that produce inequalities in the process of producing differences' (McCall, 2005, p. 1773). Thus, as in post-structural Queer Theory, it is argued that an advantage of this approach is that it problematises, subverts and decentres the limiting, hierarchical, marginalising and oppressive binaries of existing gender/sexuality categories (Biswas, 2007; Stein and Plummer, 1996). Furthermore, it is argued that 'since symbolic violence and material inequalities are rooted in relationships that are defined by race, class,

sexuality, and gender, the project of deconstructing the normative assumptions of these categories contributes to the possibility of positive social change' (McCall, 2005, p. 1777). Carastathis (2016) makes the similar point that 'the continued, unreflective use of these categories naturalizes the very systems that intersectional scholars set out to contest, undermine and transform' (p. 137). In McCall's third type of intersectionality, the intra-categorical approach, '[t]raditional categories are used initially…but the researcher is equally interested in revealing…the range of diversity and difference within the group' (p. 1782). Such an approach 'avoid[s] the fully deconstructive rejection of all categorization, yet…remain[s] deeply sceptical of the homogenizing generalizations that go with the territory of classification and categorization' (p. 1783). Fish (2008) provides a relevant example of intra-categorical variation by highlighting differences *within* the LGBT community which have been underplayed or ignored where there have been widespread and problematic assumptions that the gay community is white and middle class. Carasthatis (2016) and Dean (2011) argue that the intra-categorical approach can be criticised through what Carasthatis terms the 'infinite regress critique', that the social world is so complex that differences and the number of identity categories may be never ending.

A more general weakness of intersectionality is arguably that, as a concept, it is under-theorised in certain respects, for example, assuming a link between micro-level circumstances and macro level structures of oppression without theorising this (Carastathis' [2016] 'scalar critique'). There have also been criticisms when intersectionality has been used to focus primarily on issues of individual identity. Grzanka (2014a) states that Crenshaw and other black feminist writers at the forefront of intersectionality theory certainly do not 'reduce [it] to a theory about *identity*. Intersectionality is a structural analysis and critique insomuch as it is primarily concerned with how social inequalities are formed and maintained' (p. xv, emphasis in original). The criticism has been that '[f]ixation on agency, identities and microsociological dynamics promotes, from this perspective, a kind of tunnel vision that encourages researchers to miss the bigger picture' (Grzanka, 2014b, pp. 68-69). But Grzanka herself argues that a focus on identity *as well as* structural dynamics is necessary and legitimate since intersectionality in this view is about highlighting 'the material consequences of structural oppression on the *lives* of [individuals] trying to negotiate classism, racism, sexism, xenophobia, and homophobia simultaneously'

(p. 70, emphasis in original). In fact, Grzanka says that criticism that it should not is creating a false dichotomy of phenomena that are intricately interweaved. Developing the same point, Taylor, Hynes and Casey (2011) argue that more, in fact, should be done to address the lack of empirical exploration of intersectionality as related to lived experience.

It should be mentioned that very occasionally in the literature alternative terminology is used in preference to the term 'intersectionality'. For example, Weston (2011) has coined the neologism 'renditions' because she argues that intersectionality is too static; it infers a pre-set range of equivalent, equally present and salient different identity dimensions, each of which are defined separately and whose axes all converge at a single point. For Weston, 'renditions' therefore better explains the creative agency and performativity individuals have in projecting, highlighting or dismissing particular identifications, rather like Puar's (2007) similar notion of *assemblages* emphasizing 'becoming' rather than 'fixing'. Hascheme Yekani, Michaelis and Dietze (2011) prefer to use the term 'interdependencies' rather than *intersectionality*, as they feel it stresses the dependence of one category on others, arguing it represents the idea that each category is 'always already intertwined in multiple networks of inequality' (p. 80).

In using intersectionality as a theoretical approach, I acknowledge that its historical origins centred on the racial and gendered identities and concerns of black women. However, my aim is to adapt and broaden the application of this theory to focus on very different research subjects, gay Arab Muslim men. I would argue that intersectionality as a theoretical heuristic framework can provide an insightful means of accounting for and analysing the following in the context of my study: the coming together of male homosexual and gendered as well as religious, social class, ethnic and racial identities; the power dynamics and the outcomes that occur as a result of these various intersections, and the management of these outcomes by these men, thus shaping a good understanding of their lives, issues and identities. I would further assert that my application of intersectionality is very much in keeping with analytical approaches in contemporary academic studies that utilise it in wide-ranging ways. Patricia Hill Collins herself, writing with Sirma Bilge (2016), recognises 'the tremendous heterogeneity that currently characterizes how people understand and use intersectionality' (p.2), citing, for example, its application as a theoretical framework to investigate the connection between identity politics and hip hop in

Harrison's (2009) study of 'black, Latino, white, mixed and/or LGBT' youth and the intersection of ethno-racial, gendered and sexuality identities. Moreover, Collins and Bilge argue intersectionality and its six key themes (themes outlined earlier in this chapter, and discussed again in the concluding chapter to show how they have been adopted in my own study) can be used to account for the income gaps in countries where social categorisations such as gender, age, race and nationality position people differently in the job market; to theorise the education gap between white, middle-class children and other children by highlighting systemic discrimination and the fewer opportunities and facilities available to the poor, people of colour, the disabled, girls and immigrants; and to account for the effects of unequal power dynamics operating through global capitalism producing inequalities in countries' international sporting success. This thesis similarly exemplifies how intersectionality as a theory can be successfully transferred to new contexts and subjects. Moreover, I assert that my study makes far more explicit and extensive use of key theoretical concepts and terminology from intersectionality than any previous study into LGBT Muslim identity.

More specifically then, 'intercategorical intersectionality' offers insights into how these men's identity dimensions need to be understood as interlocking and mutually constitutive at the intra- and interpersonal level; a gay Arab Muslim man's sexual identity should not and cannot be properly or fully understood simply by analysing this identity dimension in isolation from his religious, ethnic, and racial identities, as they all interact and co-construct each other, an approach which typifies Collins and Bilge's (2016) concept of 'relationality'. Intercategorical intersectionality as a concept is also useful to explain and illuminate the distinct outcomes produced at intersections, which have to be managed, and which influence identity construction in contexts such as family relations and gay social spaces. In addition, the 'matrix of domination' (Collins, 2000) describing the various intersecting axes of oppression concomitantly experienced by black women can be usefully adopted, to account for the way in which the gay Arab Muslim men similarly simultaneously experience multiple discriminations (e.g. homophobia, racism, Islamophobia), though they will still generally occupy a privileged social position in terms of their gender identity in more patriarchal cultures like Arab Muslim ones (Ajrouch, 1999; Wadud, 2006), if their sexuality is not known to society at large. With regard to the potential for different axes of oppression to be salient in different contexts, I will argue that

sexuality, race, ethnicity and social class seem to be the most salient intersectional axes of oppression with respect to the men I interviewed.

Utilising intersectionality's 'key theme' of 'power' helps reveal the particular contexts within which power dynamics and structural factors operate that give rise to the multiple oppressions these men experience, and highlights the specific types of power dynamics/structural factors that produce these negative outcomes. My research relates to all three levels of power (personal, community, structural) described by Collins (2000), since I consider the management of intersecting identity dimensions in terms of personal identity, where individuals try to come to terms with their own homosexuality, interactions with community spaces (gay spaces and white dominant spaces), and the influence of broader structures such as institutional religion. Collins and Bilge's (2016) more specific analysis of how power operates through four interlinked domains (socio-cultural, structural, inter-personal and disciplinary) to shape inequalities is also relevant since, in the socio-cultural domain, I explore the hegemonic status of heteronormativity in Arab cultures and communities and how, within the structural domain, heterosexist values are transmitted via institutions such as the family and religious institutions. In the inter-personal domain, I demonstrate how this is achieved within the micro-level interactions between, for example, the gay Arab Muslim participants on the one hand and family and kin and heterosexual Muslims on the other, while in the disciplinary domain, I highlight the mechanisms and discourses used to preserve the heterosexual hegemony by explicit sanctioning of non-conforming sexualities. I am also interested in how these disciplinary discourses and punishments are responded to and contested by gay Arab Muslim men. Understanding these men's marginalisation and oppression through comparison with the power and privileged status of heternormativity speaks to the concept of 'relationality' in intersectionality theory.

The key intersectionality theme of 'social inequality' which emphasises the marginalisation and stigmatisation of particular identities, the silencing of voices and the making invisible of experiences is, I will demonstrate, of great relevance to the lived experiences of the gay Arab Muslim men in the study and this theme has informed the study's epistemological considerations and partly helped inspire the rationale for conceiving this project in the first place. The study will demonstrate that Collins' (2000) notion of 'inclusivity' is relevant in that the subject position of 'gay

Muslim' is often not recognised as even existing by both many heterosexual Muslims and non-Muslims, since a homosexual identity and a Muslim one are viewed as implacably non-intersecting.

The theme of 'social context' is useful to help account for how the participants' experiences of their sexuality, of homophobia, and of reconciling their sexuality and religion may differ due to the greater or lesser tolerance of homosexuality in different cultures/ countries (some participants were born in the U.K. while others grew up in Arab-majority countries). A consideration of 'social context' can thus help explain *why* particular outcomes are produced at the intersection of participants' sexual and religious iidentities, which shape their experiences and identities in specific ways.

In deploying Intersectionality as an heuristic lens, I also make use of the concept of 'intra-categorical intersectionality' to specifically illuminate how categorisations like 'Arab' or 'Islamic Masculinity', often considered as homogeneous and monolithic constructs, incorporate diverse understandings and meanings. Indeed, gay Arab Muslims are not a unitary group, with the same issues and experiences and as I will make clear in Chapter Four, homogenising the experience of being Arab would be a serious mistake as it erases the specificity and difference which produces unique identity experiences. Intra-categorical intersectionality is therefore very valuable as a theoretical concept to help capture this diversity of meaning.

Related to Taylor, Hines and Casey's (2011) point that class has been neglected in studies of sexuality and sexuality, I will demonstrate that using intersectionality theory in my own study has the advantage of illuminating the salience and extremely significant effects of the interface between sexuality, social class, ethnicity and gender in the identity construction of gay Arab Muslim men.

This study of gay Arab Muslim men certainly attempts to address the criticism that intersectionality needs to move beyond lofty theoretical abstractions and, by hightlighting the 'nexus of social location, linked to structural phenomena' (Taylor, Hines and Casey, 2011, p. 4), proves its relevance to empirical reality by fundamentally analysing how identity dimensions intersect on an everyday 'lived' basis, whilst also highlighting how these facets of identity are shaped through the multiple inequalities that result from dominant structural forces.

While appreciating the drawbacks to using categories and maintaining a healthy criticism of them (for example, I do feel it important to use an *intra-categorical* approach to uncover variation in supposedly homogeneus groups), I do not utilise a deconstructionist, anti-categorical approach to intersectionality in this study, as I feel doing so would result in a less adequate ability to analyse the lived material realities of my sexual subjects, the intersectional dimensions of their lives, and their management of simultaneous multiple structural oppressions (Grzanka 2014a; Taylor, 2011). For one thing, the anti-categorical approach fails to take into account that identity categories are hugely salient in the everyday experiences of social actors, and the constant use of such categories through social mechanisms and institutional apparatus produces very real negative and pervasive experiences that shape homosexual identities (Green, 2002; 2007a). Also, almost all of my interviewees seemed content to describe their own sexual identities in terms of the social categorisations that exist and are widely used. Taking an anti-categorical approach would also ignore the fact that much positive and progressive change benefitting LGBT people has been achieved through an adoption of a gay identitarian model e.g. in gay rights groups and movements (Gamson, 1996; Seidman, 1993) through the use of sexuality categories (indeed, I will show that some of my participants have greatly valued the outcomes of successful campaigning for gay marriage and adoption rights). Thus, categories have their advantages.

While Weston (2011) and Puar (2007) make very valid points about the dynamism of agency in identity construction processes, their alternative terms of ‘renditions’ and ‘assemblages’ have not been widely taken up by other writers when discussing the conceptual area of intersections, and for greater clarity, I use the most widely understood, accepted and applied terminology in the field. Thus I will refer to ‘intersection(s)’ and ‘intersectionality’ throughout the thesis.

2.2.1. Intersectionality and empirical studies into LGBT identities

An intersectional analytical approach seems to have been adopted in some empirical studies that have explored both non-Muslim and Muslim LGBT identities, even if intersectionality theories and the specific word ‘intersection’ and its derivatives are

not always explicitly mentioned (alternatively, a synonym like ‘interface’ may be deployed).

In terms of intercategorical intersectionality, Casey (2009) has examined both the intersection of gender and sexuality and also age and sexuality in the context of gay scene spaces to highlight how women feel excluded from these locations since both the ownership and the customer base are male-dominated, while older men can feel marginalised since these venues target a younger clientele, since youthful bodies are seen to epitomise gay desirability, and the older male body is fixed as undesirable. There have also been a few empirical studies that have explored the gender-sexuality-class intersectional axes. They include Taylor (2004, 2005, 2007) who analyzed how these dimensions intersect for working class lesbians across a range of sites such as families, schools, work, leisure and sexual relationships. Her British subjects did not see the possibility to separate out the elements of class and sexuality in their lived experiences. They lacked the material/financial capital regarded as necessary to construct a gay identity (for example, the costs of travelling to visit city gay scenes for women located in small towns and the countryside were seen as prohibitive) and they felt excluded from increasingly gentrified commercial gay spaces since they felt they lacked the fashion style to be accepted there, and also felt that the area they came from negatively affected dating possibilities. Scene space was classed by them as full of affectation, middle class and male. Moreover, being middle class was perceived as providing the financial and cultural capital to produce freer mobility to relocate to more trendy, liberal and tolerant areas to avoid anti-gay discrimination, whereas working class lesbians lacked this option (similar findings were made by McDermott [2010], additionally identifying that middle class lesbians are more protected than working class counterparts from negative psychological effects associated with coming out such as stress and fear). Taylor says that it is therefore essential to recognize that these women do not live out their sexuality in isolation from the influence of other axes of inequality. Also concerning the intersection of sexuality and social class, Casey (2010) found how income is an exclusionary barrier for British gay men to travel abroad, and that the gay travel industry centres only on the affluent, while poorer gay males are ‘othered’ as undesirable and excluded. Beckett (2004) investigated the intersection of sexuality and disability, highlighting how a person who is disabled and lesbian is presumed to

be heterosexual by heterosexual others who view her partner as a carer, and therefore the lesbian identities of the couple are elided.

Regarding intra-categorical intersectionality, Fish (2008), for example, examines how LGBT people in health care contexts are frequently and wrongly homogenised as a group that shares characteristics, whilst their diversity in terms of ethnicity and (dis)ability is ignored. Brekhus (2003), examining the lives of gay men in the United States, also highlights intra-categorical variation and the importance of not homogenising gay men into a monolithic group. He differentiates them into three distinct types according to the degree to which their sexuality is fore-grounded/suppressed. As I will apply his framework to gay Arab Muslim identities, I will outline it in some detail. The first type, the *peacock* or 'lifestyler', refers to men who lead high density, highly visible, openly gay lifestyles; indeed, the gay dimension of their identity takes precedence and defines most of their daily activities. The second type of gay man classified is the *centaur* or 'integrator'. This label describes an individual whose gay identity is neither particularly fore-grounded nor hidden, comprising one (important) aspect of the person's lifestyle along with other equally important identity dimensions, which in composite define the whole person. The centaur's sexuality is an ever present element, usually visible but lived out at a fairly low key level. In other words, the individual sees himself as not being defined *solely* by his sexuality. Brekhus' final gay identity type is the *chameleon* or 'commuter'. For chameleons, their sexuality is fore-grounded only in particular contexts, and for the rest of the time does not assume any prominence, or remains hidden. An example would be men who, for most of the time, pass as heterosexual, or do nothing to highlight the gay element of their sexual identities, but who at weekends visit gay scenes of large cities in order to temporarily assume and live out gay lifestyles.

Turning to empirical studies specifically about LGBT Muslims in the British, Australian and North American contexts, which will be referred to in greater detail throughout the chapter and thesis, only a handful of these (for example, Abraham, 2009; Hammoud-Beckett, 2007; Shannahan, 2009; Yip and Khalid, 2010) have had any Arabs in their samples and these were exceedingly small in number, usually one or two individuals. Hammoud-Beckett's study which focused on the relationship between two Lebanese-Australian brothers, one homosexual, the other heterosexual, makes brief reference to how Arab cultures consider homosexuality to be a Western disease and something alien, while Abraham's (2009) Australian study

briefly mentions how Lebanese-Australian Muslim men have been represented in the media as gang rapists and that there has been a 'conflict for masculine hegemony' (p. 84) between them and Anglo/Celtic Australian men. Otherwise, in these and other studies involving LGBT Arab Muslims, their ethno-racial identities are not really focused on and, instead, the analysis tends to centre on their sexual identities within the context of the religion.

The majority of the studies of LGBT Muslims in Western contexts have focused on South Asians and examined the (intercategorical) intersection of sexual and ethnic identities (though again, any diversity and differences in experiences of ethnic identity have been largely overlooked, as the individuals appear to be subsumed and homogenised under the very broad ethnic categorisation 'South Asian' (one notable exception is Jaspal's [2012b] study which focuses on the different experiences of Pakistani and Indian gay men). This intersection has generally been found to produce outcomes of dissonance and intra/inter-personal conflict. These studies examine the coping strategies and arguments that are used by LGBT Muslims to affirm and integrate their religious and sexual identities and the socio-cultural, religious and emotional effects and obstacles that have to be managed, negotiated and overcome at an intra- and interpersonal level (Jaspal, 2012a; Yip, 2015), especially in the context of topics such as coming out to families and kin (Yip, 2004a), (arranged) marriage (Jaspal, 2012b, 2014b; Jaspal and Cinnirella 2010a; Jaspal and Siraj, 2011; Minwalla *et al*., 2005; Siraj, 2006), sexual autonomy, i.e. the right to use their bodies as they wish and to love who they wish (Shannahan, 2009; Yip, 2008a) and migration to the U.K. (Jaspal, 2014a), all in light of the dominant homonegative representations and discourses found in Islam and the heterosexual Muslim community (Siraj, 2009). The intersection of gender with religion, sexuality and ethnicity has been most explicitly discussed in relation to lesbian Muslim identity. Siraj (2017) and Yip (2008a) argue that Muslim lesbians (unlike their male peers) have to manage issues concerning clothing and gender role stipulations from their religion as well as the pressure of socio-cultural norms shaped by patriarchy and sexism that require females, particularly, to maintain their chastity in order to preserve the honour of the family. This creates an axis of oppression due to their sexuality that exists alongside religious and cultural discrimination. Siraj (2012) also argues that the existence of LGBT Muslim lesbians has often been ignored by society at large since lesbianism is usually associated with Whiteness.

These women attempt to reconcile their sexuality and religion, through inclusive re-interpretations of Islamic holy texts arguing that lesbianism is barely mentioned in them (Siraj, 2016), and through other strategies common to all LGBT Muslims, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

How gay Muslim men's religious identities intersect with their sexual, ethno-cultural and racial identities in white-dominant contexts, and how such intersections relate to experiences of identity conflict has been explored in the context of dating non-Muslim white men and other gay Muslim men (Jaspal, 2015b; Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2012; Minwalla *et al*., 2005). Several studies have examined how LGBT Muslims face and manage multiple discriminations: homophobia from within their Muslim communities and racism/Islamophobia from within the surrounding non-Muslim society and the gay community (Abraham, 2009; Jaspal, 2017a; Siraj, 2014a).

Concerning intra-categorical intersectionality, Erel *et al*. (2011) use an intersectional approach to highlight the pervasiveness of images and conceptualisations which homogenise LGBT identities as firmly centred on 'Whiteness' and 'Westernness' and the consequences of this. Hammoud-Beckett's (2007) study details how gay Muslims may experience and conceptualise approaches to their sexual identity, homosexuality and coming out in different ways to non-Muslim gay men. Yip (2005a, 2010) discussing LGBT religiosity and spirituality in the West and Shannahan (2009), in her article on how LGBT Muslims view sexual ethics in Islam, have stressed the importance of intersectionality for understanding the specificity of identity construction processes among these Muslims to illuminate the salience of their sexual identities in relation to their other identity dimensions such as race and ethnicity. Phellas' (2005) study of Cypriot gay men in the U.K. (which included Muslims) also explored the salience of participants' sexual and ethnic identities, and found that the importance of preserving harmonious family and community relations within a culture antipathetic to homosexuality meant that these men largely did not allow their sexual identity to assume a master-status in their lives.

As can be seen then, aspects of intersectionality have comprised the thematic content of previous studies into both Muslim and non-Muslim LGBT sexualities.

2.3. Arab Ethnic Identity and Intra-Categorical Intersectionality

In this section, I will link a review of literature on Arab ethnic identity closely to the theoretical concept of intra-categorical intersectionality discussed in the first two sections of the chapter. It is important to do this because intra-categorical variation in terms of ethnicity plays a highly salient role in the identity construction processes of my interviewees, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Four.

Aly (2015) argues that the term 'Arab' is a contested construct, which cannot be unproblematically applied to describe a discrete and homogeneous ethnic group, since this group is fragmented by differences of class, language, nationality, religion, education, history and geo-politics, which determine relative insider and outsider positions, and furthermore, that affiliations to and perceptions of being a member of this group can change over time. Aly (2015) and Hopkins and Ibrahim (1997) recognise that the link between language and ethnic identity is problematic, since many second/third generation Arab youth in the West may not even speak Arabic, yet still identify as Arab due to the fact that their ancestral lineage is in the Arab Middle East and North Africa. Conversely, some of those who *do* speak Arabic may not consider themselves Arab, for example, those of Berber heritage who take greater pride in and highly value this indigenous identity marker (Davies and Bentahila, 2012). An Arab also cannot be denoted simply by race or religion, since they may be of various phenotypes, and also of various religions (there are Jewish and Christian Arabs, Muslim Arabs and atheists), even if the mass media and religious racialisation in the West homogenises all Arabs as Muslims (AlSultany, 2006; Reynolds, 2015). Moreover, there is sectarian variation within the religions that Arabs adhere to; Arab Muslims are divided into Sunni and Shi'ite (Shia) branches[3].

The next three subsections focus on further aspects of intra-categorical variation among Arabs in the West (particularly the U.K) that will be especially relevant to the discussion of data findings to be presented in Chapter Four. First, I

[3] Shia refers to *Shiat Ali*, the Party of Ali, because its followers believe that Ali, Muhammad's cousin who died in 661, should have ruled the Muslim community.The rift between Sunni and Shia Muslims began directly after the Prophet's death in 632, when disagreements over the leadership of the Muslim community emerged. The people who became Sunni argued that [Mohammad's] companions were best able to maintain his legacy; those who became Shia argued that his family was best suited to the task…[Shia have] developed different devotions and religious practices [compared to Sunnis] and there are many different branches of Shiism practiced in the world today, including Twelvers (*Ithna Asharis*) Yazidis, Ismailis (or Seveners), and Zaydis'(Kayyali, 2006, pp.16-17).

discuss variation in the degree of salience of people's Arab identity, after that, wealth and social class differences, and finally, generational differences and the role of cultural hybridity which can all produce quite distinct identities.

2.3.1. Affiliation with an Arab identity vis-à-vis other identity dimensions

Arabness is just one element among many co-present dimensions of a composite identity, whose salience may be contextually contingent (Suleiman, 1999), while other identity dimensions such as a race, religion or nationality might be fore-grounded by individuals instead, reflecting how ethnic identities are often dynamically constructed (Cornell and Hartman, 1998; Song, 2003) to match situation and audience, rather than static, primordial 'givens' (Geertz, 1963). In empirical studies of Egyptians and Moroccans living in the U.K. (Karmi, [1997] and Cherti, [2008] respectively), participants predominantly asserted nationality labels to self-identify. On the other hand, Shaheem's (2014) study of Emirati students at U.K. universities found that they tended to self-identify as Muslim instead of Arab/their nationality: heightening their religious identity provided an ontological security in the face of the challenge of beng exposed to very different and disorienting cultural/secular influences while they were in England. Bichani (2015) found that those of her Arab interviewees who resided in U.K. localities with a dense Muslim population, and where the children attended complementary schools that projected a strong Islamic ethos tended to prioritise their religious identities, whereas those living in areas with mostly White British residents tended to emphasise the secular dimension of their identity, thus identifying mainly with labels of nationality, ethnicity (Arab) or mixedness (British-Arab). The Arab identities uncovered by Bichani would appear to reflect a 'circumstantialist' type of ethnicity, which emerges from particular situations people find themselves in (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996), here relating to educational and demographic factors.

Interestingly Naber (2008) states that some Arabs in America reject the term 'Arab' completely as an identity descriptor, believing it asserts a negative nationalist outlook which excludes other indigenous peoples who live in the region termed the 'Arab world'. Specific contextual factors in a diasporic community (a diasporic community here simply meaning groups living geographically distant [Collyer, 2011] from the Arab Muslim Middle East of their family heritage) can influence the public

salience of a person's Arab identity. For example, Al Husseini and Signoles (2014) posit that the great increase in anti-Arab, anti-Muslim rhetoric in the West and Western led foreign wars impacting Muslims in recent years may encourage feelings of greater diasporic attachment to one's Arab/Muslim identity. Related to this, Aly (2015) and Cherti (2008) researching Arabs in London, Nabel (2008) discussing Arab-Americans, and Noble and Tabar (2002) investigating young Lebanese-Australian youth all empirically found that participants asserted a 'reactive' ethnic identity, using ethnicity in a collective, instrumental manner (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996) as a strategy to combat perceived/actual anti-Arab racism, discrimination and social exclusion. Nagel and Staeheli's (2008) Arab activist participants in the U.K. feel that to legitimise their Arab cultural and ethnic identities, they must accept that Islam is part of their Arabness, and feel obliged to make their religious identities more visible, especially to contest stereotypes about Islam and Islamophobic political/public discourses by educating British people about their religion. Conversely, Aly (2015) found that an anti-racist survival strategy was for Arabs to attempt to hide their ethnic origins and pass as a different ethnicity such as white, Asian or Mediterranean. Thus, returning to the concept of intersectionality, it is clear that there may be much intra-categorical variation in the salience of the ethnic identity dimension among Arabs.

2.3.2. Wealth and social class differences

While the British media often tend to stereotype Arabs as wealthy oil sheikhs (Gee, 1991), Karmi (1997) says that Arabs in Britain are not financially (or socially) homogeneous groups, which again underlines the need to recognise intra-categorical variation. De Haas, Bakewell and Kubal (2011) and Nagel (2005) note that the majority of British Arabs are highly educated, belong to a high socio-economic group working as business investors or in the professions, reside in upper/upper-middle class areas, and have average education and social class levels surpassing those of their white British contemporaries. On the other hand, Aspinall and Mitton (2010), Cherti (2008) and Valentine, Sporton, and Nielsen (2009) describe unskilled or semi-skilled working class Arabs in the U.K. (some are here illegally [Joffé, 2007]) doing retail, catering, cleaning and hotel work as well as those who are unemployed, who may lack literacy skills, have low educational attainment,

and live in local authority accommodation, sometimes in overcrowded and insanitary conditions, in socially deprived areas. These generally come from the poorer Arab countries in North Africa and Egypt. One should, of course, be careful of generalising by nationality. Loddo (2006), for example, studying Palestinians in the U.K., highlights social class variation *within* a nationality group. She argues that highly-skilled, urban, middle class Palestinian elites cultivate what they consider '[c]osmopolitan worldviews and…[a] taste for cultural difference' (p. 16), and distance themselves 'from [Palestinian] cultural practices and values they consider "traditional" [and from those they regard as] "traditional" Palestinians in Britain' (p. 10). For them, 'Palestinians who do not display openness to diversity are considered "backward"' (Loddo, 2016, p. 16), thus illustrating how class differences also create prejudicial attitudes towards the more socio-economically disadvantaged, as well as highlighting intra-categorical variation.

The largest wealth and social class differences in the U.K. generally exist between Arabs from the Arabian Peninsula and all other Arabs (Aly, 2015). Aly mentions that Gulf Arab elites own villa type accommodation and apartments in exclusive central London locations such as Hyde Park and Knightsbridge, and he contends there is 'an aura of unlimited wealth that is associated with the people of the Gulf.' (p. 125). Butt (1997) has argued that the lifestyles, mentality and issues of wealthy Gulf Arabs have little in common with the vast majority of other Arabs.The classed nature of Arab identities in the U.K. can be further observed in leisure activities, where spaces, practices, objects and discourses complement each other in the doing and consumption of Arabness. Class boundaries were found to be strictly observed by some of Aly's (2015) interviewees: *shisha* cafes in more run down, working class areas frequented by Arabs from less affluent countries such as Yemen, Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon tended be avoided by these interviewees, as were areas on Edgware Road frequented by extremely wealthy Gulf Arabs. Aly argues the enactment of these practices by his participants represents an emerging middle-class Arab identity in London.

2.3.3. Generational differences and hybridised Arab identities

Second and third generational Arab identities have emerged in the West that are often markedly different to those of parents who generally still orientate towards the

culture and customs of their homeland, where collectivist, patriarchally-dominant, hierarchical relations stress obedience and rigid gender roles (Hermans, 2006; Kayyali, 2006; McIrwin Abu-Laban and Abu-Laban, 1999). The difference in later generations is usually due to a greater degree of cultural assimilation and the development of culturally hybrid identities producing 'new ethnicities' (Hall, 1992) that defy notions of cultures that are fixed, absolutist, (Meer, 2014) 'mutually impermeable expressions of racial and national identity' (Gilroy, 1987, p. 63). Instead, 'they are racially and ethnically inclusive cultural forms' (Back, 1996, p. 248) and 'multiply inflected forms of social identity' (Back 1996, p. 7).

As far as Arabs are concerned, those in second and third generations, especially with higher education levels, feel freer to practise their religion more flexibly and tend to exhibit more liberal attitudes towards gender roles and spousal relations, valuing what they perceive as intrinsic aspects of Western culture such as the discourses and practices of democratic freedoms, diversity and tolerance (Aly, 2015). Shaheem (2014) found empirical evidence of hybridised identities in her study of the acculturation processes of Emirati students in the U.K. Moving in environments where genders were not segregated and alcohol was freely available (unlike at home), there were signs that their cultural perspectives altered as they investigated new values and behaviours such as socialising with people of other religions and with the opposite sex. They consequently felt they had developed more liberal and broad-minded attitudes, while still maintaining aspects of their Emirati identity. Nagel (2002) identified British Arabs who she termed 'young cosmopolitans' who chose to affiliate themselves with certain elements of both their Arab and British cultural backgrounds, but more importantly 'celebrate[d] the idea that they are part of a multicultural society centred in London where, from their perspective, no single group or culture is dominant (p. 277-278). Noble and Tabar's (2002) Lebanese-Australian youth exhibited a 'flexible hybridity' (p. 141) that allowed them adaptability and agency to respond to the demands of their social environment. They used assimilationist approaches when beneficial to them, gladly identifying with what they perceived as typically 'Australian' past-times and values of individualism and independence to escape what they viewed as strict Lebanese-Arab family controls over movements and relationships. On the other hand, they viewed their perceived greater respect towards parents compared to Anglo-Australian children as a superior attribute of their Arab ethnic identity (Poynting, Noble and Tabar, 1999).

In the above subsections, the concept of Arabness has been explored by relating it to intersectionality and illustrating, specifically through the intra-categorical variations I have outlined, that we should therefore not in any way conclude 'that an essential or uniform Arab ethnicity exists' (Nagel, 2002, p. 282).

2.4. Constructing Islamic Masculinities

Along with ethnicity, another identity dimension of relevance to this study of intersectionality is the performance of gender through religiously and socio-culturally designated roles and behavioral norms, and more specifically, the performance (or non-performance) of masculinity in determining what does or does not constitute an authentic Arab Muslim man in Arab Muslim communities. The anthropologist Matthew Gutmann cited by Inhorn (2012) describes how masculinity has usually been conceptualised in four main ways: 'as anything men *think* and *do*; masculinity as anything men think and do to *be* men; masculinity as reflected by some men being inherently *more manly* than others; and masculinity as anything that women are *not,* emphasising the importance of male-female relations' (Inhorn, 2012, p. 6, emphasis in original). Inhorn (2012) refers to the term 'hegemonic masculinity', as coined by the scholar R.W. Connell, as centring on:

> relationality and that the relationships *within* gender (i.e. between men) are based on the relationships *between* genders (i.e. between men and women), relationships that are hierarchical…[H]egemonic masculinity is a normative "ideal" type, which while varying cross-culturally, exhibits general patterns…including wealth and command of other resources, attractiveness, virility (i.e. sexual potency, physical strength, heterosexuality, and emotional detachment (pp. 42-43).

This concept is of clear relevance to intersectionality in that other forms of masculinity such as that represented by, for example, non-white, gay men are subordinated in the hierarchy and marginalised (Garlick, 2016).

Hegemonic masculinity in the context of Muslim communities, as in Western contexts, is predicated on the contrast with opposite concepts such as women and

men who are effeminate (De Sondhy, 2014). Hegemonic Islamic masculinity places great importance on family, marriage and procreation and therefore heterosexuality (De Sondhy, 2014; Inhorn 2012), and thus is connected to both gender and sexuality (more is said about Islam's views on sexuality in the next section). Any male who does not fit into the hegemonic conceptualisation of Muslim masculinity, such as a homosexual who does not want to get married and bring up a family, would, according to Siraj (2010), suffer the stigma and social disgrace of being considered insufficiently male or masculine. In failing to perform his ascribed gender role, he would be considered a subversive and disruptive threat to the harmony of the sexes and the social workings of the Muslim community, going against the laws of nature, God and society (Siraj, 2010).

Hegemonic Islamic masculinity requires that the ideal Muslim man will be circumcised, have completed military service, and be willing to fight to defend his country and Islam (Helvacioglu, 2006). Related to the latter point, Gerami (2005) describes a specific Islamist masculinity which emerged at the end of the twentieth century, 'the product of fundamentalist resistance movements and Western media' (p. 452), informed by the narratives of *jihad* as a form of warfare and *shahadat* (martyrdom) to serve Islam. As a result, Arab Muslim men in the west are often positioned as dangerous terrorists (Inhorn, 2012). I will say more about this point in the section on Islamophobia below.

In addition, hegemonic Islamic masculinity requires men to be active in the public sphere outside the home as the breadwinner (De Sondhy, 2014), and as the main decision maker in the family (Hopkins, 2009; Siraj, 2010). Patriarchy, 'a deeply ingrained and pervasive ideology of inherent male superiority' (Inhorn, 2012, p. 13) is a key component of this masculinity, and young Arab Muslim males are usually socialised believing they will grow up to have positions of dominance and control over females, for example, where men make the decisions about whether female children can attend school, and if wives can go out and work (Simmons, 2003). Kugle (2010) says all this reinforces the image of women as inferior to men. Traditional gender roles also designate men as protectors of women and, crucially, defenders of the honour of female relatives, ensuring that the actions of the latter do not despoil family honour through, for example, sexual impropriety; this is sometimes achieved through the use of aggression to discipline and control women, and in extreme cases, by honour killings (Baobaid, 2006; De Sondhy, 2014; Inhorn, 2012).

Hegemonic Islamic masculinity positions the Arab Muslim woman's role as subordinate and she is considered the property of her husband (Baobaid, 2006; De Sondhy, 2014; Inhorn, 2012) traditionally confined to the private, domestic sphere as the homemaker, the rearer of children and the cook (Ali, 2003; Conway-Long, 2006; De Sondhy, 2014). It is cultural practices that have influenced the application of Islam to producing understood gender role norms, and helped sustain everyday beliefs that reinforce patriarchal domination of society and gender inequalities (Baobaid, 2006; De Sondhy, 2014), inequalities that have become entrenched in Muslim majority countries through legislation that restricts the rights and roles of women (Baobaid, 2006).

The concept of a 'hegemonic masculinity', however, has been criticised for being static, exclusive and essentialising, for implying that this form is a 'single, coherent model' (Garlick, 2016, p. 33) therefore overlooking 'inconsistencies in the production of masculinities and the existence of multiple hegemonic masculinities' (Garlick, 2016, p. 35) and also reifying men into specific 'types', which fails to 'account for their nuanced and constantly evolving responses to their changing social worlds' (p. 62). Masculinities in the Arab Middle East should, in fact, be considered 'plural, diverse, locally situated, historically contingent [and] socially constructed' (Inhorn, 2012, p. 51). Indeed Gerami (2005) and Inhorn (2012) write of contrasting Islamic masculinities to the hegemonic, idealised kind which they term 'liberal masculinities' and 'emergent masculinities' respectively, that are helping to redefine how to be a Muslim man. It is argued that changing social trends such as male labour migration and the increase in love marriages in Muslim communities (Inhorn, 2012) or greater acceptance of LGBT people in Western countries (Anderson, 2009) where Muslims reside, have lead to new types of 'masculine practice…[and understandings of masculinity] which encapsulate change over the male life course as men age [and] change over generations as male youth grow to adulthood' which have shaped alternative Islamic masculinities (Inhorn, 2012, p. 60). Young Muslim men in both Muslim majority countries and of the second generation in Europe are now more often emphasising their support for liberal education, freedoms of speech and civil rights; they attempt to resist traditional dress and behavioural norms; wish to date before getting married; and may stand against fundamentalist Islamist ideologies by, for example, undertaking re-interpretive strategies of theological works that redefine traditional views on gender, thereby contesting versions that are

oppressive to women (Gerami, 2005; Inhorn, 2012). It should, though, be pointed out that these more inclusive types of Islamic masculinities seem to exist alongside and compete against the traditional hegemonic form.

While some empirical studies of Muslim youth and adults in the U.K. have uncovered instances where beliefs and behaviours associated with hegemonic masculinity are being subverted and criticised by Muslim males, attitudes strongly representative of the patriarchal values outlined at the beginning of this subsection are still widespread, attitudes derived from *Qur'an*ic declarations about gender roles, cultural and social expectations in Muslim communities that assign and sharply delineate gender roles, and from assertions of biological differences (Archer, 2001; Hopkins, 2009; Siraj, 2010; 2014b). As will be seen in Chapters 4-6, the influence of patriarchal values with their devaluing of the status of women and gay men and their emphasis on conformity to gender role norms is highly salient in the lives of the gay Arab Muslim men I interviewed.

2.5. (Homo)Sexuality in Islam, Religious and Cultural Homophobia

For LGBT Muslims generally and, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Four, also for the men in my study more specifically, the intersection of sexuality and religion is a highly significant one. Islam's view of homosexuality and the socio-cultural norms and values present in Muslim communities converge to create an axis of oppression for LGBT Muslims. Therefore, this section will explain the role of both religious and cultural factors which shape attitudes towards sexuality and homosexuality in these communities.

The historical and discursive understanding of licit sex and sexuality in Islam has been that sex can *only* be sanctioned within the context of heterosexual married relationships (based on the harmony of the sexes and the harmony of life, [Bouhdiba, 2004]). This also means that pre- and extra-marital relationships are forbidden (Siraj, 2009; Shannahan, 2009). Bouhdiba (2004) and Siraj (2009) state that Islamic teachings emphasize the prominent role of sexuality in a Muslim's life: one is obligated to get married, to have sexual intercourse and produce children. Siraj (2010) emphasizes that, while in Western law, sexuality has been seen as something of personal, individual conscience and private morality, Islam's views on sexuality have strongly been shaped by the teachings and prescriptions set out in its

foundational holy texts: the *Qur'an,* (believed to be the literal and divine word of God [Jamal, 2001]) the *Hadith* (a collection of the supposed sayings and deeds of the Prophet Mohammed [Kugle, 2010]), and in rulings of the *Shari'ah* legal code, which uphold the position that any sexual relationship can only be condoned if sanctioned in Islamic law. Muslim societies have tried to regulate sexuality to prevent sex outside of marriage by keeping the sexes separate as much as possible (Bouhdiba, 2004; Hidayatullah, 2003). Bouhdiba (2004) and Mernissi (1987) highlight how such separation of the sexes has often resulted in tacit homosexual behaviour flourishing in Islamic countries.

Ali (2006) highlights the gender-differentiated nature of licit sexuality in Islam, in that male sexuality and sexual needs are promoted and privileged, whereas female sexuality is ignored or castigated. Writers like Ali, Wadud (2006), Mernissi (1987) and Kugle (2010) outline the Muslim husband's prerogative to practise polygamy, initiate divorce, and have rights of access to the wife's sexual organs at any time, in return for providing for and protecting her (the marriage relationship was thus one of male ownership and control over female sexuality, analogous to the system of slavery, [Ali, 2006]). Mernissi and Kugle write of how female sexuality in Islam has traditionally been seen as a satanically dangerous, sexually insatiable threat to the harmonious social and moral order, and had to be controlled by confining Muslim women to specified quarters in homes (Simmons, 2003) and having them veil their faces outside. Ali (2006) stresses that men are, conversely, given complete agency within *Qur'an*ic invocations about behaviour in relation to sexual matters (for example, instructions to men concerning how they should initiate sex, and the permission given to men to have sex with women [described as a 'tilth'] in whichever sexual positions the male demands), while women are demeed as passive, non-agentive receivers of the actions of men.

Regarding homosexuality, Siraj (2009) argues that within the heterosexual Muslim community, widespread homonegativity, (i.e. 'negative feelings and attitudes towards, and treatments of homosexuality and homosexual people' [Yip, 2010, p. 37]) and heterosexism (i.e. the privileging of heterosexuality as natural within society [Plummer, 1992]) is theologically engendered. Yip (2004a) states that for Muslims, Islam is more than a religion; it is code of behaviour that impinges on every aspect of an individual's life, and the teachings of the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* guide believers in how to live a morally righteous life. As Whitaker (2011) and Kugle (2010) point out,

many Muslims will justify their opposition to homosexuality by citing from the holy texts, passages which, they have been taught, condemn homosexuality. Of key significance, the story of Lut in the *Qur'an* (where Lut's guests, angelic messengers, are allegedly threatened with sexual assault by the people of the town) is viewed by many Islamic commentators (for example, Yahya, 2000; Zafeeruddin, 1999) as an explicit condemnation of homosexuality (Jamal, 2001). Furthermore, Minwalla *et al*. (2005) and Siraj (2009) say that the verses of the *Hadith* have been cited by traditionalist and neo-traditionalist Islamic interpreters, especially from the *Hanbali* Islamic school, as unequivocally calling for the death penalty for homosexual acts. Institutional Islamic discourses invariably condemn homosexuality as a heinous and abominable threat to the survival of the species, as morally corrupting of youth, as ruining the lives of women, and causing fatal sexual diseases (Zafeeruddin, 1999; Siraj 2009).

In recent years, several academic writers, including those who would regard themselves as 'progressive Muslims' (Safi, 2003) have advocated a new Islamic hermeneutics focusing on gender and sexuality egalitarianism. Gender egalitarianism is certainly seen as important for the possibility of LGBT egalitarianism, because writers such as Kugle (2010), Safi (2003) and Wadud (2006) agree that, for there to be any progress in ameliorating the vociferous condemnation of and homophobia towards LGBT Muslim people from within Muslim communities, the older and continuing struggle for gender equality which has been conducted by Muslim feminist and anti-patriarchal writers, first has to be won.

As an example of this 'gender *jihad*' (Wadud, 2006), Nomani (2005) cited in Shannahan (2009) demands the right for Muslim women to freely choose partners and refuse sex, whilst academics like Ahmed (1992), Barlas (2002) and Kugle (2010) draw attention to the still present influence of patriarchal, andocentric and false interpretations of Islam's holy works. The Muslim feminist Barlas, for example, argues that Muslim sexual identities through the centuries have been shaped by the legal works of a half a dozen heterosexual men in an age of misogyny. She further states the *Qur'an* itself does not make negative assertions about women and sex, but rather celebrates sex, and stresses the need for *mutual* sexual satisfaction between couples. In dress prescriptions, Ahmed (1992) and Barlas (2002) argue that verses about modest dress refer only to a woman's covering her bosom area, and not her face, and that there are also verses that govern a male's sexual modesty.

With regard to homosexuality Kugle (2010) Jamal (2001) Schild (1992) and Wafer (1997) have actively reinterpreted the story of Lut, arguing it does not, in fact, single out male homosexuality for censure, while Schmitt (1992), Duran (1993) and Kugle (2010) analyse the *Hadith* and cast doubt on the authenticity of some of their rulings against homosexuality. Muslim Women and LGBT rights campaigners share a common struggle then in that they both have to manage and try to contest the way some Muslims use the supposed teachings of Islam to support discriminatory and dehumanising views and discourses, whether patriarchal, misogynistic or homophobic. Despite these noble attempts, the Islamic mainstream remains generally extremely hostile towards homosexuality.

It is also necessary to mention that homophobia within Muslim communities is not solely religiously engendered. It may also be culturally derived. Japal (2012) states that, though religious and cultural values are often closely enmeshed in ethnic communities, a distinctly cultural homophobia can nevertheless be identified (he gives the example of Pakistani communities) where heterornormative values place great emphasis on all Muslims preserving *izzat* (family reputation and honour), and one means of doing this is for children to meet their culture's expectation of heterosexual marriage, a marriage that is also often arranged. Homosexuality would therefore be seen as a subversive threat that stains the honour of the family. Jaspal (2012) and Jaspal and Siraj (2011) found that gay Muslims were therefore deeply fearful about the potential consequences of members of their ethno-cultural community discovering that they were gay, fearing exclusion from that community or being harmed. I will say more about honour, in the context of gay Arab Muslim men's relationships with family and kin, in Chapter Five.

In terms of Muslims living in the West, first generation migrants, especially, attempt 'the reinforcement of socio-cultural practices from their countries of origin' (Yip, 2004a, p. 339) and reflect homonegative social attitudes in order to strengthen the diasporic community's sense of 'internal solidarity and integration…[and] expectation for conformity, leading to a process of encapsulation, underpinned by an "in-group" and "out-group" mentality' (Yip, 2004a, p. 339). Yip (2004a; 2008a) cites examples of LGBT Muslims who describe the perspectives of heterosexual Muslims on homosexuality as considering it an intrinsically 'Western disease' that illustrates the moral deficiency of British culture, and, therefore, any Muslim professing to be gay is often viewed among their ethnic community as being culturally defiled (as well

as religiously impure) and as posing a threat of despoiling the collective purity of the community. Homophobia in diasporic Muslim communities can therefore relate to wider issues of 'belonging…[and] rights to cultural…difference' (Yip, 2008a, p.102). Rahman (2014) interestingly contends that homophobia needs to be understood within the prism of Western Islamophobia and not simply arising out of religious factors alone or only from societal structures that are non-secularised and have lower class and education levels. He has argued that a 'Western exceptionalism' arises, whereby, in the West, it is asserted that 'Western' equates with modernity, and this is contrasted with Islamic countries and cultures that are positioned and othered as backward, primitive and uncivilised. A cultural homophobia among Muslim communities can also thus be considered a response to what is perceived as an Islamophobic 'homocolonialism', where Western discourses assert a civilisational superiority in opposition to the perceived social repression (including homophobia) in Muslim cultures. Massad (2008) similarly writes of how a globalised discursive export of the Western constructed gay identitarian model to Arab Muslim countries provokes a negative reaction from such countries, which may have different patterns of organising sexuality.

Having now highlighted the fact that LGBT Muslims can potentially be exposed to homonegative attitudes that emanate from both their religion and culture, to create an axis of homophobic oppression, the next section examines what the extant literature says about LGBT Muslims' attempts to manage their identities and this oppression when their religion and sexuality intersect.

2.6. The Intersection of LGBT Muslims' Religious and Sexual Identities

2.6.1. Integration and accommodation

In general, the intersection of LGBT people's religious and sexual identities can produce outcomes of tension and conflict as a result of rigid institutional constraints and prescriptions within organised religion which define norms of sexuality and gender. However, Yip (2015), reflecting on research projects he completed with participants of many different faiths, has reflected that tales of conflict and tension at this intersection, though all too common in the academic literature, are *not* the only story. Alternative narratives of 'integration and accommodation' (p. 119) may be

found among LGBT people who have generally learnt to reconcile these apparently conflicting identity dimensions, as they 'journey' along a trajectory of 'spiritual growth…[to] the development of a positive identity [and] better social adjustment' (p. 120) often enabled through 'social and theological support' (p.120) found in online and offline sources. There may still be difficult points on the journey, where their resolve is tested and conflict has to be navigated and negotiated anew. But they gain a confidence out of their own lived experiences of individualised religious identity and acquire a transformative and transgressive energy that changes 'shame and guilt into pride and courage' (p. 132) as their relationship with the self involves them gradually accepting their sexuality as an essential part of their humanity. Their relationship with others is transformed as they come to 'relate to others as an integrated person' (p. 132) and their relationship with the divine is transformed as they come to believe they will not be rejected by God, but in fact, quite the reverse. Yip has also written how the process of the successful integration of religion and sexuality may also venture beyond the personal into the public and political realms, as some LGBT people get involved in activism for 'sexual rights' and 'sexual citizenship' (Richardson, 2000) asserting their rights to live out non-heteronormative sexual behaviours, relationships and identities.

2.6.2. Conflict, dissonance and dissonance reduction

Most studies focus, however, on very different narratives to ones of identity integration and accommodation, documenting how a sense of intra-personal conflict is a significant issue when LGBT Muslims come to realise that their sexual identity is condemned by their religion. Dissonance, seminally defined by Festinger (1957) as an extreme psychological distress felt within a person, is caused by either the concomitant presence of diametrically opposed thoughts, opinions or beliefs (which Festinger terms 'cognitions'), or the attempt to assimilate new information which contradicts existing thoughts and beliefs, or when actions undertaken conflict with those cognitions. The level of dissonance is dependent on the importance ascribed to the two conflicting elements (Festinger, 1957, Mahaffy, 1996). In the case of LGBT individuals, where the identity dimensions of religion and sexuality intersect, they may be experienced as incompatible, and thus threaten the individual's sense of psychological coherence, generating identity conflict (Coyle and Rafalin, 2000),

stress (Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010), guilt and shame (Jaspal, 2012a; Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010a) and several kinds of fear: fear of condemnation from God, fear of becoming the victim of a revenge honour killing by their family, and fear that their family could be ostracised in the wider Muslim community were their homosexuality to become known (Jaspal, 2012a). Anger might be another emotional response for those who had hoped they could somehow change their sexual orientation but have now realised this is not possible (Jaspal, 2012a). Suicide and self-harm attempts are also not uncommon indices of psychological dissonance experienced by Muslims struggling with their sexuality and religion, (self-harm attempts are described by participants in Jaspal, [2012a]; Whitaker, [2011] and Yip, [2003]), while Bagley and Tremblay (2000), Rivers (2001) Scourfield, Roen and McDermott (2008) and McDermott *et al*. (2015) all state that there are disproportionately high rates of suicide attempts among LGBT youth, in general.

On an individual level, gay Muslims in the West make use of various dissonance reduction strategies in attempting to reconcile the conflict around their religion and sexuality. This can involve negating the value of their sexual identity by, for example, avoiding all contact with the gay community and its social spaces (Jaspal, 2012a) and/or constructing a hyper-affiliation to their religious identity (Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2014). Conversely, they might feel impelled to renounce organised religion (as did some participants in Jaspal [2014a]; M.F. Khan, [2010]; Siraj, [2006]; and Yip, [2004b]) because they cannot cope with the intense shame and guilt they experience when encountering discourses and attitudes within their religious and socio-cultural communities that condemn homosexuality (Yip, 2010).

For those who attempt to preserve both the religious and the sexual dimensions of their identity, they may use a range of strategies. A very significant dissonance reduction strategy used at both a psychological and social level is c*ompartmentalisation* (Siraj, 2006; Yip, 2004b). There are two broad types of compartmentalisation. On the one hand, intra-psychic compartmentalisation (Breakwell, 1986; Crisp, 2011; Rodriguez and Ouellette, 2000) involves dealing with a sense of identity threat by cognitively keeping one's religious and sexual identities separate, psychologically bracketing off a conflicting and contradictory identity element that shapes different attitudes, thoughts and behaviours, and not allowing the contamination of the other identity components (Amiot and Jaspal, 2014; Breakwell, 1986). On the other hand, Compartmentalisation at the social milieu

means ‘[i]n most cases, either…sexuality or religion takes prominence in a particular context without leading to the relinquishing of the other, which takes on prominence in a different context’ (Yip, 2004b, p. 300). A specific compartmentalisation strategy deployed by gay male Muslims to counter the internalisation of negative social representations and discourses concerning homosexuality is ‘denial’, which involves blotting out self-acknowledgment of one’s homosexuality, (Breakwell, 1986; Murtagh, Gatersleben and Uzzell, 2014) and/or denying to other people that one is homosexual. Breakwell (1986) has written how denial, though often habitual, should only be a ‘temporary holding strategy’ (p. 82) since it prevents suitable action to address the problem of identity conflict.

A second type of compartmentalisation strategy used by LGBT Muslims at the social rather than intra-personal level (Jaspal, 2012a) involves deliberately ‘passing’ as heterosexual i.e. self mis-identifying one’s sexuality to others through deceit (Breakwell, 1986). As Gonsiorek (1995) points out, unlike a person’s race, a person’s sexuality is not necessarily detectable or observable, and this gives a gay person the opportunity to hide their sexuality, if they wish. Breakwell has asserted that, in the case of homosexual males passing as heterosexual, this is usually undertaken when the consequences of doing so are less serious than those resulting from a public acknowledgement of their homosexuality, while Goffman (1990) says that passing is frequently undertaken by those able to do so, because of the ‘great rewards in being considered normal’ (p. 58). However, Breakwell has said that a consequence of passing can in fact be increased stress and anxiety due to fears of the deception being exposed (threatening one’s established relationships and altering the views others have of oneself in the present and future and one’s reputation [Goffman, 1990]). In addition, it can create the following: guilt; a sense of alienation from the group one is attempting to pass into; feelings of ‘disloyalty’ and ‘self-contempt’ when the gay male cannot intervene if abusive comments are made by others about the category he is attempting to pass out of; and there is also a heavy cognitive load as the passer has to constantly monitor his actions within social situations (Goffman, 1990). Abraham (2009, 2010), investigating LGBT Muslim identities in Australia, questions the usefulness of passing since he argues it only helps the individual to become more proficient at the act of closeting, doing little to address the broader issue of eliminating prejudice, whilst creating extremely damaging psychological effects.

Some LGBT Muslims may take advantage of hybridised cultural influences (see also the section on Arab ethnic identity above) that allow the easier preservation of their sexual and religious identities, since they generally have greater freedom in the U.K. to negotiate a wider range of social spaces within which they can reflect on, critique and reappraise social issues and values addressed by Islam (Roald,1997; Yip, 2004), and they come into contact with potentially more liberal influences (especially around homosexuality) in the surrounding non-Muslim, secular British culture. They may thus reference their British national identity and evoke a discourse of human rights regarding their sexuality as a dissonance management strategy (Jaspal, 2016a). This can have a protective effect against the homophobic discourses of Islam (Jaspal, 2016a) and help them cope with the perceived contradictoriness between their sexual and religious identities (Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2014).

2.6.3. Theologically-centred strategies for managing identity dissonance

In developing management strategies for combating the dissonance experienced when their religious and sexual identities intersect, LGBT Muslims may attempt to remain in the religion, rather than abandon it, and work by various means to open up the necessary space to create and nuture a positive self-identity (Yip, 2005b). They create sexuality-affirming arguments that directly address the heterosexist and homophobic discourses prevalent in the religion and among its representatives. For example, they do this by stressing the lack of relevance of supposed Islamic theological rulings on homosexuality, arguing that changing socio-historical contexts necessitate an updating of the *Qur'an*'s teachings to fit the contemporary era (Kugle 2014; Minwalla *et al*., 2005; Siraj, 2006; Yip, 2005b). They interpret the supposed homosexuality of the men of Lut as their indiscriminate and dissolute use of rape as a weapon of punishment, as has historically been used in wars (Kugle, 2014; Siraj, 2006), thereby creating a reverse discourse in which the cities in the story of Lut are argued to have been destroyed for sex acts committed within a context of enforced violence and disrespect for human rights, irrespective of the gender concerned (Yip, 2010). They also question the reliability of the *Hadith* and its chains of transmission. In this way, they challenge the accuracy and thus primacy of traditionalist interpretations and mirror, albeit at a less sophisticated level, the claims that

academics like Kugle (2003; 2010) and Wafer (1997) have made to cast scholarly doubt on some of the *Hadith*s' rulings against homosexuality.

LGBT Muslim-specific support groups such as *Imaan* in the U.K. are important for offering a safe space where members are helped to access a sexuality-affirming paradigm to produce dynamic scriptural re-interpretations of Islamic holy sources that appear to condemn homosexuality, constructing counter discourses to challenge dominant traditionalist thought and traditional Muslim heterosexist cultural practices *(*Minwalla *et al*., 2005; Siraj, 2006; Rouhani, 2009; Yip, 2004a, 2005b; Yip and Khalid, 2010). Shah's (2016) study is a rare example in the literature of empirical documentation of the specific activities such as interactive workshops and presentations on Islamic jurisprudence, gender and sexuality that go on in a LGBT Muslim support group. This kind of revisionist theological work not only takes place face-to-face in the physical location of a support group's premises. Kort (2005), Shannahan (2009) and M.F. Khan (2010) mention how Cyber Islam, i.e. the use of online support communities by LGBT Muslims to seek advice and debate ideas anonymously, helps them develop a collective as well as individual new interpretation, or *ijtihad*, of their faith, thus providing a powerful conduit for the possible synthesis of religion and sexuality. It seems that, through these online discussions, re-interpretive authority rights in Islamic discourse are decentred, no longer confined to a religious elite but opened up to new actors, such as previously marginalised groups like LGBT Muslim communities and anyone who can demonstrate a moral, incisive and insightful intellectual approach to an issue, and in new locations (beyond the *madrasa* religious school) creating new productive and consumptive practices (Anderson, 2003; Kort, 2005; Mandaville, 2001).

A second religion-oriented strategy adopted by LGBT Muslims has been to proactively criticise the credibility and legitimacy of institutional systems and their arbiters that make pronouncements on the evils of homosexuality (termed an 'offensive' strategy by Yip [2005b]) Additionally, these Muslims may assert that homosexuality is something that gay people are born with, which a benevolent God intentionally imbued them with and values (an argument asserted by participants in Boellstorff, [2005a]; Jaspal [2014a]; Jaspal and Cinnirella, [2010a]; Minwalla *et al*., [2005]; Shannahan, [2009]; Siraj, [2012] and Yip, [2004b]). Utilising this proposition, gay Muslims are able to absolve themselves of any sense of personal blame or responsibility, and de-stigmatise their identities by creating a strong reverse

discourse which affords culpability to heterosexual Muslims for sinning against and rebelling against God's will in condemning homosexuality (Jaspal 2016b; M.F. Khan, 2010), and it crucially helps them achieve a psychological unification and integration of their sexual and religious identities (Siraj, 2006; Yip, 2005b). They may also argue that they are not sinning against their religion by being homosexual if sexual thoughts and emotions are kept internalised and not acted upon through physical practices (Boellstorff, 2005a; Siraj, 2012) thereby distinguishing between the 'sex act' and sexuality.

A third strategy, termed one of 'renewal' by Kugle (2010) and a 'creative' strategy by Yip (2005b) and Yip and Khalid (2010), involves LGBT Muslims stressing their rights to exist in God's benevolent and pluralistic world by their 'queering' of religious texts. More specifically, this involves producing what Kugle calls 'sexuality-sensitive' interpretations by looking for confirmation of the existence of gay people in the texts and 'uncovering' any hidden instances of same sex desire and love, as well as linking personal experience of perceived social injustice and discrimination as an LGBT Muslim to the experiences of the oppressed and weak depicted in these religious sources and to important religious figures interpreted as the champions of the rights of these oppressed groups. Doing so requires sophisticated theological capital (Yip, 2005b). But there appears to be little evidence thus far in empirical studies, of LGBT Muslims who are non-specialists in revisionist Islamic hermeneutics being able to queer these texts.

All of the strategies mentioned in this section would appear to emphasise a strong sense of religious individualism, as these Muslims put greater stress on the power of personal experiences to shape both their relationship with God and their spirituality through the following: their own identification of the essence of Islam; the downplaying of the role and power of official/institutional structures (Yip, 2010; Yip and Khalid, 2010); and the creation of 'organic and personal' re-interpretations, not necessarily from a scholarly perspective (Kugle, 2014). The emphasis placed on the lived aspect of constructing religious identities, which evolve in complex and untidy ways beyond the institutional sphere has been termed 'lived religion' (McGuire, 2008) or 'everyday religion' (Ammerman, 2007). Jaspal and Cinirella (2010) in their study of gay Pakistani Muslims have also identified such individualism at work, since their participants who appear most at ease with their gay identities and can reconcile their religion and their sexuality are those who have prioritised a more private,

personal and spiritual rather than institutional connection to God. This creative, self-determined privatisation of religion was also identified as an important factor in the shaping of participants' religious identities in empirical studies with LGBT Mulsims conducted by Bereket and Adam (2008) and Minwalla *et al*. (2005). And I will demonstrate in Chapter Four, the salience of religious individualism and lived/everyday religion to gay Arab Muslim men as they attempt to reconcile intersecting and conflicting identities.

It is important also to state that Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010a) and Siraj (2006) found evidence that some LGBT Muslims' uncritically accepted conventional heterosexist discourses regarding the truth claims of the key Islamic texts. They accepted the idea that homosexuality was sinful and wrong, perhaps because they had been socialised into the view that Islamic teachings have an immutability and permanence and thus cannot be re-interpreted (Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010a) or else because they lacked sufficient theological capital to be able to competently re-assess, re-analyse and challenge traditionalist, homophobic interpretations of religious texts (Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010a; Siraj, 2006), especially since, before the early 2010s, formal support group workshops on re-interpretive Islamic theology were not available (Shah, 2016). Also, access to support groups may not always be straightforward as potential members may find aspects of these groups off-putting. Such groups have sometimes been criticised for their conservatism such as their supposedly illiberal attitudes towards sexual behaviour, alcohol consumption and the way female members dress (Rouhani, 2009; Yip and Khalid, 2010). Shah (2016) and Yip and Khalid (2010) found that social class was a factor that might prevent more LGBT Muslims from accessing events at these groups, in that the majority of users were involved in middle class occupations, were highly educated, had greater mobility and were less restricted in terms of family/community constraints, and had greater opportunity to access online and offline resources afforded by their class position. They thus possessed greater intellectual and theological capital to contest dominant homonegative discourses in Islamic sources and to combat their marginalised statuses. It appears the intersection of sexuality and class can sometimes produce detrimental effects by preventing the acquisition of the theological capital required to contest Islamic discourses on homosexuality. Overall, there needs to be more empirical investigation into the role and use of online (as well as offline) LGBT Muslim oriented support groups and resources.

2.6.4. Using LGBT Muslim support groups for emotional support

As discussed, LGBT Muslims may use support groups to take advantage of the opportunities to create a more sexuality-affirmative hermeneutics through these groups' reinterpretive work with Islamic scripture. But membership of such groups also allows them to benefit from the groups' more affective and social functions. Sandstrom (1996) has described two types of social support as being firstly, empathy and emotional relief (through shared understandings of life experiences and feelings) and secondly, camaraderie and friendship (through the provision of opportunities to talk and socialise). With regard to support groups specifically, Corey and Corey (1992) and Rappaport (1993) describe the functions of support groups as facilitating the exchange of and learning from stories/experiences which create a collective narrative and social identity, and the provision of assistance and encouragement, which all help in expressing, validating (Ramirez-Valles, 2002) and promoting a positive self identity and transforming a stigmatised identity. In LGBT Muslim oriented support groups, in addition to re-interpretive work, one's own sexual story, i.e. one's personal experience of being an LGBT Muslim, can be shared and owned by a wider public so 'personal sufferings become collective participations' (Kort, 2005, p. 110) with the resulting commonality of narratives creating a feeling of belonging and empowerment (Plummer, 1995). Online technologies, especially, have helped ensure that 'the historical isolation and rejection of sexual diversity seems relatively distant' (Pullen, 2010, p. 2), since through sharing their sexual stories online, LGBT people help to create communities and sexual identities that can self-affirm and transgress the boundaries of the offline world of heteonormativity (Pullen, 2010; De Ridder and van Bauwel, 2015). Furthermore, Tanis (2009) argues that online forums facilitate the easier revelation and discussion of aspects of marginalised and stigmatised identities due to the fairly anonymous nature of the medium, where ties are relatively weak (Granovetter, 1973) and thus seekers of support can feel it is less high-risk to reveal personal or potentially embarrassing information about themselves.

2.7. Coming Out to Family and Kin

All gay people face the issue of whether to disclose their sexuality (or 'come out') to significant others, and for LGBT Muslims, the decision to disclose or not is an important consideration in managing the intersection of their sexuality and family relationships. The management of disclosure to family and kin, their reactions, and how relationships are negotiated post-disclosure is a central theme in my thesis and therefore, this section address what the literature has to say about this. I begin by defining coming out and discussing the range of parental/family reactions that occur according to theoretical models of the process, and, after that, I focus on what the literature says about LGBT Muslims and disclosure.

2.7.1. Meaning and models

Coming out is defined by McCarn and Fassinger (1996, p. 508) as the process of 'struggle with identity awareness, acceptance and affirmation' in one's relationship with the self and others, as one grows up homosexual in an environment of pervasive heterosexist attitudes.

The Western concept of coming out is usually viewed in the literature as a laudable step that has positive consequences in reinforcing self-acceptance, self esteem and confidence in one's sexuality and in helping avoid psychologically damaging consequences such as leading double lives and experiencing negative emotions like shame and denial (James and Murphy,1998; Phellas, 2005). This literature also tends to highlight how more young men than ever before are coming out as gay, and at an earlier age, and that the process has been made easier as a more accepting culture has developed in part due to the greater prominence of LGBT people in print and visual media and the increasing array of social and recreational facilities and networks aimed at LGBT people (Plummer, 1995; Valentine, Skelton and Butler, 2003; Weeks, 2007). Indeed, Plummer says that, with the new receptive environment, coming out stories have 'snowballed' (p.96) globally among different ethnicities.

Assumptions about more liberal societal attitudes towards homosexuality may, however, lack particular relevance to Muslim cultures (Rahman, 2014), where a gay Muslim is often considered an unviable, impossible identity (Abraham, 2009,

2010; Rahman 2014), and a concept like 'coming out' may not be comprehended or rejected since a homosexual 'identity' is simply not recognised. As mentioned previously, homosexuality may also be viewed as an immoral, white 'Western disease' in Muslim communities (Abraham, 2009; Jaspal and Siraj, 2011) and therefore considered an irrelevant phenomenon; a topic that requires no discussion. Heterosexual Muslims in the U.K. may also criticise LGBT Muslim people's desire to 'come out' as evidence of their assimilation into the surrounding Western culture (Jaspal and Siraj, 2011) steeped in secularity, permissiveness and individualisation (Yip, 2003; Yip, 2004a). This can provoke a heteronormative resistance in Muslim communities and unsympathetic or worse reactions to coming out declarations (Rahman, 2014). Rahman (2014) and Yip (2004a) argue that ethnicity and religion are therefore extremely important socio-cultural structural forces that can and do disrupt and subvert contemporary Western narratives of freedoms of choice to a great extent when LGBT Muslim identities intersect and clash with the norms and values of their communities and families. In light of the aforementioned points and in relation to the notion of intra-categorical intersectional variation, it is therefore essential not to attempt to cross-culturally homogenise the Western experience of coming out to the lived reality of many LGBT Muslims' sexual identities, as that could be a serious misrepresentation.

Of relevance to the intersection of Arab Muslim men's sexual identities with family relationships (the subject of Chapter Five), there are in existence models which purport to theorise parental reactions to disclosure (for example, Anderson, 1987; Butler and Astbury, 2005; Robinson, Walters and Skeen, 1989). In these, parents are said to pass through stages of, firstly, denial, pretending to themselves the disclosure did not happen, not believing it, or dismissing it as a phase; secondly, of anger and guilt, where external sources or the parents might blame themselves for the child's homosexuality; thirdly of bargaining, where parents try to maintain a good relationship with the child if the child agrees to change their sexuality, or agrees that no one else should be told; fourthly of depression, grief and shame, where parents feel shame about others discovering their child is gay and grief for the child they feel they have lost, and finally, of acceptance, where they alter their hopes and accept the child's sexual identity.

These 'crisis-oriented' (Herdt and Beeler, 1998) stage models have rarely been empirically tested (Savin-Williams, 2001), however, and seem to be incorrect,

as research has shown that parents react to disclosure in many different ways, including immediate acceptance and unconditional love (LaSala, 2010; Savin-Williams, 2001) and that relationships can improve immediately after disclosure (LaSala, 2010). Savin-Williams (2001) says that the models are also inadequate since they do not explain how the process *evolves,* how exactly feelings of shock change into acceptance, nor do they explain how discrete events predict that parents will respond in particular ways. Reactions may also vary depending on the context, the child's age at disclosure, the parents' and child's personalities, and the interactions they have (LaSala, 2010). More importantly for this thesis, these models do not take into consideration variables such as religion and ethnicity. Hunt (2007) and Reynolds and Hanjorgiris (2000) have pointed out that they centre on white, middle class men in Western contexts and ignore how factors such as oppression and discrimination relating to ethnic minority status, race and religion shape a specifically different experience of coming out (Fassinger and Miller, 1996; McCarn and Fassinger 1996). Lewis (2012), for example, warns that disclosing one's homosexuality in non-Western cultures may need weighing up in terms of very different contextual factors such as family, honour and kinship, which place an emphasis on marrying and having children (Hunt, 2007), that are more salient than in the West, and where disclosure might cause great shame for the multigenerational extended family (LaSala, 2010), all of which I will demonstrate is generally true for Arab cultures (see Chapter Five). There is also likely to be 'in-group' variation in reactions due to factors such as religion, social class and 'degree of enculturation (immigration status)' (LaSala, 2010, p. 93).

The criticisms of these coming out models very clearly relate to and highlight the benefit of an analytical approach that recognises intra-categorical intersectionality since, through this approach, the danger and inaccuracy of presuming a common set of experiences is dramatically illuminated. We therefore need to keep all potential variables in mind when we investigate the reaction of the families of gay Muslims to disclosure, and also to be very wary of universalising the theoretical models and homogenising gay Muslim parental experiences with those of white British parents. The specificity of the coming out process for LGBT Muslims is discussed in more detail in the next section.

2.7.2. LGBT Muslims and coming out to parents and family

In light of the previous discussion on religious and cultural homophobia prevalent in Muslim communities, it is not surprising that many LGBT Muslims decide to stay in the 'closet' and keep their secret from family members (Siraj, 2006). However, as the act of closeting continues over a longer period of time, the family, assuming that their relative is heterosexual, will start to bring up the subject of marriage. LGBT Muslims generally attempt to avoid this topic by asserting their pursuit of educational and career goals and financial security (Jaspal, 2012a) and are fearful that discussion of the topic could negatively affect the positive relationships they have had up until then with family members (Jaspal, 2014b). There are also frequent worries that public knowledge of gay Muslim men's sexuality will destroy female siblings'/relatives' potential for marriage (Minwalla *et al*., 2005; Yip and Khalid, 2010). LGBT Muslims also experience other negative emotions such as inadequacy, embarrassment, self-disgust and loneliness as their hidden sexuality conflicts with parental wishes for them to marry (Japal, 2012b). Some place great store on spatial independence and move away from the family home as soon as they can, (including, for those living in Muslim majority countries, emigrating, to be discussed in Chapter Five) often sacrificing family relations to avoid having to come out; to avoid marriage pressure; to explore their sexuality with greater privacy and freedom; or to escape potential disownment by or negative reactions from their family (Jaspal, 2014a, 2015b; Siraj, 2006: B. Khan, 2010). Ironically, putting distance between themselves and family members can threaten the valued family relationships that LGBT Muslims felt would be negatively affected if they disclosed their homosexuality, and some regret the fact they are not able to discuss relationship issues with family (Jaspal, 2015b)

Paradoxically, for some gay Muslim men, the idea of getting married itself is deployed as a psychological coping strategy to protect gainst the negative emotions associated with a perceived deviant sexuality (Jaspal, 2012b), and some will use marriage as a strategic cover to lead a double life, maintaining outward respectability and gaining the room to explore their real sexuality in private (Yip, 2004a). For those who still refuse to conform to family expectations, relations become strained or severed (Jaspal, 2014b; 2015a). Even when some LGBT Muslims have 'come out', parents still pressurize them into marrying, either because they see it as a 'cure' whose healing power can normalize deviant sexuality (Siraj, 2006; Yip and Khalid,

2010) or as part of a compromise where in return for marrying, they agree to turn a blind eye to their son's sexual orientation. This is often accepted by the son as a way to balance individual freedom, family honour and social demands (Yip and Khalid, 2010). But for those gay Muslim men who give in to this pressure, the marriage usually fails (Jaspal, 2015a).

In terms of voluntary disclosure, Jaspal and Siraj (2011) and M.F.Khan (2010) found that those gay Muslim men who had regular contact with gay cultural spaces and with white gay men were much more likely to come out to family. According to Valentine, Skelton and Butler (2003), young LGBT people rarely come out to the whole family simultaneously, using their understanding of differential family relationships to make informed, individualised choices about how best to disseminate the news about their sexuality. Related to this, Yip (2004a) found that gay Muslims would typically come out to siblings. This is largely because of the contact the younger generation typically have had with and the influence of the surrounding Western culture and its supposedly more tolerant views and attitudes towards homosexuality, as they have grown up (M.F. Khan, 2010; Siraj, 2009; Yip, 2004a).

After learning that their child is gay, the literature documents that there has been a variety of negative reactions from Muslim parents. As well as pressurising their child to marry regardless, in the hope that they might turn 'straight', they have attempted to force the child to have corrective psychological counselling (Jaspal, 2014a), they might threaten to remove financial support (M.F. Khan, 2010; Whitaker, 2011) force the child to leave home (Whitaker, 2011) and ostracise him/her (Jaspal and Siraj, 2012a). A strategy of silence i.e. of 'don't ask, don't tell' is also commonly used by gay Muslims and their parents after disclosure (*Naz Project*, 2000; Yip, 2004a). There have been very violent reactions from some Muslim families such as physical attacks (Minwalla *et. al*, 2005; Whitaker, 2011), and some sons fear becoming 'honour-killing' victims (Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010a; Jaspal and Siraj, 2011). Hammoud-Beckett (2007) and Rouhani (2009) writing in Western settings argue that coming out can have disproportionately more negative and dangerous effects for a gay Muslim than for a non-Muslim gay male; thus, further emphasising possible intra-categorical variation when sexual, ethnic and religious identities intersect (Fish, 2008).

2.8. Racialised Gay Spaces

This section focuses on the intersection of racial/ethnic identities with the white-dominant spaces of the gay scene and gay dating websites, spaces that form an important part of Chpater 6. The gay scene encompasses urban community spaces such as bars, clubs, shops, and restaurants (Weeks, 2011), while online dating has been defined as 'a purposeful form of meeting new people through specifically designed internet sites' (Barraket and Henry-Waring, 2008, p. 149).

Regarding the intersection of racial identity and Western gay culture, Almaguer (2004) argues that gay culture has been shaped predominantly by white, middle class men, since they have occupied a privileged class and racial position, and had the economic and social capital to create gay institutions and communities, populated by themselves and similar others. Contact with such white-dominant offline and online gay spaces may help LGBT Muslims attenuate dissonance created by the intersection of their sexual and religious identities by providing affirmative representations of homosexuality, and outlets for emotional support, socialising and sex through contact within like-minded social networks, far removed from their usual ethno-cultural networks. This allows for the reification and reinforcement of homosexual identities, helping gay individuals understand, manage and accept their sexuality (Reynolds and Hanjorgiris, 2000; Weeks, 2003, 2011). In this respect, Johnston and Longhurst (2010), appropriating writer Yi-Fu Tuan's term, describe how gay scenes can be regarded as 'fields of care'. Jaspal and Cinnirella (2012) have empirically confirmed that these advantages of the gay scene are prized by LGBT Muslims. Identifying with white British gay men who are beyond the contact and influence of a gay Muslim man's parents is also viewed by some as beneficial in strengthening a sense of well being, and can be an empowering inspiration to come out (Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2012; 2014). Gay scene spaces can also facilitate identity hybridisation, allowing LGBT Muslims to live out 'Western' gay identities – a gay person with a gay orientation (Abraham, 2009; Jaspal and Cinneralla, 2010a; 2014).

However, it should be pointed out that Yip and Khalid (2010) have found that some gay Muslim men experience a multiplicity of competing, sometimes conflicting identities through contact with these spaces, where their culturally hybrid identities can create unhappiness and difficulties. Furthermore, the type of bonding social

capital (Putnam, 2001) characterised by emotional, psychological and social support and a feeling of belonging (Cserni and Talmud, 2015; Skoric, Ying and Ng, 2009) emerging from the connections and relations centred on shared identities, attributes and experiences (Cserni and Talmud, 2015) that can be accessed on the gay scene, may be differentially accessible due to the intersection of race/ethnicity with these spaces, as minority groups may encounter explicit racism and Islamophobia here (see also the section on racism and Islamophobia below). In addition, Jaspal and Cinnirella's (2014) sample of Pakistani gay males felt that white British gay men would not be able to understand the socio-cultural strictures Muslim gay men experience, unlike other Pakistani Muslim gay men. Indeed, Jaspal and Cinnirella (2012) indicate that a reason gay Muslim men may avoid gay scene spaces is that they fear that, by meeting and dating openly gay, white, non-Muslims, this contact might increase the chance of accidental/non-voluntary disclosure of their homosexuality to their family and community, anxieties which must be understood in the context of the pressure to maintain honour and preserve harmony within very close, extended family relationships. This clearly underlines the salience of the intersection of sexual identity and family relationships in these men's lives. Thus, we should keep in mind that, for these gay Muslims, their ethnic, religious and cultural identities intersecting with their sexual ones may well produce different experiences and self-concepts of their sexuality compared to white, British, non-Muslim gay males, and that the latter group may in fact *not* be best placed to provide emotional support or be able to fully comprehend the experience of what it means to be gay and Muslim and the difficulties this causes (Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2012). Morever, the presumed positive effect of increased social capital and access to affirmative representations of gay men and support found on the gay scene needs to be set against the generally low level of contact LGBT Muslims have with these spaces (Abraham, 2010; Jaspal, 2015b) for the reasons described above, as well as because of its focus on drinking alcohol, and an atmosphere termed 'bitchy' 'cold' and 'ageist' by the LGBT participants in Yip (2003). Some participants in these studies felt a sense of conflict that destabilised their identities when visiting the gay scene since it just reinforced a sense of the incompatibility of their religious and sexual identities and feelings of guilt (Jaspal, 2015a; 2017a).

In terms of gay dating websites, it appears that nothing has been written focusing specifically on LGBT Muslims' use of these websites, let alone use by gay

Arab Muslim men and so my study will make a timely contribution to filling this lacuna.

2.8.1. Ethnicised erotic capital in gay spaces

Green's (2008a) 'sexual fields' approach will be useful in my study to analyse the complex relationships and power dynamics between gay male Arabs and non-Arab gay men that play out when ethnic identities and/or age intersect with offline and online gay spaces. Green adapts Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977,1980) applying the concepts of 'field', 'capital' and 'habitus' to the social organisation of sexual life, to describe the interaction within and navigation of structurally embedded and institutional erotic schematas.

Green (2008a) defines a sexual field as the hierarchical social relations or 'tiers of desirability' that exist within gay spaces [creating] 'differential probabilities for partnering across individuals' (Green, 2011, p. 247) because of the status order it constructs. According to Martin and George (2006) 'the field' produces capital, a relational resource of power, and within the field there is a fairly self-sustaining and to some extent, historically-derived consensus defining capital, and competition to maximise it. Operationalising and regulating the field is the *habitus.* Green's (2008a) and Martin and George's (2006) concept 'erotic habitus' describes the 'dispositions, appreciations and inclinations' (Green, 2008a, p. 30) through the working of a 'symbolic force' (Bourdieu, 1986), where normative and prestigious forms (e.g. of social groupings) and erotic typologies (such as racial and ethnic typologies) are unconsciously assimilated by an individual through the representations they view and the interactions they observe in gay locations, indicating who is desired, bought drinks, approached, spoken to, etc, and who is not.

Green (2008a) argues that the hierarchical location of a social actor within a sexual field is dependent on their amount of *erotic capital*, 'the quality and quantity of attributes that an individual possesses, which elicit an erotic response in another' (Green, 2011, p. 29). Related to this, in gay online and offline spaces, Green (2007b; 2008b), McKeown *et al*. (2010), Paul, Ayala and Choi (2010), Raj (2011) and Riggs (2013) have identified a hierarchy of ethnic desirability at work, with white gay males occupying the highest position followed by Latino men, with black and Asian males much lower down the scale. East Asian gay men, in particular, are deemed as

sexually undesirable, through being positioned as feminine, weak and submissive (Ridge, Hee and Minichiello,1999) and placed at the bottom of the hierarchy. Jaspal's (2017a) research indicates that South Asian gay men also have a low position in the hierarchy since they experience explicit rejection as potential romantic partners by white British gay men in both online and offline contexts (they are even rejected as platonic chat partners) due to perceived racist attitudes based on skin colour, and discrimination based on cultural and religious differences.

The level of erotic capital can vary within the same context depending on the audience. Boykin (1996), Green (2008a) and Husbands et al (2013) using the example of black men in North America, highlight how they often lack erotic capital in gay scene spaces, being marginalised and ignored sexually and the writers link this to historical societal discrimination and subordination that has its antecedents in the period of slavery. However, these same men may be sexually desired and possess high erotic capital when the attraction to them stems to some extent from *sexual fetishisation* and white gay male submission fantasies (Green, 2007b). Black men have long been stereotyped as sexually insatiable, macho and hypersexual, with larger genitalia, and greater sexual stamina, virility and appetites than white men (Boykin, 1996; Fanon, 1970; Green, 2008a; Mercer, 1991; Staples, 2004) and this image of physicality, sexual potency and hyper-masculinity can be an attraction for some gay white men. Empirically, McKeown *et al*. (2010) and Green (2008a), in the British and North American context respectively, found that their black participants were consistently objectified by white gay men in the ways mentioned above, valued when they had very dark skin, were tall, very well endowed, and dominating penetrators, *but* often discounted as potential partners for emotion-centred relationships. This stereotype of the black male is not only to be found in the gay community. Fanon (1970) argues that the black male is frequently considered by society at the genital level, his personhood elided in the white erotic imagination; he is transformed into a penis.

Erotic capital in relation to Arab men does not seem to have been researched, but as I will demonstrate in Chapter Six, it is a highly salient issue that results from the intersection of their ethno-racial and sexual identities within white-dominant gay spaces.

2.9. Racism and Islamophobia in White Spaces

The final section of this chapter considers the intersection of racial and ethnic identities with white spaces more generally (whilst still devoting attention to gay white spaces), to examine how this intersection can create an axis of oppression and experiences of discrimination, which, as will be vividly demonstrated in Chapter Six, is a very significant factor for non-white Arab Muslims. The first part of the section focuses on racism, defining it and examining the literature on it in offline and online gay spaces. This is followed by defining Islamophobia and explaining how it affects both Muslims generally, and LGBT Muslims more specifically.

Despite the fact races and racial classifications have no ontological or measurable objective reality and no basis in biology or genetics (Caliendo and McIlwan, 2011), race is important because it has a 'socio-cultural reality' (Mukhopadhay, 2011) since 'political, economic and cultural systems treat [it] as if it were a coherent way of categorizing humans' (Jensen, 2011, p. 25), and this produces 'real social…consequences' (Meer, 2014, p. 117) such as racism. Racism is defined by Clark *et al*. quoted in Della, Wilson and Miller (2002, p. 374) as the "beliefs, attitudes, institutional arrangements, and acts that tend to denigrate individuals or groups because of phenotypic characteristics or ethnic group affiliation". Todorov (2009) lists five main propositional components of racialist ideologies. The first is the contention that races exist. The second is that there is a connection between physical type and character/moral characteristics, with often a causal relationship, that is to say, physical differences hereditarily create cultural variation and fixed psychological properties. The third proposition is the requirement of a collective psychology emphasising conformity to the actions of the ethnic group to which one belongs. The fourth concerns the assertion of a hierarchy of values relating to judgements about attractiveness of physical appearance and superiority of moral and intellectual attributes. The fifth proposition is that the previous four are distilled into a political ideal which is put into action (p. 71).

Racism in Europe and America has long involved the tacit acceptance of the 'racial contract' (Mills, 1997), whereby Whiteness has become the taken for granted norm through centuries of white Western colonial oppressions and discourses (Gosine, 2007; Mills, 1997), where one set of people, white people, have existed as full human beings, and where non-white people historically having been viewed as

subhuman, socially, cognitively and morally inferior, have therefore been denied opportunities, rights and liberties afforded the privileged group.

With respect to the issue of racism experienced by non-white people in gay spaces, Boykin (1996) and McKeown *et al*. (2010) assert that white gay people are just as racist as white straight people, since both groups are socialised within the same society. Various 'whitening practices' (Bérubé, 2001) construct, preserve and strengthen the concept of the gay male as being white: a lack of questioning of the ethnic dimension of gayness, thereby increasing taken for granted assumptions; discriminatory door control practices in gay scene venues (Bérubé, 2001); the gay media/consumer culture presenting images of and targeting only affluent, white, educated, gay men (Bérubé, 2001; Green, 2008a) and the physical appearance of political representatives of LGBT activism, which usually mirrors the appearance of people making the laws in order to acquire recognition and respectability, i.e. white people (Bérubé, 2001).

In Western offline gay spaces, Green (2007b; 2008b), Han (2006) Ikizler and Szymanski (2014) and Minwalla *et al*. (2005) empirically confirm that Whiteness is perceived as privileged (indeed, Minwalla *et al*. found attitudes representative of what is known as *validation theory*, where being in close relation to those things typified by 'White' increases one's social standing, power or validation, attitudes which might arguably be said to be a sign of inverse racism and psychological self hatred among those who propagate them. The researchers felt that this was reflected in the fact a few of their participants had an exclusive attraction to white men, and by comments they made about this situation). People of non-white ethnicities in gay spaces can feel marginalised, ignored and unsafe. Jaspal (2017a) argues that white gay men feel freer to discriminate against racial minorities since they think their own experiences of homophobic discrimination gives them licence to openly express less politically correct attitudes in these spaces. Coleman (2011) and Paul, Ayala and Choi (2010) argue that Internet sex sites probably expose non-white gay men to more blatant racial discrimination and dismissal than they would experience in everyday offline contexts, since the solitary nature of online partner-searching means that, when racism is experienced, there are usually no immediately available empathetic others to confide in, and the atmosphere of greater candour and anonymity and the ease of exiting websites can mean the seriousness of moral disrespect is downplayed or ignored (Coleman, 2011).

With regard to the experiences of LGBT Muslims and white-dominant gay spaces, Yip (2003) found that only a small minority of his interviewees termed the British gay community racist. Jaspal (2016a) in a more recent article asserts that research has shown that in both offline and online contexts LGBT Muslims feel rejected by their non-Muslim peers due to racism, while Abraham (2009) empirically documented instances of anti-Asian racism experienced by Indonesian- and Malaysian-born Muslim participants within the gay scene in Australia. Interestingly, Minwalla *et al*. (2005) found that, among non-white gay Muslims in North America, there was, conversely, sometimes a stigma associated with dating white men, especially older ones, due to cultural influences such as the predominance historically and persistence, in some Muslim countries, of age differentiated homosexuality, i.e. pederasty.

Also experienced when ethno-religious identities intersect with white-dominant spaces is Islamophobia. This has been defined as a newer, more prevalent type of racism based on cultural and socio-religious differences (e.g. language, religion and dress) as opposed to the colour racism traditionally understood as racism (Allen, 2005; Modood, 2005a). The meaning of 'Islamophobia' in academic literature is contested (Iqbal 2010), however. It has encapsulated broad phenomena from xenophobia to anti-terrorism (Cesari 2011). The concept has been criticised in that, by implying collective 'pathologies', it fails to encapsulate concrete, real world, experienced aggression, or else it implies criticism limited to the religion, Islam, rather than individuals who practise it (Meer, 2013). Bleich's definition as 'indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims' (2012, p. 182), is useful as it recognises that both the religion and its followers are inescapably interlinked in the individual and collective social imagination. Roy (2010) and Nadal *et al*. (2012) have used the term to focus on specifically *religion*-oriented actions: the 'micro-aggressions' of sustaining the trope of the Muslim as terrorist; the pathologising of Islam, its adherents and their practices as abnormal; presumptions of homogeneity of beliefs and practices among Muslims; the exoticising of Muslims by asking a great number of questions about their religion; and the mocking or making fun of the religion.

Much of the debate about the meaning of Islamophobia has centred on the extent to which religious prejudice and racism overlap. Grosfoguel (2012) Iqbal (2010) and Taras (2013) assert that in contemporary discourse, Islamophobia

meshes together racial, cultural and religious prejudice. Examples given by Meer (2013) of the racialisation of the category of Muslim, are the racial profiling and physical/verbal abuse of those who are judged to be Muslim simply from their appearance such as their skin colour, beards, rucksacks, headscarves and religious caps. Of particular relevance to my study, in the West in the early 21st century, a specific *Arab*ophobia is being melded with anti-Muslim prejudice, with the longstanding historic trope of the Arab as violent terrorist, appropriated anew (Grosfuguel, 2012; Taras, 2013). Taras (2013) and Sayyid (2014) thus conclude that critics of Islam both culturalise and racialise the religion.

Sayyid (2014) identifies six activities that characterise Western Islamophobia: attacks on people perceived to be Muslims; attacks on property belonging to or connected with Muslims; co-ordinated (i.e. financially and socially supported) actions of intimidation against Muslims; discrimination in institutional settings, for example, harassment, bullying or unfair regulations; continuous systematic denigration of Islam/Muslims in incidents in the public sphere, such as spreading hate for Muslims on Internet sites; and finally, active state controlled or effected Islamophobia such as greater surveillance/stopping and searching of Muslims.

Western media play a prominent role in constructing and propagating Islamophobia, depicting Muslims as symbolically endangering cultural norms and lifestyles (Iqbal, 2010; Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010b) and as a physical threat in terms of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism (Kundnani, 2007a). These media representations of Muslims are repeatedly taken up in everyday social talk becoming 'common-sense' assumptions, and consequently, Islamophobia is socially manifested in responses of fear of and aggression towards Muslims (Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010b). European Islamophobia is also fostered through political discourses which construct a dialectic between Western values of supposed inclusivity, tolerance, equality and human rights versus the values of Islam/Muslim communities, considered unmodern, uncivilised and oppressive (El Tayeb, 2012; Rahman, 2010). Interestingly, El Tayeb discusses how the neoliberal 'human rights' agenda involves the support and promotion of the interests of (hitherto discriminated against) LGBT communities, and there thus emerges a 'homophile Islamophobia' in European cities, where Muslims can become victimised by an alliance of LGBT activists, neoliberals and white supremacists.

There would appear to be ample evidence of the existence of contemporary Islamophobia. B. Khan (2010) and Puar and Rai (2002) in the American context, Poynting and Noble (2004) in the Australian context and Awan (2014) and Copsey *et al*. (2013) in the British context highlight how Islamophobic physical and verbal assaults, discrimination against and even murders of Muslim citizens have increased dramatically in the years following major terrorist attacks in America and Britain. Abraham (2009), Kundnani (2007b) and Fekete (2004) draw attention to the increased ethnic profiling by police and government agencies which labels Muslims as dangerous and subversive. Yip (2008a) states that there is unequal access for Muslims to legal and social resources to help fight against discrimination. Summarizing U.K. opinion poll evidence, Hussain and Bagguley (2012) state around one-third of the British population consistently expresses hostility towards Islam and Muslims. Modood (2005b), Kundnani (2007a) and Bagguley and Hussain (2005) writing in the British context, say that in an attempt to escape Islamophobia, some Muslims may hide their religion and ethnicity from non-Muslims if their physical appearance allows them to.

Not much has been documented empirically about the intersection of LGBT Muslims' sexual and religious identities in terms of their experience of Islamophobia. Among the studies that do touch on this, Jaspal (2017a) and Yip (2005c) have argued that gay scene spaces may be avoided by LGBT Muslims because they are considered overtly secular, something perceived to have negative consequences, since some fear they might be rejected or excluded by those of a different religion (Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2012) in these spaces. They can also be put off by the reactions of white gay people who are highly surprised by their presence, since they believe that Islam and homosexuality are incompatible (Abraham, 2010; Yip, 2003). 'Queer Islamophobia' (Abraham, 2010) experienced in these spaces can take the form of a 'Muslim as terrorist' discourse, or a rejection of Muslims as sexual partners, with them being 'othered' as strange outsiders insecure of their sexuality, or inauthentic due to their unwillingness to come out as homosexual to significant others because of their ethno-religious/cultural backgrounds (Abraham, 2010; M.F. Khan, 2010). LGBT Muslims may experience a double rejection as a consequence of their intersecting identities: racism/Islamophobia from white British gay men and homophobia from the Muslim community, which means they have very little form of social support in negotiating the intersection of their religious and sexual identities,

and can therefore experience negative psychological effects (Jaspal, 2017a). As a result, some might try passing as a different ethnicity in their contact with gay British white men to reduce this problem, or they may turn to faith-based organisations for friendship and emotional support (Jaspal, 2017a). Referring back to the conceptual framework of intersectionality and particularly intra-categorical variation, these issues also highlight how the experience of being gay in Britain should certainly not be homogenised, since empathy and solidarity based on sexuality among gay men of different ethno-religious backgrounds may be far from guaranteed.

2.10. Summary

This chapter has presented a literature review relating to the main conceptual and empirical themes linked to the research project's aim of investigating the various intersections of gay Arab Muslim men's sexual, ethnic and religious identities. It discussed the relevance of Intersectionality as a theoretical framework, defined different types and examined how an intersectional approach has been used in empirical studies of sexual and LGBT Muslim Identities. The theme of Arab ethnic identity was examined in relation to intra-categorical intersectionality. Gendered identities, and specifically the construction of different types of Islamic masculinities, were also analysed. The strategies that LGBT Muslims use to intra-personally manage dissonance produced by the intersection of their religion and sexuality, and how the outcomes of this intersection were dealt with within family relationships were also discussed. The intersection of their racial, ethnic and sexual identities with white-dominant spaces was examined, where the negative outcomes of racism and Islamophobia that are axes of oppression within a matrix of domination shape interactions within these spaces, and which along with religious and cultural homophobia can generate experiences of multiple discriminations. The literature review has paved the theoretical and thematic way for the content and analysis of the data chapters (Chapters 4-6) on the intersectional identities of gay Arab Muslim men that follow, helping provide an important point of reference and comparison with the identities and experiences of LGBT Muslims more generally. Having now reviewed in detail the extant literature, (and before presenting the data), the next chapter proceeds to discuss the main methodological considerations of the study.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCHING GAY ARAB MUSLIM MEN: EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.1. Introduction

This chapter begins by outlining the feminist-aligned/intersectional epistemological approach adopted and then considers how the study's epistemological concerns are linked to the research method I feel is best suited to the knowledge sought in terms of the study's aims and research questions: a qualitative methodology involving interviews. The focus then transfers to the technical and practical aspects of the research process itself. After discussing sampling strategies and the resultant sample, I describe in detail the data collection and data analysis process. The purpose of doing this is to provide a thick description of the research context in order to provide the methodological clarity and transparency necessary to allow the reader to make informed judgements about the strengths and weaknesses of the data collection/analysis process and any possible biases and non-typicality, and hence to judge the overall quality, trustworthiness and credibility of my claims and interpretations about the identities of gay Arab Muslim men in the U.K., especially when linked to the data excerpts presented in subsequent chapters. The final part of the chapter focuses on how ethical considerations, and in particular, my convictions as a researcher to behave in a morally correct way, have played an important role throughout the research process and on the human relationships involved in this process. Having now outlined the structure of the chapter, let us begin by examining the connection between epistemology and methodology as it specifically relates to my research topic.

3.2. The Epistemological Framework

3.2.1. A feminist-aligned, intersectional approach to epistemological issues

Influenced by my own personal biography as a gay man as discussed in Chapter One, I bring a particular and empathetic subjectivity to the search for knowledge in my research topic, and now set out my imperatives. I am interested in giving voice to gay Arab Muslim experiences and subjectivities The term 'giving voice' has often

been used by feminist researchers claiming an empathetic understanding and knowledge of the issues and concerns of their female research subjects, and they speak on behalf of their subjects to effectively highlight the discrimination and prejudice their fellow women face. Much feminist research is therefore linked to a politically-active praxis that aims to subvert and de-construct societal sexism, patriarchy and misogyny where it occurs, and thus improve women's lives (Priessle and Han, 2012; Stanley and Wise, 1993). However, when I use the term 'giving voice' in this study, I am not asserting any kind of representativeness for myself in terms of claiming to be a political advocate or activist with expertise to know and speak on behalf of the 'gay Arab Muslim community', demanding social change. 'Giving voice', in the context of *this* study, means opening up a space in which participants have the opportunity to tell their sexual stories (Plummer 1995) and speak out about issues of personal concern to them such as their experiences as gay men, about conflict between their religion and sexuality and experiences of homophobia. These are stories many of them have long been used to suppressing and silencing due to dominant homophobic cultural and religious discourses and practices and negative social representations of homosexuality that are shaped by and disseminated through institutional power structures like the family, religious texts and heterosexual society at large. Giving voice is also about encouraging self-empowerment through the telling of their stories, through which they may feel able to assert, reclaim and validate hitherto socially stigmatised identities. In terms of epistemology, my study strives to provide an alternative narrative that, in uncovering and documenting the existence of gay Arab Muslims and putting their lives and perspectives firmly at its analytical centre, contests the narrative of compulsory heterosexuality, whose negative power courses through our social worlds and represses, oppresses, disempowers and silences LGBT experiences, something I would argue is especially true of Arab Muslim cultures. By exploring the lived experience of gay Arab Muslim men, and helping their stories to be told, the subjugation and invisibility of alternative forms of sexual existence can be contested (Hesse-Biber, 2012). My concerns here broadly tie in with those of Critical Theory, that is, to promote awareness of and critique dominant ideologies that have controlled and produced knowledge that oppress some parts of society (Kidd and Kral, 2005). Queer Theory also has a similar purpose in attempting to resist, decentre and destabilise hegemonic norms, but it also has a nihilisitic impulse in its

attempt to deny sexual/gender categorisations (see the work of Butler, [1990], for example), which jars somewhat against the approach to sexuality in this study that accepts the use of categories (as set out in Chapter Two). Critical theory and its sub-branches feminist and intersectional epistemology are extremely salient to my aims as, in liberating and privileging alternative forms of knowledge claims to represent social reality, they seek to promote personal growth and cultural/social change through empowerment and emancipation, and reduce the marginalisation and domination of particular groups and therefore to improve people's lives (Benton and Craib, 2001; Kidd and Kral, 2005). The founding intersectionality theorists such as Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins feel an intersectional epistemological approach must contest the taken for granted 'racist, classist, masculinist and colonialist epistemologies that have produced oppressive knowledges and consequently, oppressive social structures, institutions, and inequalities' (Grzanka, 2014c, p. 31). Grzanka (2014c) and Collins and Bilge (2016) assert that intersectionality has always had a strong political impulse. In terms of the political drive of feminist epistemologies, Stanley and Wise (1993, p. 192, emphasis in original) have suggested:

> [t]he social location and production of knowledge [means] that knowledge claims are thereby positioned as part of a *political process* in which some knowledge claims are seen and certified as superordinate in relation to others.

And while I am not in any way a political activist (I have never marched or taken part in advocacy campaigns for sexual justice and citizenship for LGBT people), my research can be said to be political in its commitment to highlighting how gay Arab Muslim men are affected by and challenge hegemonic, institutionalised, heterosexist forces that produce discrimination and inequality, and in my concern for their welfare in the face of this oppression. Through the voices I make heard in Chapters 4-6, I hope to make a small contribution to the effort to 'challenge the right of the powerful to define realities' (Hawkesworth, 2012, p. 92). The search for justice in the context within which my study is situated is the human right of LGBT people to live free of 'oppression and to live differently' (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002, p. 6) and to exist as full and equal sexual citizens (Richardson, 2000) in social, legal and political

arenas. The moral purpose of my research study relates to its 'seeking authoritative knowledge [of[the unjust subordination' (Ramazanoglu and Holland, p. 16) of LGBT people, and is also concerned with participants' welfare (Sampson, Bloor and Fincham, 2008) and with affecting positive change by helping to limit feelings and experiences of prejudice, stigma and marginalisation (Barker, Richards and Bowes-Catton, 2012) of LGBT people so they can recover a sense of emotional well-being (Karayanni, 2012). In terms of methodology, and how a commitment to giving voice affected the approach to data analysis, the analysis was very much grounded in the personal narratives of interviews, where throughout the readings of the transcripts, I was very alert to identifying the issues that had been emphasised by the participants as being of particular interest, importance and concern to them. Further, a bottom-up, inductive analytical approach was utilised, so that the contents of the interview transcripts (that is, what the participants actually said) were used as the starting points to make links to academic theory. Giving voice in this sense was reinforced through the incorporation of a great number of quotations, capturing what the participants said about their lives and concerns, *in their own words* (their quoted words were selected for use as evidence to support the interpretation and claims I was making in my analysis of the data). There can therefore be little doubt that participants' voices are very clearly heard in this thesis.

My research also aligns with feminist epistemologies in that its methodological philosophy (as will be demonstrated throughout the chapter) emphasises, in part, knowledge building achieved through dialogic, co-operative partnership between the researcher and researched, stressing values of democratic egalitarianism and respect between parties; and also in the methodological choice of in-depth qualitative methods rather the positivist methods typical of the natural sciences which treat 'people and relationships as things…isolated for analysis and seen as static and one-dimensional' and removed from any historical context (Benton and Craib, 2001, p. 111), thereby ignoring or neglecting the 'meanings and consciousness of social actors' (Morrow and Brown, 1994, p. 54). Furthermore, the qualitative methods I used are also often preferred in feminist research as a means to reject the supposedly detached neutral stance of the researcher to the subject and the belief that knowledge is objective and value free (Miner *et al*., 2012), as commonly found in quantitative research, and to strongly uphold a subject-subject

relationship rather than a subject-object one (Giddens cited in Morrow and Brown 1994).

My alignment with the broad principles of a feminist theoretical paradigm may be controversial to some, since I am a man and my subject of study is men. Feminist research has by definition focused on women and what they have to say about their gendered experiences of discrimination and oppression (Kelly, 1984; Bar On, 1993) and their 'struggles to have their understandings of the world legitimated' (Alcoff and Potter, 1993, p. 2) against 'prevailing [patriarchal] forms of knowledge' (p.10). Stanley and Wise (1993) argue that feminist research must be about women by women and for women. A man using feminist principles to research men's lives might therefore be viewed as 'paradoxical' (Layland, 1990). According to Stanley and Wise's view, men can only be the subjects of feminist research when the research highlights their oppression of women. In contrast, however, DeVault and Gross (2014) assert that there are feminist researchers who have wanted to move beyond doing interviews only with those with whom they are 'comfortably similar' (p. 213). Certainly, Crowley (2007) investigates social discrimination and oppression in society more widely, including towards men, hence her research with a father's rights group which can also be viewed as a stigmatised group because of the unfavourable reaction of female rights groups to their work. Arendell (1997) studying divorced men insists on the importance of pursuing topics of personal interest, and therefore on her right to research these men's experiences and opinions as a subject in its own right. Thus, there seems to be a lack of consensus on whether or not a feminist epistemology can be used to research men. The insistence of some female academics that feminist research can only be undertaken by women is usually made in the specific context of emphasising 'feminist consciousness' where women's lived experience gives them a unique stand-point to understand their oppression by men (Stanley and Wise, 1993). Because my research context is different to this, I do not therefore feel disqualified from adapting relevant feminist principles to fit my context: the oppression of gay men by heterosexuals. I also feel it is ironically essentialising and discriminatory of some feminist writing to stereotypically claim there are distinctively feminine traits of 'sensitivity, responsiveness…and trust' (Code, 1991, p.17) that create empathetic subjectivities as opposed to the supposed emotional detachment represented in 'the *masculine* epistemological stance' (Code, 1991, p. 51, emphasis in original). I would argue male researchers also have the capacity to

demonstrate empathetic sensibilities. Interestingly, intersectionality, a theory that has developed directly out of feminist writings and, as I have indicated, shares its epistemological concerns, has been applied to researching male homosexuality and appropriated as a theoretical framework by male researchers with seemingly hardly any objection, perhaps because its scope is far broader than gender, the central focus of feminism.

3.3. Research Design

3.3.1. Adopting a qualitative approach

As set out in Chapter One, my research questions centre largely on perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and feelings, on how my participants understand and give meaning to their intersecting identities, and how they interpret their interactions with others. The nature of the research questions made me decide to adopt an interpretivist, qualitative approach because such an approach is well-known to uncover and illustrate very effectively people's perspectives, behaviours and meaning-making processes as they interpret the social world, and act on the meanings they ascribe to their cognitions, and to their own and others' actions as social actors (Phellas, 2005; Wilcox, 2012). According to Weeks (2012, p. xviii) interpretive approaches can be successfully used as a methodology to investigate gayness in all its complexity by exploring 'the richness and density of individual lives', rather than looking for some kind of single correct answer or universal truth, since experiences that diverge from the norm are relevant and should be expected when complex issues are investigated (Bryman, 2016: Phellas, 2005). In addition, because I am using the theoretical paradigm of intersectionality as a major focus of the study, a qualitative approach can effectively highlight the complex interlocking inter-relationships of sexuality with various identity dimensions such as race, class and age (Weeks, 2012). In addition, qualitative approaches are better suited to the study of phenomena such as sexuality and sexual identity formation and religious identities when it is not possible to employ easily manipulative variables to properly capture the range and depth of experiences, experiences that cannot be made to easily fit into the more rigid range of answers typically demanded by positivist, quantitative research (Wilcox, 2012). Conversely, quantitative methods 'offer limited access to accounts of experiences,

nuances of meaning, the nature of social relationships, and their shifts and contradictions' (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002, p. 155), although Yip (2008b) has shown that survey methods can be used in tandem with qualitative methods to uncover the scale of strength of feelings, and to analyse the effects of specific independent variables of gender and sexuality in very large samples (his was 565 people). For my study with a relatively small sample size of 35, I felt that using quantitative methods would not bring any particular additional benefit to my purposes.

Finally, the feminist aligned/intersectional epistemological approach of '"dis-indentfication" [from] value neutrality, and from norms of distanced, dispassionate research' (Hawkesworth, 2012, p. 94) and an acceptance that forms of knowing can be political and involve emotions (Code, 1993), an approach I favour, sits much more comfortably within a qualitative framework than a positivist quantitative one where objectivity and claims to being value-free have traditionally been strongly emphasised.

The best way to find the knowledge to answer my research questions naturally leads on to a discussion of the most appropriate research method(s) or tool(s).

3.3.2. The research method: Interviewing

I decided on using interviews because they have been considered extremely effective in producing data about people's concerns, feelings and perceptions (Miller, 1997; Peräkylä, 2005) and are believed to provide far greater insight into these aspects of self-representation than quantitative methods such as questionnaires and statistical analysis (De Fina, 2003; Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010a). Interviews are a good means to make 'experiences hearable' (DeVault and Gross, 2012, p. 210) through the generation of 'narratives that elucidate […] the internal psychological processes involved in identity experience' (Minwalla *et al*., 2005, p.117). Interviews are also good for establishing context particularisation, i.e. to 'set the perspectives heard within the context of personal history or experience' (Lewis and McNaughton Nicholls, 2014, p. 56), to add depth and understanding to an analysis by helping elucidate motivations and reasons for participants acting and thinking as they do.

I also felt that, since many academics researching LGBT Muslim sexuality have used interviews as their method of choice, such a method would provide me with sufficient credibility and validity in establishing an academic researcher identity, since it is important for 'fledging researchers [like myself] to be inculcated in the ways of the tribe' (Robson, 2002, p. 89) i.e. the academic qualitative research community, and by utilising its tried and tested methods, conform to the 'high professional standards' (Robson, 2002, p. 89) of this community.

Another reason for selecting interviews was that, while interested in issues such as participants' experiences of 'coming out' as homosexuals to their families, I felt it would be highly insensitive and intrusive, to attempt to observe an intimate and potentially difficult event like this, as well as impractical, since its timing is not necessarily predictable, nor likely to coincide with the scheduling of an academic research project, and it would not be time-inefficient or realistic to wait and hope that through observing interactions, these sought after narratives would somehow emerge by chance (Murphy and Dingwall, 2003). The same is true in relation to wanting to investigate experiences of racism and Islamophobia. Moreover, I was very concerned about the feasibility of access for observation, due to my outsider status as a non-Muslim and non-Arab. Indeed, subsequent experience proved that it would have been impossible for me to observe participants in *Imaan* LGBT support group meetings, as, on a visit to the group, I was asked to leave before the meeting started and told it was not open to non-Muslims. Practicalities of the time scale and speed of recruitment also pragmatically determined the decision to do interviews, since they produce faster results than observation, which usually takes far longer (Silverman, 2013). As an ethno-cultural outsider, I judged that even the process of recruiting people for short, one-off interviews would be difficult enough, let alone for extended observation. In light of all these issues, I felt recorded interviews were a more suitable option than (participant) observation.

Despite this, I am aware interviews are not a panacea. I will mention two main aspects of Murphy *et al*.'s (1998) 'radical critique' of them that are salient to my own experience of doing interviews (and which I discuss in more detail in the data collection section of this chapter). There is firstly the ontological problem of whether what is said in the interview really reflects interviewees' attitudes, perspectives or experiences in the real word settings outside the interview (Hammersley, 2008, p. 90). Secondly, Interviews can also be methodologically problematic in that there may

be power imbalances of various kinds, caused by characteristics of the participants that may shape an interview dynamic where interviewee opinions will be influenced by the interactional cues given off by interviewer reactions to what is said, or social conventions/taboos, which can affect what is truthfully disclosed (Hammersley, 2008). There may thus be a reactivity that is created via the interview that 'contaminates' data (Hammersley, 2008). Another drawback of interviews that I will also discuss in more detail later in the chapter concerns their timing and setting.

Having chosen interviews, I decided they should be semi-structured in preference to fully structured or completely unstructured ones. As Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001, p. 6) point out, semi-structured interviews allow for 'shifting nuances of identity … [and] the development of narratives'. Logically related to this point, I viewed highly structured interviews with their rigidly sequenced questions and standardized wording, devised in advance, as greatly and inappropriately limiting interviewees' potential range of answers, and allowing little possibility for them to guide the discussion, or to potentially reveal more unexpected aspects of their experiences and identities (Wilcox, 2012) to produce a more complete picture and enrich the data. At the other end of the scale, I felt that since I had specific research questions and specific themes to cover, the discussion needed to have a greater degree of focus than a completely loose, unstructured interview whose discussion points evolve organically and unpredictably, and which would by no means ensue that the topics I was interested in would be addressed.

I made use of a self-devised interview guide, arranged into four broad thematic areas: general biographical details, identities [sexual, ethnic, religious] and their intersections, relationships with LGBT [Muslim] support groups, and involvement with and attitudes towards white gay spaces, with questions that were derived from the three main research aims set out in Chapter One. The questions in the guide formed a starting point for discussion, and further discussion points and questions naturally developed out of the interviewee's responses to these initial questions (see the Appendix for the interview guide).

3.4. Sampling

3.4.1. Sampling strategies

My general approach with a difficult to reach population like this one was to attempt to recruit in locations where gay Arab/Muslim communities 'gather' (Wilcox, 2012). The most effective strategy was visiting 'virtual' gathering places, the online sites or resources aimed at LGBT people generally/LGBT Muslims more specifically. Thus, I visited LGBT Muslim support group and gay dating websites, searched for member profiles of individuals with obvious or apparent Arab-sounding names and privately messaged them a brief description of the study. I adopted this approach with two *Facebook* groups I joined: the *Imaan* LGBT Muslim support group and a group called *Gay Arabs and Moslems in London* and with five gay websites: *www.gaydar.co.uk* *www.planetromeo.com* *www.manjam.com* www.manhunt.net and www.adam4adam.com. Using gay dating websites had been recommended by both a project worker I met at *Naz Project*, Khaiser Khan, and by Dr. Asifa Siraj (via indirect correspondence), a specialist in researching LGBT Muslims. I also created my own *Facebook* page dedicated to publicising the project and calling for participants.

In the end, twenty-eight out of the thirty-five participants were recruited through private messages sent on the gay dating websites. Three participants were recruited through the use of the private messaging function on my own project-dedicated *Facebook* page. Three participants were similarly recruited on the *Imaan Facebook* page and one on the *Gay Arabs and Moslems in London Facebook* page. Online sampling was therefore almost exclusively used in this study, as it had become clear early on that it was a far more fruitful sampling method than other methods that achieved few results, such as snowballing and visiting LGBT support groups.

3.4.2. Challenges of the sampling process

In theory, having a dedicated *Facebook* page entitled *Gay Arab Muslims (MSM) in the U.K* on an extremely popular social media platform seemed to offer a promising and more targeted (hence efficient) means of recruitment for the study, since users

would be made aware of my page though search results if they did a *Facebook* site search inputting these terms. However, because of the global reach of *Facebook*, it soon became evident that the vast majority of over two hundred individuals who indicated they 'liked' the page, and the few that expressed an interest in participating in the study, were not located in the U.K., and appeared to have non-Arab sounding names (some seemed to be living in South and South East Asian countries, while many other names, locations and photographs suggested white, non-Arab males) and that they were mainly using the page to make new social and sexual contacts.

The complete lack of connection I ordinarily have with gay Arab Muslim men greatly limited the sampling procedures that could be deployed. My study was extremely heavily reliant on convenience or opportunistic sampling (Bryman, 2016; Burgess 1984), that is to say, where the sample is 'simply available to the researcher by virtue of its accessibility' (Bryman, 2016, p. 187). I had to adopt a pragmatic approach of doing 'what works' (Murphy and Dingwall, 2003). Because gay Muslims are a difficult to access, relatively invisible population with some being 'closeted' from families and friends (Abraham, 2009; Yip and Khalid, 2010), I was certainly not in a position to recruit any kind of representative sample. In such cases, convenience sampling has also been a necessity (see for example, Yip, 2004; 2005b).

I had hoped that a much greater degree of 'snowballing' would happen during the recruitment process to make it easier and swifter (only one instance occurred, in fact). Snowball sampling according to Phellas and Coxon (2012, p.19) 'relies on a series of referrals that are made within a circle of people who know each other or are loosely connected.' It has been effectively used in previous studies of LGBT communities by Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010a) researching gay Pakistani Muslim men, Phellas (2005) in his work with gay Cypriot men in the U.K. and Yip (2004a) with LGBT Muslims of South Asian origin, though its drawbacks should be acknowledged: participant connections with others of a similar background and interests such as educational levels (Yip, 2008b) will usually lead to unrepresentative 'views of an exclusive group of informants' (Seale, 1999, p. 116), thus increasing the selection bias (Yip, 2008b). Though a few of my interviewees mentioned that they knew people who might be interested in participating, almost invariably, nothing concrete developed from this.

A fourth challenge that was encountered was the extremely slow speed of recruitment during the early period (in the first seven months, an average of just one

person per month was recruited and interviewed) which produced a sense of demoralisation, frustration, and an anxiety about whether I would be able to recruit a sufficient number of participants to make the study viable, and caused me to doubt continuing with the project. The lack of replies from the messages I sent to dating website users should not have been surprising though, since the primary intention of users of these sites is to find partners for sexual contact/relationships. It was decided, early on in the study, to offer potential participants a £10 gift voucher as a form of inconvenience allowance to recompense time they had to give up to attend the interview and to help motivate people to take part (see the ethics section of this chapter for further discussion of offering rewards to participants). Toft (2012), has ruefully noted that without such incentives (which he did not use in his study of bisexual Christians) response rates may not be maximised. It was difficult to know, however, if my offer of an inconvenience allowance actually had any effect on participants' decision to participate, as I did not question them about this. Several participants seemed surprised when given the voucher and said they felt that it was not a necessary gesture, indicating this was not an important motivator for them to take part. They seemed content to freely give their time to help promote the 'wider good' of the research without expecting any reciprocal benefit.

As seems to be the case with much empirical research with interviewees, some potential participants changed their minds about taking part, or seemed not to have been serious about participating in the first place and thus, many initial leads went dead.

3.4.3. Sample characteristics

The sample was recruited and interviewed over a 19 month period, between February 2012 and October 2013. Table 1 below outlines some biographical details about the participants (who have been given pseudonyms) such as their nationality/ethnicity, age and self defined sexual orientation. Participants are listed in the order in which they were interviewed.

Table 1: Biographical details of the sample.

Pseudonym	Age	Nationality	Time in U.K	Sexual self-identification	Occupation
Samir	36	British born Lebanese	36 yrs	avoided labels	Computer designer
Ash	37	Mixed race Yemen/Indian	33 yrs	gay	Law enforcer
Karim	46	Moroccan	15 yrs	bisexual	Customer services clerk
Nasser	27	Egyptian	8 mths	gay	Post-graduate student
Mohamed	31	Iraqi	4 yrs	gay	Postgraduate student/translator
Philip	38	Lebanese	15 yrs	gay	Lecturer
Ehab	38	Palestinian	7 yrs	gay	Medical professional
Ahmad	22	Mixed-race Qatari/Afghan	3 yrs	gay	Undergraduate student
Haitham	28	British born Half-Egyptian, half Moroccan	28 yrs	bisexual	Marketing officer
Khalid	26	Half-Egyptian, half-Saudi	7 yrs	gay	Undergraduate student
Salem	24	British born Emirati	24 yrs	gay	Post-graduate student
Tariq	32	British born Moroccan	32 yrs	bicurious	Undergraduate student/editor
Ali	22	American born Lebanese	15 mths	gay	Undergraduate student
Zakaria	24	French Algerian	2 yrs	gay	Sales assistant
Hashim	26	British born mixed-race Saudi/Pakistani	26 yrs	bisexual	Financial manager
Walid	31	British born Libyan	4 yrs	gay	Postgraduate student
Harun	32	Lebanese (has Iraqi parents)	12 yrs	gay	Part-time interpreter
Ibrahim	26	British born Egyptian	26 yrs	MSM	Doctor
Yassir	38	British born Egyptian	38 yrs	gay	Services manager
Rashad	34	Israeli Arab	7 yrs	gay	Export manager
Fethi	36	Libyan	10 yrs	gay	Part-time translator
Laith	30	French Algerian	5 yrs	gay	Care worker
Chakib	35	Algerian	11 yrs	gay	Counsellor

Qais	20	Palestinian	1 yr	gay	Undergraduate student
Wail	32	Sudanese	1 yr	gay	Traffic manager
Elias	33	Libyan	8 mths	gay	Unemployed
Fahad	45	British-Qatari	45 yrs	gay	Musician/composer
Omar	34	Libyan	15 mths	gay	Legal advisor
Malik	28	British-Sudanese	21 yrs	homosexual	Pharmacist
Bilal	27	Jordanian	1 yr	gay	Businessman
Badr	35	Saudi Arabian	6 yrs	gay	Health worker
Jamal	22	Omani	4 yrs	gay	Undergraduate student
Idris	34	Emirati	12 yrs	homosexual	Businessman
Yaaqub	27	Palestinian	11 yrs	gay	Operations manager
Amine	38	Algerian	5 yrs	gay	Retail worker

The sample consisted of 35 males living in the U.K. The vast majority self-identified as gay/homosexual, though in a very small number of cases (see the table), other labels such as 'bisexual' were used by participants. In order to establish numerical viability for the sample, that is to say, to have a sufficiently large number of in-depth accounts that would allow much more confident assertions about the presence and frequency of common characteristics or experiences, and due to convenience sampling, the sample comprised Arabs from different nationality groups and from different geographical regions of the world (those who originated, or whose family originated from North Africa, the Middle East and the Arabian Gulf, as well as those born and bred in the U.K.) A sample of mixed nationalities like this, I would argue, enriches the study by throwing light on interesting intra-categorical intersectional differences in the experiences of these Arab males such as the fact that they may live under the influence of different Islamic religious schools with their differing rulings on and attitudes towards the issue of homosexuality, and the differential consequences of this (e.g. the Hanbali school is far harsher in its punishments for homosexuals than the Hanafi school, [Kugle, 2010]). A more heterogeneous sample like this also illuminates some interesting differences in migratory and diasporic identities and experiences (see Chapter Five for more information on gay migration) which again has the benefit of adding more depth and nuance to the exploration of gay Arab Muslim identities in highlighting intra-categorical variation. Eight of the 35

were born and grew up in the U.K., two moved here as young children (at four and seven years old), and one was born and brought up in the United States. The remaining 20 arrived in adulthood from Muslim majority countries.

The vast majority of the participants were highly educated. 27 out of the 35 interviewees (77%) had been university educated to undergraduate level; seven interviewees (20%) held Master's degrees and two (6%) held PhDs. This profile seems extremely surprising taking into consideration there was no purposive sampling to try to recruit well-educated participants, and a broader range of educational experiences and levels might have been expected in recruitment, since Internet technology use appears to have become ubiquitous in society. It may be that the sample obtained indicates that people who had university educations were more familiar with the concept and purpose of empirical research from their own experiences of higher education, and were therefore willing to consider participating (certainly, the two participants with PhDs expressed exactly this sentiment).

In addition, the sample consisted of predominantly younger men: only two of my interviewees were over the age of 40, while 40% were in their twenties. The total age range was from 20 to 46 years old. It is interesting that Roberts (2014), studying workplace discrimination against gay men, experienced difficulty in recruiting young men in their twenties, and that the majority of his 45 participants were in their forties. The reason for the preponderance of younger men in my sample is, I suggest, that gay dating websites (from which the vast majority of the participants were recruited) and also the *Facebook* group membership profile for *Imaan* seem to be domains where the intersection of sexuality and demography mostly results in younger users in their twenties and thirties. Filiault and Drummond (2009) reflecting on their empirical work with openly gay men say that, because gay culture is youth-oriented, it is often the case that older gay men have been difficult to recruit, and Meezan and Martin (2003) have stated that older and less educated LGBT people have traditionally been difficult to access and to engage in research. Conversely, Filiault and Drummond (2009) claim that gay men recruited through the Internet tend to be younger and less educated than those recruited through more conventional channels. The sample in my study does not conform to the profile Filiault and Drummond suggest regarding education levels. It could also be that young gay Muslims growing up in a culture with relatively liberal values towards homosexuality (as in the U.K.), as I mentioned in Chapter Two, may assimilate those values and

feel at greater ease with and be more open about and willing to discuss their sexuality (Abraham, 2009; Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010a; Yip 2004b). Participants who worked were in professional and managerial jobs, with a small minority in more working class occupations.

The question of the optimal sample size should also be mentioned. I did not decide *a priori* on a fixed number of people to be interviewed, but rather wanted to stop recruitment when I felt I was reaching the point of data saturation and few new themes were emerging (Beitin, 2012; Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006). I was following Mason's (2002) maxim that the sample needs to be large enough to conduct useful comparisons in the context of the research questions, but not too large as a detailed and subtle focus is impossible. For my study, I felt that data saturation was occurring by the time I had conducted 35 interviews and hence I ceased recruitment.

3.5. Data Collection

This section discusses various aspects relating to the fieldwork process with consideration given to the research setting and its challenges.

3.5.1. Conducting the interviews

Apart from two interviews conducted by email, and another one that was not audio-recorded, all interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder. Green and Thorogood, (2009) claim that audio-recorded interviews present evidence to the reader that the data produced is a trustworthy replication of what was said. On seeing the small size of the voice recorder, participants generally seemed unperturbed by the thought of being recorded, and the device appeared to have no negative effect on the relaxed rapport successfully established in the vast majority of the interviews. Wilcox (2012) argues that the use of such unobtrusive audio-recording equipment better facilitates the establishment of rapport with interviewees than video-recording equipment. The shortest interview lasted 50 minutes and the longest was 2 hours and 40 minutes. The average length was 1 hour, 45 minutes.

The physical location of some of the interviews (locations chosen by the interviewees, – see the section on ethics below for more on the rationale for allowing

a choice) sometimes proved disruptive to the smooth running of the interview. Problems included bad weather in outdoor locations and intrusive background noise in public spaces which affected the clarity of the recordings, causing difficulty during the transcription process. There were also difficulties with room availability in the university setting where the majority of interviews took place. I did feel the classroom locations helped to facilitate a sense of privacy (compared to public locations such as cafes) and lent the interview process an air of academic professionalism. Interestingly, Wilcox (2012) argues that doing interviews in 'formal' locations like this are less conducive to establishing a good rapport with interviewees, but I did not find this to be the case.

One participant agreed to do an interview only on condition I not record it, permitting me to take written notes instead. Having no shorthand writing ability, this proved an extremely difficult challenge, resulting in very brief, unsatisfactory notes for what was an interview of almost two hours. It is important to mention data collection difficulties since, as Bryman (2016) points out, a lot of published research tends to present an over-sanitised and unrealistic view of the process, ignoring discussion of problems that needed to be overcome.

Two interviews were conducted through asynchronous email exchanges. In one case, this method was necessitated because of the participant's privacy concerns and refusal to take part in any type of face to face interview (Martin and Knox, [2000] confirm that such concerns are a reason why LGBT people might prefer to avoid interviews conducted in person). Email interviews can thus be an effective means to maintain interviewee privacy and anonymity (Couch, Liamputtong and Pitts, 2012; Mann and Stewart, 2000), since there is no physical presence or clues to visual appearance (Hewson, 2014; Markham, 2011). In the other case, an email interview was necessary because the interviewee was then in the United States, and many time zones behind the U.K. (Ayling and Mewse [2009], James and Busher [2012] and Markham, [2011] have all argued that email interviews are an effective research method in cases when interviewee and interviewer are separated by geographical distance like this). Furthermore, I was wary of attempting a synchronous online interview through *Skype*, fearful of technical hitches. Bryman (2016) and Hewson (2014) admit that issues with Internet bandwidth, excessive traffic, poor audio and breaking up of pictures can occur with *Skype,* detrimentally affecting the interview experience and the amount and quality of data obtained, with

Hewson (2003) advising it may be better to take the 'lowest-tech' option to make certain the job is done. This was my approach here.

It was clear to me that email interviews had the significant benefit of making the data analysis process faster, since they do not need to be transcribed (Bjerke, 2010; James and Busher, 2012; Kazmer and Xie, 2008; Kvale and Brinkmann; 2008). I had thought that such interviews might encourage depth and quality of response in allowing the interviewee breathing space to reflect on the question. Indeed, Ayling and Mewse (2009), Hewson (2007; 2014) and Evans, Elford and Wiggins (2008) have all claimed that greater reflection time for the interviewee and the production of richer, more in-depth data is one of the major advantages of using asynchronous email interviews. But I was also, on the other hand, apprehensive that the answers provided with this particular method could, in fact, lack detail, since email communication itself is generally perceived to be a means of conveying information economically, tending to emphasise brevity, unlike the adaptable, organic development of conversational interaction (Mann, [2003], cited in Bjerke [2010]). I also worried that the idea of having to type long, detailed answers might be viewed by participants as a time-consuming, off-putting chore for them, and thus, less insightful data might be generated, concerns also previously raised by McDermott and Roen (2012) in their study of LGBT youth online. My reservations were generally confirmed, as the two email interviews did tend to provide much less data. Yet, despite this, useful material could still be mined from them. Pushing people to expand on answers did feel more awkward with email interviews (especially coupled with the need to try and maintain participants' goodwill and co-operation, and not de-motivate them). The email interview method did not prove very time efficient in one case as the process stretched out for three months because the interviewee was busy with other demands and/or forgot about the project and had to be sent polite reminders (I was well aware of the need not to appear to be pestering, something that can annoy interviewees, affect rapport and lead to inferior data [Kazmer and Xie, 2008]). This waiting experience also clearly illustrates the fact that power rests with the interviewee who decides when exactly to respond (Hewson, 2014). I did not find that the greater degree of anonymity afforded by textual communication facilitated any greater level of openness to discuss potentially embarrassing topics such as sex (when compared to my face-to-face interviewees)

as Ayling and Mewse (2009) among others claim. My interviewees were, in fact, equally open on these matters in both media.

3.5.2. The role of the interviewer: Insider, outsider or both?

Walby (2010) argues that gay participants bestow an insider status on researchers who disclose they are also gay, and both Walby (2010) and Lee (2008) assert that being positioned as an insider can significantly shape the ambiance of an interview, the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, and thus the data produced. Based on the richness of the data obtained, I would posit that the revelation of my own sexuality (which I sometimes made in early communications with participants when giving them my biographical information, or when directly asked by interviewees) and of being a gay *man*, in particular, may have encouraged them to be more frank and open by revealing intimate and sexually explicit details of their sexual lives than they would if they were being interviewed by a heterosexual male, heterosexual female or lesbian interviewer. Similar benefits from occupying a gay insider status have been mentioned by Homfray (2008) a British gay man reflecting on his research with gay and lesbian communities in the U.K. and Phellas (2005), a Greek Cypriot gay man researching Cypriot gay men in the U.K. I also felt that an insider status through sharing the same sexuality and gender made it easy for me to raise questions about intimate topics like sex (something also identified by Einarsdóttir, [2012] studying LGBT couples in the U.K.) and having a shared schemata and vernacular about gay male life and culture in the U.K. meant there was an ease of understanding, since clarification requests were often unnecessary, for example, when names of some gay bars and nightclubs were mentioned, or about aspects of gay male practices such as ‘cruising’ (something also highlighted by Lee [2008] investigating older British gay men, and in Robert’s [2014] reflections on his interviews with gay men in the British workplace). I also felt that my own general experiences of issues that participants experienced relating to their sexuality such as stigma and disclosure helped me demonstrate a degree of empathetic understanding that perhaps would be more difficult for a heterosexual interviewer who had not experienced these specific issues, and that this enhanced trust, rapport and the amount and depth of information that the participant was prepared to reveal about personal and sensitive topics.

On the other hand, I did become aware that being an insider in terms of shared sexuality and gender did occasionally prejudice my way of viewing the world, somewhat blinding me to other equally valid knowledge claims (Hammersley, 1992). For example, I was surprised by the large number of interviewees using gay dating websites in pursuit of monogamous long-term relationships, since I had assimilated the widespread assumptions in the gay male culture that gay relationships tend to centre more on non-monogamy. In such an instance, it would seem an outsider's perspective could be potentially more objective in the analysis, where they might notice and question things overlooked or taken for granted in my insider interviewer's perspective.

The *outsider* or 'stranger' position of a researcher can also have other positive benefits. My ethnicity as an outsider to British Arab communities was advantageous in terms of being able to instil confidence in participants about issues of privacy and confidentiality. Two interviewees specifically mentioned that they felt they could trust me more in terms of discreteness compared to an Arab interviewer, who they stereotyped as more prone to gossip. My ethnic outsider identity seemed to have the effect of allowing them to become relaxed and open up during the interview. This chimes with LaSala's (2003) point that interviewees fearing gossip within their community, if interviewed by insider researchers, may be more wary and, therefore, may, in fact, give less honest answers, which would, of course, affect the quality of the data produced.

Regarding my own identity and how it shaped my experience of the research, there was at least one occasion when my outsider status in terms of the intersection of my ethnic and religious identities created strong feelings of isolation and dissonance within me. This was my attendance of the *Imaan LGBT Muslim Conference* in 2012 to look for participants. Since the conference was one created by Muslims specifically for Muslims, I felt very awkward and uncomfortable there, which greatly inhibited me from speaking to potential recruits for my study. Added to this, the intersection of my age (being twice as old as the majority of attendees) with my sexuality further reinforced my outsider status and added to my discomfort.

It is important to keep in mind then that some aspects of interviewers' intersectional identities (such as race, class, gender, sexuality) can both lend them the status of insider and marginalise and 'other' them in certain contexts (Berger, 2015; Hayfield and Huxley, 2015). Thus, we should not understand insider-outsider

status as a simple, either-or discrete dichotomy, but as fluid and constantly shifting, often depending on the context and topic under discussion in the interview. I was clearly much more an insider based on my sexuality, gender and education levels in some contexts, but firmly an outsider in terms of religion, ethnicity and age in others. One is rarely a complete insider or outsider due to these multiple identity intersections.

3.5.3. The role of the interviewee and influence of interviewee characteristics

I was always aware of the interviewee's role in shaping the content of the interview, which made for a dynamic, evolving, co-constructed product (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Green and Thorogood, 2009; Phellas, 2005; Silverman, 1993). In interview interaction, the interviewee often makes assumptions about the interviewer, and decides which information to withhold or disclose based on those assumptions and to shape 'accounts' to match what they perceive to be the assumptions and biases of the interviewer (Green and Thorogood, 2009; Silverman, 2006). This is a major criticism of interviews as mentioned earlier in the chapter. My approach to this problem was to treat *interview-data-as-topic* (Rapley; 2006) that is, to consider the *functional* or rhetorical purpose of our spoken interactions (looking at the 'hows' as well as the 'whats' Holstein and Gubrium, 2011), and thus not necessarily treat the interviews as always absolutely true reflections of an external or internal reality. I took a pragmatic ontological approach which, while allowing for the existence of 'accounts' (Dingwall, 1997) that may provide a distortion of reality, asserts it is still possible to accept that what interviewees say generally has meaning beyond the interview context, and that knowledge that relates to an external truth in their social worlds can be obtained (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Miller and Glassner, 2011; Yeo *et al*., 2014). I was certainly alert to accounts created by interviewees for the purpose of impression management through strategies such as justification and excuse making (Dingwall, 1997) whenever they felt their actions went against socially accepted norms, in order to seek approval from the interviewer. A good example of this involved my participant Mohamed. At one point previously, we had talked about the system of 'gender-inscribed' sexual roles that operates in male-male sexual interactions in Arab countries like his own (Iraq). He pointed out that the role of the submissive male partner had undesirably negative connotations of femininity and

weakness. When I later asked him what role he preferred to take, he emphatically said that he was ‘versatile’. However, I already knew from reading his online profile on a gay dating website that he had classified himself as ‘a bottom looking for a top’. His insistence to me in the interview interaction that he was ‘versatile’ could be his attempt to impression-manage, as a stigma avoidance strategy. Our previous discussion of sexual roles in Iraq had made my question of his preferred sexual role a leading one. I sensed that the same stigma management accounting was being deployed by one or two other interviewees in response to the same question.

I was concerned that age might be another interviewee characteristic that could negatively affect the interview dynamic, interaction and data produced by potentially creating a reactive, inhibitory effect in my youngest interviewees, who were around twenty five years younger than I. As a consequence, I certainly found myself making more of a conscious effort to appear as friendly, approachable and ‘down to earth’ as possible in pre-interview, ‘getting to know you’ coffee chats with these participants in an effort to put them more at ease.

The English language competence of the non-British interviewees spanned a broad spectrum, including degrees of non-fluency, and as an English language teacher by profession, I was also aware of how divergent linguistic codes used by the interviewer and interviewee in spoken interaction might potentially detrimentally influence the comfort of the interviewee, disrupt effective communication, and produce less useful data (a problem also highlighted by Mason [2002] and Mies [2009]). With Rashad, who lacked sufficient linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1984) because of his very broken English, it often required sustained effort, with clarification and confirmation requests on my part, to follow his meaning. His interview was a clear example of where it was necessary for me to grade the vocabulary and expressions I used at a more appropriate (lower) level, which had the desired effect of enhancing communication.

Another important interviewee characteristic that I noticed shaped the interview dynamic and the quality and depth of data obtained concerned personality traits. Some individuals appeared to be more sociable and talkative, while others were less so; the latter needing more frequent prompting to develop and elaborate on their answers, though short, one line answers sometimes still occurred despite such prompting. Energy and concentration levels of the interviewee on the day were also a noticeable variable that could affect the quantity and quality of the data

produced. For example, the interview I completed with Bilal lasted for two hours and 40 minutes and was conducted in a single session without a break, after he had had a long working day. Towards the end of our conversation, I was aware that he was becoming more fatigued, less alert and giving less developed responses, so I tried to be sensitive enough to bring the interview to a conclusion at that point.

Taking all the above discussion points concerning interview interaction into account, it should be clear that producing convincing interpretations of interview data requires that attention always needs to be paid to its production context (Murphy and Dingwall, 2003). Having detailed aspects of data collection by describing the interview process and having discussed both my role as a researcher in terms of my insider/outsider status and the role and interview effects created by my interviewees, the next section details the analytical process that occurred after all the data was collected.

3.6. Data Analysis

It is generally agreed that providing detailed descriptions of the sequencing of coding or theme generation in the data analytical process is important, (as is the reporting of the other stages of the research process), to help limit error, show transparency and detail, and increase the validity of the presented findings (Mays and Pope, 2000; Maykurt and Morehouse, 1994; Murphy and Dingwall, 2003), thereby allowing for a more rigorous review of what the data is purportedly communicating (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Hence, I will now outline the analytical approach I used.

I firstly carefully transcribed all the interviews, which proved extremely time-consuming, as I am not a trained touch-typist. Every three minutes of interview talk took 30 minutes to transcribe. I did not use a professional transcription service because of the expense, and more importantly, I wanted to be fully immersed in the data to get a deeper and better understanding of emergent themes. Moreover, I had assured participants that I would be the only person to hear the recordings and I did not want to compromise my ethical integrity.

To analyse and then arrange the data, which would also obviously involve decisions about content (Mills, 1959), I used thematic analysis, which ‘refers to how semantic codes link together with broader themes…The aim of this type of analysis is [to] illustrate topics within and across research participants.’ (Muñoz-Laboy, Parker

and Wilson, 2012, p. 115). I did this by reading each transcript slowly and carefully, identifying key broad thematic areas, a broad theme in this context is 'some signal trend, some master conception, or a key distinction' (Mills, 1959, p. 216), for example,' religious identities', and I transferred all the relevant data extracts in the form of quotations to a *Microsoft Word* document dedicated to this theme.

After all the data extracts relating to a single broad theme had been transferred to this *Word* document, there then followed repeated readings of it in a process of reduction, to identify various subthemes found within the broad over-arching theme, and then, I grouped together quotations for the subthemes from throughout the document (Huberman and Miles, 1994). There was thus a funnel structure to the themes' selection and organisation, from broad to narrow. Throughout this process, interview transcripts were re-read to ensure that nothing relevant or important was being missed. I utilised a 'constant comparative' type of analysis (Glaser and Strauss cited in Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) where the data that is coded as belonging to a specific category is compared with other data that have been codified as belonging to that category, to establish similarities, differences and therefore, through a focused analysis, allowing the differentiation and creation of categories and also subcategory formations that emerge out of existing categories. In doing this, there was an iterative process of revisiting, analyzing and comparing data, modifying the analysis where necessary (typical of good practice in qualitative research data analysis, according to Murphy and Dingwall, [1998]; Hammersley and Atkinson, [2007] and Coffey and Atkinson, [1996]). I did not use a qualitatitive software package such as *Nvivo*, as I felt it would not lend any particular advantage in terms of providing greater analytical insight or clarity regarding the various levels of coding, since I was not working with a extremely large or complex data set, and I fully anticipated the analytical process to be straightforward enough to make the use of *Nvivo* unnecessary, and this proved to be the case.

In the three chapters that immediately follow, I include large amounts of data in the form of many quotations from the interviews alongside my interpretations and conclusions, thereby aiming to provide the means for the reader to judge the adequacy (or 'persuasiveness' as Phellas, [2005] terms it) or otherwise of my interpretation; to judge whether the conclusions are justified, and to allow the reader to consider possible alternative interpretations of the data (Aul Davies, 2008; Green

and Thorogood, 2009; Greenhalgh, 2014). Examples of non-confirming or contradictory cases have also been included in interview extracts in the data chapters, in order to provide a more nuanced and accurate understanding of phenomena, and thus enhance the study's credibility for the claims that are made (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Mays and Pope, 2000; Murphy and Dingwall, 2003; Seale *et al*., 2006).

An aspect of analysing the results from the data collected is to consider the extent of their generalisability. I would agree with Phellas' (2005) assertion that accounts given by participants and associated interpretations by researchers cannot be seen as something representative of all diasporic men of similar ethnic, religious and sexuality backgrounds who are making sense of their sexuality. Phellas, researching gay Cypriot men, argues that the least that can be claimed is that such processes have been uncovered in a particular localized context which may have produced biases due to historical and social influences. In this vein, my study centres on an analysis of the identities of particular gay Arab Muslim men living in U.K. cities in the second decade of the 21st century, recognising that these identities are temporally, spatially and contextually bound and shaped. Thus, what I am doing here is providing a snapshot of identities found existing in a particular time and place, and describing the context in its individuality (Seale's [1999] *ideographic* methods). Certainly, particularisation has been described by Stake (cited in Murphy and Dingwall, 2003) as the central goal of qualitative research, though it should be acknowledged that some degree of generalisation may still be possible. For example, Schofield (1993) argues that a form of generalisability in qualitative research relates to how findings can be synthesised with results from previous qualitative studies. As will be seen from my analyses in the data chapters 4-6, I sometimes use such an approach, where I identify commonalities between characteristics of gay Arab Muslims in the U.K. obtained from my data, and characteristics of LGBT South Asian Muslims presented in the empirical findings of other authors' studies.

I am also aware of and acknowledge the 'partiality' of my interpretation as presented in the final product, and do not claim it presents some 'absolute truth'. As Mauthner and Doucet (1998) point out when discussing the connection between data analysis and reflexivity, knowledge production will reflect our beliefs and biases, and we make particular choices of theoretical frameworks which will influence the

procedure and analysis of data, such as selecting what fits to illustrate a particular theory (such as 'intersectionality' in my own study) and ignoring other things in the determining of categories; how ideas are linked to categories; and deciding what are typical and negative examples.

3.7. The Management of Ethical Issues in the Research Process

Edwards and Mauthner (2012) say that research ethics relate to 'the morality of human conduct...to the moral deliberation, choice and accountability on the part of researchers throughout the research process' (p. 14), while Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) state that 'research is an inherently…moral activity: it is not…morally neutral' (p. 88). Ethics importantly highlight the 'integrity' of the research work produced (Bryman, 2016, p. 120).

Before I was permitted to start the empirical stage of the process, I completed the mandatory university ethical clearance. This requirement would appear to confirm Bryman's (2016) claim that the need to maintain ethical standards has become more greatly emphasised in academic research in recent years. In this section, I demonstrate the extent to which my own research has considered ethical issues by focusing on informed consent, the principles of non-maleficence and autonomy, power in the researcher-researched dyad and, finally, ethical behaviour in managing personal relationships with participants.

3.7.1. Informed consent

In wanting to emphasise my commitment to good ethical practice regarding informed consent (Bryman, 2016; Murphy and Dingwall, 2007), and to provide a sign of 'openness' and transparency, I always shared the aims of the research with potential participants and provided them with full written details of the project. I also made sure I informed them about the possible future dissemination of the data at conferences or in published articles, reflecting Burgess' (1984) and Bryman's (2016) point that what will be done with the finished research product needs to be made clear to participants.

I informed potential participants at the outset that interviews would be audio-recorded, especially as I (rightly) anticipated there could be concern about a relative

stranger being in possession of a recording of material of a sensitive nature. Revealing this information only after the participant had consented to be interviewed, would, in my opinion, be highly unethical and unprofessional, since he might feel implicitly coerced, and such a strategy might not ultimately be productive, because he might then refuse to be interviewed, and if he *were* interviewed, a relationship of trust and a good rapport might fail to be established because of the earlier lack of transparency. My approach in this situation seems consistent with what Murphy and Dingwall (2007) and Edwards and Mauthner (2012) term *deontological* approaches or 'duty ethics of principles', which concentrate on the universal rights of research subjects to just and truthful treatment, privacy and respect. This need for ethical honesty regarding informed consent was brought home to me when, during a 'get to know you coffee' meeting, one potential interviewee physically baulked and looked fearful when the word 'recording' was mentioned. Attempts to contact him, after I had agreed to take notes instead of recording the interview, were not successful. By chance, we met on a street one day. He was with a group of Arab friends. I said 'hello' to him but he pretended not to have seen me. I reflected later that that this kind of encounter can strongly impinge on aspects of confidentially and anonymity within the researcher-researched relationship, since his acknowledging me might have potentially put him in a difficult and compromising position, if his friends enquired about our relationship. I later read LaSala's (2003) useful strategy to prevent this scenario, which, in retrospect, would have been good to have used: he tells participants he will never attempt to greet them in chance social encounters, and instead allows them to choose to greet him, as a means of preserving confidentiality.

3.7.2. Ethical behaviour and online privacy rights

The recruitment method described earlier of browsing and selecting potentially relevant user profiles on gay dating and LGBT Muslim support and social networking sites, and contacting these individuals through unsolicited private messages raises a 'grey area' ethical issue concerning the extent to which profiles and postings on websites and forums are considered in the public domain and legitimate sources to be used by researchers to recruit participants, or whether privacy rights are being infringed through these actions (Bryman, 2016). Direct messaging of site users by

researchers (as well as the unsolicited posting of advertisements for research projects) can be considered intrusive, offensive and a type of 'spam' by some forum users (Binik, Mar and Kiesler, 1999; Hewson, 2014; Wright, 2005). With regard to my own study, only a very small minority of people explicitly expressed any displeasure at being contacted when I privately messaged them on gay dating websites with the details of the project, though I accept that, simply because people do not express their displeasure, does not necessarily mean that they feel that their privacy has not been intruded upon. Overall, my approach was that, while I treated the worldwide web and its contents as in the public domain, I attempted to at least have the sensitivity to immediately and unquestioningly accept anyone's expressed wish to decline to participate, and not bother them again.

3.7.3. Offering rewards to participants

I gave £10 gift vouchers to participants as a form of inconvenience allowance. I felt that from a feminist-aligned perspective, voucher giving can arguably be considered an example of good ethical practice, in ensuring that it is not only the researcher who is seen to benefit from a situation where, too often, the researched is treated as an object to be exploited (Head, 2009, Thompson, 1996). Showing appreciation for the contributions of time and effort by interviewees in this manner can also thus help in a small way to reduce power imbalances in the interviewer-interviewee dynamic. The allowance that I provided was not monetary, but a gift voucher that could not be redeemed for cash and the value was carefully thought about, to ensure it was small enough not be unduly coercive, thus helping to preserve ethical integrity (Head, 2009). Webster, Lewis and Brown (2014) have argued that 'the benefits incentives may bring outweigh ethical risks if these risks are overtly acknowledged and managed.' (p. 93) which is something I attempted to do.

3.7.4. The principles of non-maleficence and autonomy

I demonstrated commitment to respecting participants 'physical, social and psychological well-being' and upholding the ethical principle of *non-maleficence,* i.e. not causing harm (British Sociological Association, 2008; Economic and Social Research Council, 2011) by assuring potential participants at the outset (stated

explicitly on the consent form) that they could withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason, and that they would not have to answer any questions during the interview they did not want to. This also reflects the upholding of the principle of *autonomy* or *self-determination,* i.e. respecting respondents' decisions (The British Sociological Association, 2008; Beauchamp *et al*. cited in Murphy and Dingwall, 2007), and gives them 'some degree of protection and control' (King, 1996, p. 179) in the process. I fully accepted that any non-consented data would not be used or pursued.

It was particularly important to avoid the potential for any harm to come to participants through their identities becoming known (especially as gay Muslim men have faced verbal and physical abuse because of their sexuality – see the literature review in Chapter Two, and also Chapter Five, for more evidence of this) and, therefore, conforming to good ethical practice, the names of participants in my study were anonymised (as advised by the Economic and Social Research Council, 2011; Murphy and Dingwall, 2007; Ryen, 2006), and I carefully analysed and re-read all interview transcript material used in the data chapters to ensure, to the best of my ability, that individuals could not be identified from any details they provided. To further ensure privacy and confidentiality, all the completed interview recordings and their transcripts were stored securely on a 'password protected hard drive' (as recommended by Wilcox, 2012).

The need to uphold the principle of non-maleficence and protect participants from psychological distress was brought home to me in relation to posts by others on the project's *Facebook* page. Messages, apparently from heterosexual Muslims, started to appear which castigated LGBT Muslims, including the kind of '[d]isparaging…belittling or demeaning [remarks and] abusive language' (Tokunga, 2011, p. 427), typical of online 'flaming', a phenomenon that is facilitated by the de-personalised character of the medium and the psychological distance between users (Bazelon, 2013; Tokunga, 2011). One comment posted on my *Facebook* page stated: 'Go kill yourself, you dogs. There's plenty of gays in the hell-fire and *inshallah*, you'll end up there.' With abuse like this from their ethno-religious community, it was hardly surprising that confidentiality and anonymity were considered essential pre-requisites by some interviewees to secure their agreement to participate in the study. The abusive *Facebook* messages evoked a disgusted

reaction from me and as the page creator, I was able to make these posts invisible and prevent the senders from making further posts.

Another aspect of respecting participants' emotional and psychological well-being was I felt being 'open, empathetic and non-judgemental' (Wilcox, 2012, p. 32). This was especially important in my reaction to any responses participants gave when discussing religion, as I am a non-Muslim, and a person who is certainly not religious in any shape or form. Thus, I stressed to them before and during the interviews, that it was definitely not my purpose to judge what they said, in any way. The need to be empathetic and non-judgemental became even clearer when some participants made very moving and harrowing revelations concerning their religious and sexual identities (something also experienced by Toft [2012] and Wilcox [2012] in their studies of bisexual Christians and LGBT religious people, respectively). For example, three of my participants graphically described being verbally and physically assaulted by family members after they had come out as gay. Several recounted suffering childhood sexual abuse by older male relatives (see Chapter Five), which I also found unsettling. Rashad's story was particularly disturbing to hear. He described being raped repeatedly by a respected Muslim religious leader, as he grew up, of being abducted and threatened at gunpoint by figures connected to this leader when he reported the matter, and tearfully recounted how he had lost his business, was forced into exile and cannot see his family. I listened sympathetically, but was shocked hearing such details. Discussion of sensitive topics can clearly make for an experience that generates mutual stress. Einarsdóttir (2012) and Toft (2012) have pointed out that while much attention is paid in academia to ethical principles of preserving the emotional and psychological well-being of interviewees, the emotionally burdening and stressful effect of some interviews on the *interviewer* (often as a result of the close rapport that has been developed [Hubbard, Backett-Milburn and Kemmer, 2001]) is often overlooked in the methodological literature. I felt that I was able to manage the experience, in that the reactions I had, related more to feeling disturbed and upset rather than feeling traumatised (Hubbard, Backett-Milburn and Kemmer [2001] talk of an uncomfortable-traumatic scale of experience). I did not feel as though I needed any formally organised emotional support through de-briefing, peer-mentoring or counselling because of what was disclosed (as recommended by Dickson-Swift *et al*. [2008; 2009] and Hubbard, Backett-Milburn and Kemmer [2011]). I did, though, make use of more informal peer-

support networks by discussing these upsetting experiences with close friends. It was, ultimately, satisfying to hear Rashad indicate at the conclusion of the interview that he had found the experience cathartic and therapeutic in that he was able to unload emotions that he had always kept bottled up inside him. This highlights how interviews can be 'a two-way process in which the respondent gets some kind of physical and emotional value back from the researcher' (Toft, 2012, p. 53).

3.7.5. Issues of power between the researcher and researched

Aligning my epistemological approach with those of feminist/intersectional epistemologies that aim to reduce or eliminate the power differentials inevitably built into the researcher-researched relationship (Herzog, 2012; Roberts, 2014), and aiming to pursue a more ethical type of research, I handed responsibility for the choice of interview location to participants. I should also admit that another motivation for this decision was I hoped that, being in a location where participants could feel more at ease would facilitate more openness and rapport, and be conducive to a successful interview. In three cases, the interviews were conducted in the homes of participants. This also necessitated ethical considerations because of potential safety risks in going alone to a stranger's abode. But I felt that this risk was mitigated to a sufficient degree by the fact that I had previously met all three individuals at an introductory meeting, and felt generally able to gauge from their personality and demeanour whether I would feel comfortable enough to visit their home. Highly public venues like cafes were often chosen by participants for their interviews, and a dilemma arose for me concerning the extent to which interviewee choice should be indulged at the expense of privacy and ethical concerns, since questions of a personal nature would be discussed in these interviews in these public places. Participants knew in advance of the interviews that such topics would be raised, but this did not deter them from choosing a café location.

The hierarchical power structure of interviewer-interviewee relations usually determines that the content of the interview is shaped to the *interviewer's* interests, in terms of topics discussed, questions asked, and the importance conferred on/extent of discussion of particular points. Thus, the relationship is often one of a restrictive, uni-directional control of the interviewee (Dingwall, 1997; Gannon and Davies, 2012; Silverman, 1993; Wang and Yan, 2012), setting up an oppressed-

dominator binary (Gannon and Davies, 2012), where people seem treated as passive research objects that research is done *on* (Stanley and Wise,1993). I at least attempted to create an enfranchising 'collaborative, non-hierarchical relationship' (Bickham-Mendez and Woolf, 2012, p. 642) to some extent, by asking, at the end of each interview, an open question about whether there was anything else that participants wanted to mention or discuss. Several interviewees did take this opportunity to raise further points that they felt were important to them. For example, two interviewees expressed surprise that the topic of safe sex and its importance/lack of importance to Arab gay men had not been discussed, and thus we proceeded to talk about this topic. Four others took the opportunity to raise topics they were interested in discussing. By the inclusion of a question asking if there was anything else they wanted to discuss, participants were at least given the opportunity to directly decide some of the interview content.

The fact that several participants cancelled or rescheduled interviews at their convenience also suggests that power is not always located within the interviewer throughout the research process but rather is transferable (Roberts, 2014). Dependent on their goodwill due to the extremely slow speed of recruitment, resulting, in part, from me being an ethnic and religious outsider to this community, I had little alternative but to politely agree to re-schedule interviews when these requests were made.

3.7.6. The ethics of sexual relationships with participants

Another ethical issue that occurred during the data collection process related to the interviewer-interviewee relationship and, more particularly, where lines and boundaries should be drawn in terms of degrees of familiarity. A shared gay identity between researcher and interviewee can raise ethical issues that an outsider researcher would not be faced with (Roberts, 2014) such as a more intimate relationship which can cross into sexual intimacy (LaSala, 2003). In my own interactions with participants, an interviewee offered me a 'lower back massage' after I had mentioned that my back was hurting. I perceived this to be an flirtatious offer and an example of 'sexualised rapport', which can occur when males interview other males about same sex acts and relationships, but which can be an unwelcome distraction to the researcher's purpose (Walby, 2010, p. 648). A second potential

interviewee said that he would complete an interview but would 'like to have some fun first'. In both the aforementioned cases, I maintained what I considered to be a professional attitude, thinking about both my own personal behavioural code and professional ethical guidelines (two steps recommended by Wyatt Seal, Bloom and Somlai [2000]), and I enforced a strict demarcation between 'business' and 'pleasure', determining not to cross a line of over-familiarity with participants, and to maintain a professional distance. My approach here aligns with that of LaSala (2003), Lincoln (1998), Roberts (2014) and Walby (2010), and contrasts sharply with that of writers such as Blackwood (1995), Bolton (1995), Gearing (1995) and Goode (1999), who variously see researcher-participant sexual relations as a potential means for completely dissolving all barriers between the two, evening out unequal power dynamics; a means of greatly increasing rapport; of preventing the researched from being 'objectified'; and as a resource, where intimate relations can be utilised to obtain greater quality and quantity of data, with far deeper insight into a phenomenon. There are evidently differing views on the ethical rectitude of sexual relationships with participants. With the greater emphasis on ethics in research in recent years, attitudes may have changed since the views of writers in the 1990s.

Einarsdóttir (2012) raises the interesting point that, while much is made about responding to interviewees who wish intimate interaction with the researcher, little is mentioned about the interviewer's feelings of being attracted to a participant. Researchers are humans, and so it is likely that they will find some of their participants sexually attractive. From my perspective though, attempting to act on such feelings is in conflict with a researcher's ethical duties and professionalism, for the same reasons I have given against researchers responding to participant-initiated sexual approaches. Furthermore, I agree with Goode's (1999) assumption that there is the danger of serious consequences for the researcher later, if the participant is dissatisfied or unhappy after the sexual experience. A repercussion of this, I would suggest, might be participants' subsequent withdrawal of their consent to use interview material, and more seriously, the researcher could be exposed to complaints to the academic institution of inappropriate behaviour, which could thus create reputational harm to the researcher and his/her department or university. In my view, researchers should not complicate the main purpose of their research enterprise with potentially problematic liaisons.

3.8. A Note on Terminology

Looking ahead to the presentation and analysis of the data in the next three chapters, a decision needs to be taken concerning the choice of basic linguistic descriptors I will use between *gay* versus *homosexual* versus *non-heterosexual* versus *queer* (all terms that have been used in past empirical studies) to describe men who are sexually attracted to the same sex.

In his earlier work, Yip (2003; 2004a; 2004b) preferred the term *non-heterosexual* as an adjective, whilst later acknowledging the problematic nature of the label, in that it implies heterosexuality is the normative standard. He subsequently (Yip, 2005a, 2010), along with Minwalla *et al*. (2005) and Shanahan (2009) used variants of *LGBTQI* (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trangender, Queer, Intersex). The label *queer Muslims* has been used in articles by Rouhani (2009) Abraham (2009) and in the titles of Yip and Khalid's (2010) and M.F. Khan's (2010) studies as an alternative umbrella term to *LGBTQI*. Yet, as Munt (2010) and O'Riordan and White (2010) state, many gay Muslims have not reclaimed or do not wish to reclaim or have rejected the term *queer* in a politically active sense, and find it offensive[4] (Munt, 2010). I concur with these sentiments, in that I am personally rather uncomfortable with the term 'queer', as I feel it still has highly derogatory connotations, and for this reason, I will not be using it as a preferred term myself in this study. Moreover, not a single one of my interviewees used it as a term to self-identify, which could indicate that the word has less currency as an identity descriptor in the U.K., or that its popular use as a label of political activism lacked relevance to my interviewees. This circumstance might also seem to highlight a mismatch between the sexuality labels that have recently been adopted in academia for the in-fashion titles of books, and the terms that people actually prefer to use to describe their sexuality in the British context, given the choice (the sexuality identification labels mentioned both in the table on pages 69-70, and throughout the data analysis in Chapters 4-6 when referring to participants are labels that participants have self-ascribed).

[4] O'Riordan and White (2010) state that the term 'queer' used with a positive connotation has its roots in radical LGBTQI political activism within the United States and it is in America that this usage is most commonly found, as well as in the writing of academics working within the area of critical theory called 'Queer Theory'.

Writers like Bhugra (1997) Siraj (2006, 2009), Jaspal (2010), Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010a) and Jaspal and Siraj (2010) have mostly used the adjective *gay* with some instances of *homosexual*. I follow these writers and use these adjectives sometimes synonymously throughout the thesis. This is because I focus on Muslim males only, and the broader social environment of my study is that of an Anglophone Western country, Britain, where such terms are in common and frequent usage and their meanings generally understood. I also refer to the term *LGBT* as that abbreviation has been used most widely in academic studies and in everyday discourse on sexuality, though in recent years, various additional initials have been affixed to it to allow for a much wider-range of identity ascriptors (including Q for 'Queer', a second Q for 'Questioning' and I for 'Intersex' to name but three) leading, most recently, to the coining of the neologism *LGBT*+ as a concise alternative (for example, in the titles of studies by Barres, Montague-Hellen and Yoder [2017] and Fredriksen-Goldsen, [2016]).

3.9. Summary

Investigating the methodological approaches of many published empirical studies about gay Muslims read in the course of preparing this PhD thesis, what struck me quite conspicuously was the frequent *lack* of explicit attention to methodological issues. There was little focus on the rationale for the approach and research methods used; there were sometimes omissions of explanations of the data analysis process, a lack of discussion of ethics, and very frequently a lack of consideration of the role and influence of the researcher on the data produced. In this chapter, I have endeavoured to counterbalance the weaknesses of some of these studies by providing as much detail as possible about methodological considerations, which have emerged in the course of making important decisions about the following aspects of the methodology: research design, sampling, data collection and analysis, ethics and the roles of interviewer and interviewee in the process. In this way I hope enough information has been provided to enable the reader to assess the credibility and validity of my project. Having now reviewed the literature in Chapter Two and discussed the methodological aspects of my research in this chapter, in Chapters Four to Six, I move on to present the main research findings of my study into the intersectional identities of gay and bisexual Arab Muslim men in the U.K .

CHAPTER FOUR: CONSTRUCTING AND MANAGING PERSONAL IDENTITIES: BEING ARAB, MUSLIM AND GAY

4.1. Introduction

I begin the data analysis by focusing, in this chapter, on the meanings and consequences of the intersections of the participants' identities at an individual and personalised level (before looking at how their identities intersect at a more interpersonal level in Chapters Five and Six). The chapter begins by examining the participants' identification with Arabness and the personal salience of their Arab identitities. Drawing on the interviews, I will problematise the way the term 'Arab' as used in everyday discourse appears to presume taken for granted assumptions that reference an easily-defined, monolithic and homogeneous ethno-linguistic group (Butt, 1997: Davies and Bentahila, 2012; Nydell, 2006), which is not true of my participants. In describing their Arab identities, the influence of geo-political and socio-cultural differences and factors of wealth and social class illustrate a high degree of intra-categorical intersectional variation (McCall, 2005; Monro and Richardson, 2011 – a concept previously discussed in Chapter Two). The chapter then moves on to discuss the outcomes at the intersection of participants' sexual and religious identities, by specifically investigating the impact of homophobic Islamic discourses that circulate pervasively within their Muslim communities and cultures. A particularly high degree of psychological dissonance is experienced at this intersection and the bulk of the chapter examines the strategies participants use to manage this dissonance. I also attempt to problematise the way that, like popular understandings of the term 'Arab', Islamic discourses are widely assumed (by Muslims and non-Muslims) to be monolithic in their complete hostilility to homosexuality, with no scope for alternative interpretations to this condemnatory stance. To do this, I highlight the existence of gay Muslims like my participants who adopt a sexuality-affirming hermeneutics, opening up alternative Islamic discourses that strive to compete with and subvert the hitherto hegemonic heteronormative ones.

4.2. Intersectional Arab Identities

4.2.1. Identification as Arab

Virtually all of my interviewees self-identify as Arab. However, Tariq, a thirty-two year old British-born Moroccan qualifies this identification slightly by saying he has been 'Arabised':

> For me, Arabic is my first language…I would class myself as Arab, because I've been Arabised.
>
> Interviewer: So, what do you mean by Arabised?
>
> Well, over four or five hundred years, the language, the culture, the history that we've kind of learnt…[f]rom Islam…from the invading Muslims…from the Middle East…so, for example, we don't drink because it's unIslamic to do so.

'Arabisation' is defined as the advance of the culture of Arabia and the Arabic language and literature across the Middle East and North Africa in the seventh century and beyond, usurping other languages and literatures such as Aramaic, Latin and Greek, whereupon a gradual ethnic identification to Arabness ensued (Reynolds, 2015), and a concomitant process of Islamisation (Hopkins and Ibrahim, 1997). Indeed, several of the interviewees equated Arab and Muslim identity as virtually synonymous. Tariq also pointed out that many greetings and everyday expressions in Arabic incorporate religious phrases and references to God.

Ehab, a Palestinian, proudly identifies as Arab, and appears to take issue with the view expressed by some of my other interviewees that the term 'Arab' primarily references Gulf Arabs and is therefore somehow not a valid means of self-categorisation for those from the Levant region:

> There's a huge argument that the north of that world, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, we are not Arabs apparently. We are talking about more the Gulf countries are the Arabs…[but] I consider

> myself to be Arab, so, I'm against the whole 'we are a different race and we speak just [the same] language'. [Ehab, 38 years old, gay]

Ehab's words about Levantine Arabs not being considered proper Arabs chime with Yazbeck Haddad's (2011) comment that the definition of an Arab is often restricted to Arabian Peninsula natives, while others nominally called Arab, residing, for example, in the Levant, are regarded as non indigenous Arabs who have become 'Arabised'. Thus, the authenticity of what constitutes an Arab is clearly a contesed issue.

Twenty-eight-year-old Malik, who identifies as Arab and whose family background is Sudanese, illustrates in his comments that one's choice of primary identity descriptor can vary between ethnicity and nationality, depending on the individual and the socio-cultural and geo-political context:

> They [people in Sudan] could say one of many things. They could say, 'No, I'm African' or 'Yes, I'm definitely Arab, and I'm not African at all.' It depends on who you ask. Being an Arab, to some Sudanese people is somewhat, almost aspirational, and it almost makes you better than someone from South Sudan, for example.

Malik's words here clearly reflect comments by Fábos (2012) that 'social practices in Sudan…equate Arabness [and associated] "whiteness"…with membership of the dominant mainstream elite' (pp. 218-219) and that 'Arabized northern Sudanese culture forms the basis of national identity' (p. 221), in contrast to 'African-identified Sudanese [culture] of the south and west' (p. 222). There is thus a clear hierarchical racialisation of identity classifications in Sudan, whereby 'Arab' is seen as a prestigious identity marker and 'African' is subordinated to this, a hierarchy that emerged out of the historical enslavement of Africans during the period of the Arab conquests of the region, and the adoption of a European-type colonialist discourse, whereby African South Sudanese were positioned as primitive and uncivilised (Al-Rasheed, 2006; Fábos, 2012).

It was also clear in the interviews that there was intra-categorical variation in the degree of salience or prominence of the Arab identities of my participants. For

example, Zakaria illustrates that his Arabness assumes a master-status with a constant visible presence and importance in his life:

> [A]ll my friends are Arabs. All my clients are Arabs. I'm working in an Arab area…I'm going to an Arab barber…I'm going next weekend to an Arab gay party. [Zakaria, 24 years old, gay]

Zakaria's description is reminiscent of Brekhus' (2003) high octane and highly visible 'peacock' or 'lifestyler' identity type (Brekhus uses these terms to describe gay identity [as discussed in Chapter Two] though I feel they can be usefully applied to ethnic identity too). On the other hand, Malik who was born and grew up in the U.K. feels that his Arab identity is rarely fore-grounded:

> I find it hard being an Arab here…I don't think I have any Arab friends really, some, not a lot. I don't think I'm surrounded by the Arab world when I'm in the U.K. at all. In fact…It's only when I see family…that I'll even speak Arabic. [Malik, 28 years old, homosexual]

Applying Brekhus' (2003) identity typology to Arab ethnic identity construction, Malik would surely typify a 'chameleon' or 'commuter' identity type in that his Arabness comes to the fore only in certain contexts (here, visits to the family) and lies dormant the rest of the time.

With some interviewees, there is a tendency to foreground their national identities above their Arab ones. Such a propensity has also been identified in Phillip's (2013) work with Levantine Arabs and Wynn's (2007) study of Egyptian Arabs in the Middle East. Haitham's comment below highlights this tendency and also a process of identity heirarchisation at work, whereby his Arab identity is relegated to a lower position of salience:

> If you talk to other Egyptians, as well, they never consider themselves as Arabs. They say Egyptian. As second, they'll say African, third, they will say Arab…The Arabs to us are the Gulf

> Arabs, the Saudis, Bahrainis, the Emiratis. When we use the word 'Arab', that's what we mean. [Haitham, 28 years old, bisexual]

In fact, two interviewees pointedly used the term 'Arab Arabs' to differentiate themselves from those who originate from the Arab Gulf region, and Wynn (2007) has similarly written how many Egyptians frequently refer to Gulf Arab tourists in Egypt as 'the Arabs', with this term usually assuming a pejorative connotation (I discuss this further later in the chapter). Thus, it appears that the authenticity of who is an Arab may be contested through assertions of geography and nationality.

For those who were born and had grown up in the U.K. or else lived for many years here, it was interesting to find out whether and in what way their sense of Arabness might have changed over time as a result (see also the discussion about hybridised identities in Chapter Two). Idris, for example, evinces feelings of awkward ambivalence about his Arab identity, neither fully identifying with being Arab nor British because of hybrid influences in his life. His words reflect a kind of in-betweenness, of diverse cultural attachments, and of simultaneously belonging yet not belonging (Hall, 1992, Huytnik, 2005: Papastergiadis, 2005):

> To be honest with you, since I left home, I don't consider myself as coming from a[n Arab background]. Even right now, if you ask me where I belong, I will say I belong everywhere…I don't want to limit myself…it's not the first thing I tell people, that I'm Arab, you know. When people ask me, I tell them I live in the U.K. or I've lived in places in Switzerland and the U.S…and even when I go home [to the United Arab Emirates], I see the people, and that's not me…I don't feel that I'm European because I haven't adapted to the culture or the way of life, but then, when I go back [to the U.A.E], they don't look at me as I'm one of them, because, you know, there's certain things I wouldn't adopt, or I question…their way of living, and the people don't like that. So, it's kind of a bit the middle of nowhere. [Idris, 34 years old, homosexual]

Ibrahim, on the other hand, appears to be very much like one of Nagel's (2002) Arab 'young cosmopolitans', talking very appreciatively of the beneficial

aspects of hybridity in being able to pick and choose the advantageous features from both cultures (also reflecting Noble and Tabar's [2002] concept of 'flexible hybridity' and of findings in Aly's [2015] study of Arabs in London – see Chapter Two) to shape his lived experience:

> I think the benefit of being an Arab who is born here [in The U.K.], it means that I'm really exposed to two cultures which is nice, cos I can take the best of both worlds. I really like Arabic culture, the Arabic music and the food and the lifestyle...But I've…got the benefits of Western society as well… openness, acceptance for who you are, freedom of speech and, to a degree, more open mindedness. [Ibrahim, 26 years old, MSM]

Salem, born and brought up in the U.K. juxtaposes the supposedly positive values mentioned by Ibrahim against what he himself perceives to be negative 'Arab values' when discussing his former Arab partner from the United Arab Emirates and family relationships in that country:

> He's been brought up with values where you have to listen to your parents, you don't have a say to what you want in life, there's a norm, and you must follow that norm …[I]n the Western culture, it's all about being intuitive and questioning things and finding yourself. [Salem, 24 years old, gay]

Fahad who, like Salem, was born and brought up in the U.K. also appears to illustrate his assimilation into a Western value system in his insistence that all potential dating partners, including Arab ones, need to have, in his words, 'come out of the closet' and to be leading a similar openly gay lifestyle to his own. These Western 'liberal democratic' cultural values are also evident in the civil rights discourse (a discourse incidentally also found among second and third generation Arab participants in London [Aly, 2015] Belgium and Holland [Hermans, 2006]). Fahad illustrates his adoption of these values in his advocacy of the Western cultural construct of gay marriage:

> People have their rights. That should be the same across the board, gay or straight. It should be a civil marriage, so that you have your rights, as an adult, in a relationship. You have all the protections. [Fahad, 45 years old, gay]

During the interview, he went into a detailed explanation about the difference between civil partnership and gay marriage legislation in America, demonstrating considerable knowledge of the issue.

Yaaqub, ever since he arrived in the U.K. as an eight year old, has consciously attempted to integrate into British society and adopt its prevalent socio-cultural values, and it would appear that his Arabness has unsurprisingly been diluted, apparent in his claims of subverting 'traditional' Arab gender role norms (where in patriarchal Muslim cultures the roles and activities of females may tend to be centred on the domestic sphere (Ajrouch, 1999; Aly, 2015, Kayyali, 2006; Siraj, 2010 – see also the discussion on Islamic masculinities in Chapter Two):

> I have a British accent, I have British lifestyle. I work Monday to Friday nine til five…I'm a big believer of integration. I'm not gonna pick up a British accent if I mix with Arabs all the time…My brother's forty years old and he can't cook for himself. What a great life that is…You live with your family for so long that you can't become independent…when I go home, I do hoover and I do clean up, and I'm capable of looking after myself. Whether that's considered as a man's thing or not, I don't care...[The] other side of being an Arab [is] where I'll have a wife that'll cook for me, and wash my clothes and do things for me. [Yaaqub, 27 years old, gay]

Amine is a rare example in the sample of someone who completely rejects the label Arab and instead asserts an indigenous identity and emphasises what he sees as the alienness of the customs and culture of Arabia:

> I'm not Arab…I am hundred percent Berber…I don't have anything in common with…someone from Kuwait because they are completely one hundred percent Arab…I'm miles away from these people…[the]

> food, culture, I have no idea what is going on over there. [Amine, 38 years old, gay]

Amine's words here mirror comments by Aly (2015) Ennaji (2005) and Magnusson (2015) that the identity of 'Arab' is frequently contested and rejected by those of Berber heritage in North African countries.

Having discussed the variation in degree of personal affiliation with an Arab identity, the next two subsections further relate to intra-categorical intersectionality by highlighting how the term Arab is not conceived of by my participants as indicative of a homogenous ethnic grouping, as they emphasise many perceived differences between Gulf Arabs (generally taken to mean those who reside in countries along the Arabian peninsula such as Saudi Arabia, The United Arab Emirates and Qatar) and all other Arabs. The subsection that follows concentrates on geo-political, cultural and religious differences between Gulf and other Arabs. The subsection after that examines differences in wealth and social class between these groups.

4.2.2. Geo-political, historical, religious and socio-cultural differences

The Maghrebri and Levantine Arab interviewees largely tend to consider Arabs from their regions to be very different from Arabs in Gulf countries: they feel that they themselves are 'more open-minded', more liberal, have greater freedoms of expression, are less conservative culturally and religiously, less religious/insular and less patriarchal in behaviour than Arabs in the Gulf (the latter point highlighting the significance of gender in their identity construction processes). They seem to attribute this to a moderating influence of historical and contemporary contact with Christian communities within their countries, and also the cultural influences from past colonisation by Europeans such as the 19th century colonial enterprise in North African countries which facilitated contact with different religions, cultures and languages (Hopkins and Ibrahim, 1997; Brustad, 2015: Reynolds, 2015). The positively qualified characteristics supposedly possessed by Maghrebi and Levantine Arabs mentioned above are used to contrast with and 'other' the lifestyles of Gulf Arabs:

> [I]f we're talking about the Gulf countries, their mentality is very, like we always joke about it, but we say it's very 'Arabic', which means very strict, very traditional, men should be separated from women, where up north [it] is more free…it's more liberal. People have more kind of democracy…and that kind of ability to express themselves…Syrians and Lebanese, they are quite open-minded in many terms. [Ehab, 38 years old, gay]

> In Egypt…it's a little bit more Westernised, and the same for Lebanon… [In Saudi Arabia], women…do what they're told, whereas that will never happen in a place like Egypt or Lebanon. So, the men are less like, 'I'm the man, and you're the woman' kind of thing. [Ibrahim, 26 years old, MSM]

The above quotes are consistent with Nydell's (2006) argument that there is a notable difference between the extreme religious conservatism and patriarchy of the Gulf countries (especially Saudi Arabia), and the relatively more liberal and tolerant religious environment in other Arab countries. Empirically, Phillips' (2013) study of Jordanian and Syrian Arabs has highlighted similar attitudes towards Gulf Arabs to my own participants, where they are negatively indexed as being much more culturally and religiously conservative. Thus, who is deemed 'more' and who 'less' authentically Arab, determining also the power to speak on behalf of and represent Arabs, appears to relate to the varying influence of religiously and culturally sanctioned patriarchal values that enforce defined gender roles and segregation, as well as political philosophies and policies that can vary in terms of insularity, and the exercise of democratic rights and freedoms. It seems that Arabs who live in countries where the aforementioned societal influences exert the greatest influence are positioned as 'true' Arabs by those from other Arab countries.

The Omani interviewee Jamal adds some nuance to this picture though, by claiming that variations in liberalism, openness and religious conservatism exist *between* Gulf nation societies, especially in relation to Saudi Arabia:

> I would say Saudi is the most extreme form of extremist Arab culture. But Oman is a bit more liberal…because they're [the Omanis] more

> understanding, and they're more open to new ideas. I think it has to do with they're more friendly…Saudis…they're very authoritarian. [Jamal, 22 years old, gay]

Amine, an Algerian, contends that geo-political and socio-cultural factors that shape lifestyles in the North African Maghreb and the Arabian Gulf create a bi-directional discrimination, and that Gulf Arabs equally hold prejudices against North African Arabs. He contends they de-legitimise and negate the Arabness of Maghrebi culture partly through criticisms of the Maghrebi people's perceived lack of Arabic language proficiency (due to the influence of Western colonial languages and culture). Maghrebi Arabs thus allegedly end up being considered less Arab by those from the Gulf:

> They [Gulf Arabs] think, for example, that we [North African Arabs] don't have any culture…that none of us speak very well Arabic, none of us speak French, and we don't have our proper language, basically, cos everything was imported…do you remember, Algeria was invaded by France…so, we lost all our identity. [Amine, 38 years old, gay]

The French-Algerian interviewee Laith claims there is 'big racism' from Gulf Arabs who treat Maghrebi and Levantine Arabs as 'trash' and 'second class Arabs'. Interestingly though, many of Phillip's (2013) Syrian and Jordanian Arab interviewees also tended to 'other' North African Arabs, viewing them as having been overly influenced by Western European culture and thus having become more secular, less religiously committed and linguistically different. Hence, it may be that of all Arabs, Maghrebis have the greatest outsider status in terms of who is considered a legitimate member of this category by other Arabs (Ennaji, 2005). And this also seems to illustrate the phenomenon of how identity construction is a process not only of something achieved by the self but also partly about ascription by others (Bhugra and Gupta, 2011; Hall, 1992).

Geo-historical factors can also play a role in shaping definitions of who legitimately counts as an Arab and who may be excluded. For example, Badr, a thirty-five year old Saudi Arabian interviewee, argues that, to be classified as a true

Arab, one must be able to prove one's connection to a recognised tribe, tribalism being a historically fundamental organisational principle of Gulf Arab societies (Cooke, 2014), and to be able to demonstrate an authentic and ancient tribal heritage through the male line[5], which thus also highlights the importance of gender and patriarchy. Not only does this legitimise oneself as a 'proper' Arab, in Badr's opinion, but a link to historic tribal ancestors also confers an honourable status:

> I can trace my blood to twentieth and maybe even beyond…twentieth grandfather…I will know by the family tree. And everyone knows where he's from, how he grow up and what he do. So, we carry on that kind of…nobility, cos you are from the original Arab race, which is came out from Yemen about two thousand years ago, and spread in the Arab Peninsula as tribes…Whoever…don't belong to a tribe, is not considered to be a noble blood.
>
> Interviewer: So, are there some actual countries where, people in Saudi might not consider those to be proper Arab people?
>
> Everyone [laughs]. Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Syria, Lebanon…They speak Arabic, but they're not Arab.

Badr's comments clearly reflect Allen's (2006) and Cooke's (2014) points that membership of a tribe (as well as a clan or family) is a means of acquiring an identity and lending collective and individual honour and prestige, and that Arabs who assert their tribal origins will regard 'detribalised' Arabs as of uncertain heritage and identity, and of possessing no honour or purity, since the blood line that bestows honour and repute has disappeared.

[5] Nearly all Gulf nationals belong to a tribe that can contain thousands of people. Like a genealogical tree, the tribe occupies the position at the top of a pyramid structure which subdivides into smaller groups (clans) and clans comprise various families. Tribes are based on patrilineage (male descendency) have a male leader and are connected to a specific territory. Gulf governments have attempted to inculcate a feeling of national identity to replace or at least supplement a tribal one but the tribe still 'influences an individual's status, possibilities for marriage partners, business opportunities, land rights and heritage' (Torstrick and Faier, 2009, p.111).

While Badr clearly connects tribal lineage with definitions of Arabness and Arab ethnicity, it should be pointed out that Idris who is also a Gulf Arab (an Emirati) does not share Badr's opinion:

> For me, the Iraqis are Arabs, the Egyptians are Arabs, because the same culture, same language and everything. The only thing which differentiates them is the geographical location…but at the end of the day, they are all Arabs. [Idris, 34 years old, homosexual]

Badr's and Idris' views show how ethnic identity category membership, assignment and delineation should not be viewed as something fixed, agreed upon and straightforward but as an ongoing, fluid, active, socially constructed process involving agency and contestation.

4.2.3. Wealth and social class

Further relating to the concept of intra-categorical intersectionality, this section discusses the variations in wealth and social class that can be found among people termed 'Arabs', continuing to underline the fact that they should not be viewed as a unitary, homogeneous group. Reflecting the views uncovered by Allen (2006) and Wynn (2007) about the resentment felt towards Gulf Arabs by non-Gulf Arabs, many of my participants homogenise the former group as comprising an extremely wealthy social class and stereotypically position them as having undesirable personality traits derived from their supposed excessive wealth, mirroring Wynn's (2007) comment that the root of such stereotypes is the economic and power differentials that exist between Gulf countries and other Arab countries like Egypt. (See also Chapter Two for more discussion of the intersection of wealth and social class with Arab ethnic identity).

Several of my participants charge Gulf Arabs with exhibiting arrogant attitudes and of being spoilt by the generous social support systems in their countries, systems made possible by oil wealth. Fahad's comment below is typical:

> There's a lot of arrogance [among Gulf Arabs]…because throughout history, they were thought of as Bedouins and camel people, and

> towel heads…there's a lot of 'Look at what we've become.'…There's that arrogance that comes with having money…it is very prevalent in the *Khaliji* states… The government [in the *Khaliji* states] pays for certain things. You don't pay taxes. In Qatar, they [the government] pay for electricity, they pay for your gas, they pay for this, they pay for [that]. So much is being done for you. So, like a nanny state, kind of thing. [Fahad, 45 years old, gay]

This quote reflects Allen's (2006) claim that resentful attitudes towards the Arabs of the Gulf become vocalised in criticism of their supposed arrogance. Nydell (2006) confirms the factual veracity of Fahad's comment above, describing how the discovery of oil has transformed the Gulf societies over the last half-century from their earlier lives of great poverty and a reliance on 'herding, fishing, pearling and piracy' for income generation, and she confirms that utilities and consumer goods are all subsidized by the government, and no interest is levied on loans, within what she terms a welfare state. Moreover, Sultan (2011) and Sultan, Metcalfe and Weir (2011) say that Gulf nationals are paid extremely high, tax-free salaries in public sector jobs, as well as receiving free healthcare, housing and education by the Gulf governments.

From Badr's Gulf Arab perspective, they may feel disliked and discriminated against by other Arabs because of these circumstances:

> The rest of the Arab countries, they are more poor, so they will look with, first of all, envy, why the Gulf they are rich and they are not…They think, they're [Gulf Arabs] rubbish. They have oil and they have easy life, they have everything and they shouldn't…They think [Gulf Arabs are] uncivilised, arrogant, rich. [Badr, 35 years old, gay]

Badr's words appear to illustrate how the resentment is partly because other Arabs feel that the presumed wealth of Gulf Arabs is offensive because it is perceived to be unearned and undeserved (Butt, 1997). Certainly, Butt (1997) and Kapiszewski (2006) have mentioned that a consistent theme of complaint against Gulf Arab states from other Arab countries is that the latter's labour has been exploited by the former, and the resultant wealth has not been invested in projects in the rest of the Arab

World, to assist the socio-economically disadvantaged. Gulf Arabs themselves are certainly aware of such criticisms, as my interviewee, Idris, (originally from the United Arab Emirates) attests:

> In North Africa, not a lot of the countries are developed. And then, they see the Saudis, with all the money. The foundation of being a Muslim is to help each other, and we get *Zakaat,* it's one of the months we help people out, and when they see the Saudis are not helping the poors out there, [and that] they come to the West for their weekend and spend so much money, they don't like that. [Idris, 34 years old, homosexual]

It seems clear then that Gulf oil wealth has a polarising effect and is an emotive topic among Arabs (El-Rayyes, 1988).

Jamal, an Omani, claims there are large socio-economic differences between Gulf Arab countries themselves, which confer relative positions in terms of insider and outsider statuses at nation state level, and this appears to generate an intra-Gulf social class hierarchy:

> Omanis are sort of considered the semi outsiders of the Gulf, and the Yemenis are really the outsiders of the Gulf. [Jamal, 22 years old, gay]

Nydell (2006) confirms this, stating that Yemen is an extremely poor Arab country while Saudi Arabia is very rich and the Gulf coast Arab states like the U.A.E are incredibly rich. Thus, while we should take note of intra-categorical variation within the broad category of Arab, such variation clearly also exists within categories of further ethnic sub-division, so even a term like 'Gulf Arabs' should also not be considered a homogeneous group. Furthermore, Foley (2010) highlights that both rich and poor people exist in Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia: despite there being great concentrations of wealth, some exist in squalid living conditions and abject poverty as beggars, which thus gives the lie to the stereotype of all Gulf country citizens being very wealthy.

Quite a common technique used in the interviews to underscore the 'otherness' of Gulf Arabs and to discursively construct in-group/out-group statuses, was to negatively contrast their supposedly undesirable personality traits with more admirable personal qualities (such as modesty and politeness) generalised as representative of non-Gulf Arabs:

> If you go to Lebanon, Syria, Egypt…they live without being arrogant or, they don't like to mention their wealth…It is considered something not good to say to the people, 'Oh, I'm rich'…[I]n the Gulf states…they feel himself [*sic*] as a superior in comparison with the other type [of Arab]. [Walid, 31 years old, gay]

> When I came here in London…I worked in shops and stuff like that, and every time they [Gulf Arabs] came…the way they behave…what I've seen is just disgraceful. How rude they are, how arrogant they are, how they dismiss you, how they snatch the things from your hands when you try to do your customer service…They just don't see you as a person…I'm sorry, but that's why I don't like that. North Africans, we are very friendly…we don't have this attitude. We always say 'Hello, Good Morning, Thank You, Bye.' [Amine, 38 years old, gay]

A further theme running through the interviews involving generalised criticisms of Gulf Arabs centres on their uses and alleged abuses of wealth. They are positioned as morally suspect and hypocritical, using their money to indulge in sexual promiscuity, specifically, prostitution and orgies, activities which my interviewees, in constructing allegations of hypocrisy, juxtapose against the attitudes of strict religious conservatism, generally acknowledged to exist in the Gulf States:

> We know that all the orgies is with Russian women coming there to do some prostitution and stuff like that [in Dubai]…And we know that all these rich countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, there [are] all the orgies they do with gay men…but they always pretend that they're

> good Muslims. I think it's a lot of hypocrisy…which we [Algerian Arabs] don't like that about them. [Amine, 38 years old, gay]

It is interesting how Amine views being westernised and being Muslim as mutually incompatible because of the very different social and cultural values he deems prominently influence the formation of these identities. Amine's comments also echo views presented in Aly (2015), Butt (1997) and Wynn (2007) where Arabs often emphasise their lack of respect for Gulf Arabs for the exact same reasons Amine cites above. Gulf Arab money is depicted by my participants as empowering the fulfilment of any sexual desire, where people can be commoditised and purchased for sex, as evidenced in Harun's recollection of an encounter in a gay club, which also highlights his highly negative reaction to a financial proposition he received:

> Dubai, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf countries…like everything is money to them. They can do anything by their money, by their power, by their oil. And I don't like them at all…I met a few of them, I refused them. The first guy, he was from Kuwait. I met him in a gay club in Vauxhall. The first minute, when he came to me…he tried to show me that he's more powerful than me, and he can buy me. The first thing he done, he took his cheque from his pocket. He said, 'Here you are, and write any numbers if you want, just to have a sex with me.'…Honestly. I swear…I said some bad words to him…like 'fuck off. I don't care about your money', and 'who do you think you are? [Harun, 32 years old, gay]

To conclude this section, we can say it is difficult to give an exact and agreed upon definition of an 'Arab.' The term is often applied very broadly in Western popular discourse and culture, and anyone who identifies/is identified as such is assumed to share characteristics and lifestyles, as part of a collective ethnicity. Yet, as has been demonstrated from my data, those nominally called Arab may differ in the extent to which they identify and affiliate with this label; their Arab identity may not occupy a position of a master-status and may be subordinate to other identity dimensions such as nationality or religion. Furthermore, there may be great variation in lifestyles and perspectives, shaped by geo-political, historical, religious and socio-

cultural factors. The evocation of class differences was a constant theme in my interviews which, along with these other factors, starkly illustrates the cleavages that exist and the processes of 'othering' at work between Gulf Arabs and other Arabs. This process can also be detected operating between Magrebi (North African) Arabs and Arabs outside that region. 'Othering' by definition emphasises difference rather than commonality. In light of the preceding discussion, it is imperative that a nuanced consideration of the concept 'Arab'is needed, relating it to the notion of intra-categorical intersectionality to uncover and better understand the variation subsumed within the term and to avoid mistakes of essentialism and homogenisation. Having discussed the intra-categorical intersectional variation within 'Arab identities', let us now turn our attention to a different intersection, the (intercategorical) intersection of participants' religious and sexual identities, beginning, in the next section by illustrating how my participants become aware, at an individual and at a wider social and community level of how homosexuality is viewed in Islam and of its attitudinal discursive reproduction by the religion's heterosexual adherents.

4.3. Religious Homophobia within Islamic Texts and the Wider Muslim Community

As discussed in Chapter Two, Islam's sacred texts, the *Qur'an*, with its references to the story of Lut, and the *Hadith* that call for the death penalty for persons involved in homosexual acts, have been frequently cited as evidence that Islam completely censures homosexuality, and thus of homosexuality's incompatibility with Islam (Siraj, 2006, 2009; Whitaker, 2011; Bereket and Adam, 2008; Kugle, 2010). Many of my own participants accept unquestioningly that homosexuality is considered sinful in Islam and cite these works as evidence. Some of them have read these sources first hand, while others had gleaned their knowledge through anti-homosexuality discourses that were disseminated in schools, mosques and the home, loci of childhood socialisation, where they gradually became aware that a homosexual identity is stigmatised and that one possesses such a stigmatised identity (Goffman, 1990):

> If you follow the rules, homosexuality is a sin, and it's a big sin. And at the time of the Prophet, gays were stoned, because God said, 'Stone them, or my punishment will be more severe.' [Laith, 30 years old, gay]
>
> Interviewer: Where are you getting this information from then? Who tells you this?
>
> From the *Qur'an*...That's what I read...[and] when you're reading books of *Hadith*.
>
> When I was younger, I had all Muslim friends, and you know, the gay thing was always a bad thing. It was always seen as bad. And whenever you did any religious education classes, it wasn't just in Islam, in most of the religions, it was always kind of, the condemned people. [Ibrahim, 26 years old, MSM]

Two of my participants stress that they believe Muslim homophobia in the U.K. stems from cultural as well as religious factors. Such homophobia is viewed as a defensive mechanism to set boundaries to preserve the culture, traditions and values fundamental to the ontological security of their specific ethno-cultural identity, traditions and values perceived to be under threat of dilution from the potential assimilation of very different cultural norms dominant in the wider British society, as Hashim clearly describes:

> [The majority of] Muslims in [city's name]....are not conservative Muslims, but they're culturally conservative...So, you have a lot of people who are not...at ease living in the U.K. and they feel they have to revert back to a very kind of conservative form of Pakistani or Arab culture that they have back at home, and they have to kind of impose it on anyone. [Hashim, 26 years old, bisexual]

As discussed in the literature review in Chapter Two, the situation that Hashim details may result from these Muslims reacting to the supposedly more liberal values of the

Western culture that are perceived as out of step with the generally more conservative values of Muslim communities with homosexuality being viewed as a Western disease.

In the next section I examine the outcome of cognitive dissonance that occurs for many of my gay Arab Muslim interviewees when they come into contact with these theologically and culturally homonegative discourses.

4.4. Cognitive Dissonance as a Negative Outcome

For the majority of my participants, homonegative Islamic discourses they encounter have produced markedly negative outcomes at the intersection of their sexual and religious identities. They become subjected to direct or indirect religious and culturally derived homophobia within their immediate and closest social circles, their Muslim families and kinship networks (as will be discussed in detail in the next chapter), and their wider Muslim communities. Perceiving themselves as, in my interviewee Ibrahim's phrase, 'the condemned people' in texts which terrorise homosexuals (Goss, 2004), and enduring routine expressions of homophobia in the heteronormative social spaces they traverse has certainly had a damaging psychological impact, generating feelings of cognitive dissonance (Festinger,1957) stress and stigma at the intra-personal level. For example, extreme guilt or stress has clearly been experienced as participants have struggled to reconcile what they believe Islam says about homosexuality with their own sexual identities, as illustrated by Idris:

> The punishment [in Islam for homosexuality] is being stoned to death...So, that's quite scary...And even now...I'm always conflicted because religion's a strong part of me, and you know, so is my sexuality. Especially in the beginning, even before having sex, I would feel really, really bad, and my heart would start beating faster because I was so scared that I shouldn't really do it. And then there were times when I would cry afterwards...and so, it was quite traumatic. [Idris, 34 years old, homosexual]

Unsuccessfully attempting to manage some of these symptoms, Philip tried to commit suicide in his youth:

> [A]t some point I tried to kill myself, as a kid, because I was really not dealing with being gay at all. And I was depressed…and I thought by taking a few spoons of cockroach poison, that that will end it all. But, I survived it. And my parents never actually knew what's going on. They thought I was in love with a girl and I had some issues. [Philip, 38 years old, gay]

A very small minority of participants claim that at the intersection of their religious and sexual identities, they have suffered very few detrimental effects from the homophobic discourses that circulate within their religion and culture, emphasising that they have not struggled with, nor experienced, any major conflict or problems reconciling their religion and sexuality. Their explanations relate to the fact that they experience their identities as culturally hybrid (Bahbha, 1994) where diasporic and host communities converge (Hutnyk, 2005), and the influence of a Western culture allows them to adopt the identity label of 'Gay Muslim', something considered oxymoronic and impossible in their highly homophobic Muslim ethno-religious culture (Rahman, 2014; Yip, 2004b). This can effect a preventive or else ameliorating function in cases of identity conflict, as I discussed in Chapter Two. For example, Ash cites his upbringing in a Western European country, and what he views as its relatively liberal and tolerant attitudes towards homosexuality as enabling the facilitation of a more positive self-image and self-acceptance regarding his sexuality:

> To me, it's never been a problem. I've always reconciled.... And I just live on with it...I'm quite lucky in the sense that I came here at the age of four and a half...and I went to nursery, infants, junior, secondary school and everything here...And I guess my brain was set in that way, as to the type of freedom. [Ash, 37 years old, gay]

Ibrahim, a 26 year old, who identifies as a MSM, mentions how growing up in the U.K. has similarly meant the benefit of 'openness, open-mindedness and

acceptance for who you are'. Khalid, who spent his youth in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, explains the lack of any conflict between his sexuality and religion during this time was because he could psychologically compartmentalise these different identity dimensions (Breakwell, 1986) from a young age:

> I've always accepted myself...from a very young age...I was thirteen or fourteen, never really struggled with my sexuality, I don't think. I never mixed between, sexual orientation and religion and society, never mixed up things. Maybe that's why I never struggled with anything. [Khalid, 26 years old, gay]

Compartmentalisation here seems to be used as a dissonance *prevention* strategy. Later in this chapter, I will discuss compartmentalisation used as a dissonance and identity *management* strategy.

Plummer (1995) and Yip (2015) have written that, although many LGBT individuals initially experience dissonance as they navigate their paths through life, many are then also able to develop an awareness of and agentically utilise various strategies that enable the transition from lives characterised by stress and tension to a gradual and generally successful integration of both their sexual and religious selves. They 'journey' along a 'suffering-survival-surpassing' trajectory (Plummer, 1995). The remainder of this chapter will illustrate the strategies my participants engage with in order to counter the Islamic condemnation of homosexuality, to reduce dissonance and help them pass along such a trajectory towards achieving a positive self identity.

4.5. Attempts at Managing Cognitive Dissonance

An inevitable consequence of experiencing cognitive dissonance is that the individual concerned seeks strategies to reduce it (Festinger, 1957, Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2012). Festinger argues that people attempt to do this in several ways: by changing their behaviour or cognitions (i.e. thoughts or beliefs); by justifying their behaviour, thoughts or beliefs through either replacing contradictory thoughts or adding positive new thoughts; by ignoring/denying information that gives rise to dissonance; or by changing the social context e.g. by avoiding situations and

contexts which emphasise the dissonance. Among my own participants, I have identified five main identity dissonance management strategies they have used: abandoning their religion, compartmentalisation, utilising non-theological reverse discourses, deploying theological reverse discourses and seeking emotional support from other LGBT Muslims (the latter three strategies are utilised as an effective means to more positively reconceptualise and transform their stigmatised identities and consequently integrate disjunctive identities). Each of these five strategies is discussed in detail in the subsections that follow.

4.5.1. Abandoning their religion

Changing behaviour or 'cognitions' to attempt to reduce dissonance can involve LGBT people rejecting their religion (Rodriguez and Ouellote, 2000). Indeed, evidence from previous research with LGBT Muslims shows that some do indeed abandon their religion (Bereket and Adam, 2008; Yip, 2004a). In my own study, three interviewees have felt it impossible to reconcile their religion and sexuality, and ultimately decided to leave their religion completely in order to fulfil the sexual lives they desire and achieve an i*dentity consonance* (Festinger, 1957). Yaaqub, for example, details what he feels were the mutually exclusive choices available to him:

> I thought, well, if I'm going to live my life, there are two roads here: I can either be who I am, and live my life a happy man; or follow Islam, and have Islam path the way of life for me, of things I have to do, that would *not* make me a happy person...And guess which way I chose?...I'm happy...It's either or. I don't believe that somebody can be gay and Muslim at the same time. [Yaaqub, 27 years old, gay]

Jaspal (2014a) and Whitaker (2011) mention that renouncing one's religion may be much easier for Muslims living in Western 'secular' countries (such as for Yaaqub who has lived in the U.K since he was a teenager), rather than for those in some Muslim majority countries, where the presence of Islam and its heterosexist norms and discourses create expectations of its followers to participate publically in the religion legally and socially, and where in countries like Saudi Arabia, there is the death penalty for apostasy.

Unlike Yaaqub who sees religion and sexuality to be incommensurable, Ahmad, a twenty-two year old gay man feels that having a religious identity does not exclude the possibility of a sexual identity:

> That [being homosexual] does not mean that I'm any less of a Muslim, or I should just stop practising it, just because I'm gay, which is not acceptable in my religion...cos honestly, I don't think I could choose between my religion and between my sexuality... Sexuality is what I am...I actually think about it every second of my life...Religion is again also important to me...I shouldn't really leave it.

The vast majority of my participants have not abandoned their religion but, instead, attempt to preserve both their religious and sexual identities. One important way of doing this is through compartmentalisation, discussed next.

4.5.2. Compartmentalisation

Compartmentalisation, as explained in Chapter Two, is a dissonance management and reduction strategy which involves a process of psychological separation of the religious and sexual identity dimensions, denying the linkage or intersection between them. Fahad and Laith perfectly describe the use of compartmentalisation as an identity management strategy:

> One is not synonymous with the other. My religion is my personal belief in God, and my personal belief in who I should be as a citizen, as in a good citizen, how I respect other people…My personal relationship with another consenting adult is nobody's business, nor is it religious. [Fahad, 45 years old, gay]

> I'm probably the most conservative Muslim gay you will find…When it comes to religion [and sexuality]...I keep two things separate. You just live with the guilt. You put it in a box, and it doesn't affect you anymore. [Laith, 30 years old, gay]

Tariq's compartmentalising behaviour in the following quotation appears to reflect Brekhus' (2003) commuter or 'chameleon' type of gay identity where his homosexuality is fore-grounded or downplayed as specific contextual factors demand. During Islamic religious festivals and Fridays (as religiously significant days for Muslims), he avoids any identity conflict and associated dissonance by consciously suppressing his sexual identity and emphasising instead his religious identity:

> I don't have sex with men like a month before [and] during Ramadan and then Eid, because I do lean towards it being a sin…I try not to have sex on Fridays, our holy day…Any conflicts is sometimes because of religion. [Tariq, 32 years old, bicurious]

Tariq's behaviour here seems consonant with the type of hyper-affiliation to the religious identity during Muslim religious festivals that was identified among South Asian Muslims by Jaspal and Cinnirella (2014).

The two sub-types of compartmentalisation strategy of *passing* and *denial* (outlined in Chapter Two) were also utilised by many of my participants (see also the next chapter on family and kin relationships for more examples of the strategy of passing). There is pressure on these men to pass, that is to say, to pretend to be heterosexual to others (Jaspal and Siraj, 2011) when confronted with heteronormative social discourses from other Muslims, where they must either adopt the guise of a heterosexual or face the potential negative consequences of it being known that they are homosexual. Nasser told me that, growing up, he pretended to be heterosexual to reduce dissonance when socialising with heterosexual male Muslim friends, joining in with their admiring comments about attractive girls.

The second type of compartmentalisation strategy, denial, i.e blotting out any negative thoughts that may contradict one's sense of identity was clearly used by Hashim in not admitting his homosexual feelings internally (Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010a; Jaspal, 2012) in order to reduce dissonance/preserve identity coherence:

> There was always that attraction to guys, but there was also a big kind of mental block in my head, saying that, you know, surely it's wrong. You can't do this...I wasn't talking to my friend about it...I

> thought, if I was admitting it to her, then you're admitting it to yourself, as well...and that's one thing I couldn't really do at that point...I didn't want to admit it to myself. [Hashim, 26 years old, bisexual]

Another participant, Nasser, reinforced the self-denial of his homosexuality by even getting engaged to a woman. Breakwell (1986) has written how denial can lead to the deception of others and this was true in Nasser's case as he actively passed as heterosexual to family members throughout the six month engagement.

My interviewee, Bilal, voluntarily considered seeking psychotherapy in an extreme attempt to transform what he felt was a stigmatised, 'spoiled identity' (Goffman, 1990) attempting to change his sexual orientation and 'become' heterosexual. Such an action can be viewed as him trying to deny his sexuality. He had actively researched the *NARTH* organisation (National Organisation for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality) online, an organisation that purports to offer curative services for a homosexual orientation. During our interview, Bilal talked knowledgably about the steps and procedures involved in sexuality realignment therapy with this organisation.

While some my participants may attempt to change behaviours and cognitions by abandoning their religion or using compartmentalisation strategies of passing and denial to separate out their sexual and religious identities, others attempt identity integration (Rodriguez and Ouellette, 2000) preserving both dimensions as a means to reduce the dissonance caused by coming into contact with homonegative Islamic discourses. They do this by reconceptualising and reconfiguring their view of their religion and sexuality through deploying a range of both non-theological and theological reverse discourses, as will be discussed in the next two subsections.

4.5.3. Non-theological reverse discourses

In terms of this strategy, during the interviews, several participants used essentialist justifications to emphasise that they were born homosexual as the result of specific genetic or hormonal factors (they did not bring religion into their explanations). This biological perspective posits that there is such a thing as an innate sexual essence that determines a person's sexuality and it predates, and is unaffected by the

influence of external socialisation processes: the classic assertion of the effect of 'nature' rather than 'nurture' (Weeks, 2011). In the biological approach there are claims for a 'gay gene', or chromosomal or hormonal imbalance which negatively affects and alters what is seen as a person's normal sexual drive (Weeks, 2011). Some of my participants clearly contend that their homosexuality is something innate, predetermined and involuntary. In this way, they rationalise the acceptability of their sexuality to themselves, and thus ameliorate potential dissonance:

> I think a lot of Muslims, especially the *imams*, they do not understand that being gay is not something that you acquire by who your friends are...it's in your genes or DNA. [Ash, 37 years old, gay]

> Sometimes, [the body] gets it wrong...[a] hormonal imbalance...If the child gets a lot of oestrogen, that's where they come out very feminine, and this is the way you get females, lesbians quite butchy, because they have too much testosterone, which is the male hormone...If science is telling me I was born like this, then I can't fight it. [Philip, 38 years old, gay]

Apart from biological explanations, some of my interviewees have attempted to reconcile their sexual and religious identities by attributing a direct causal link between their homosexuality and sexual abuse as children by adult males, as Chakib exemplifies:

> Maybe, sometime you blame others. I was abused when I was little...and I always say to myself, maybe if I wasn't, I would be like a straight, like normal. [Chakib, 35 years old, gay]

Eppink (1992), Murray and Roscoe (1997) and Schmitt and Sofer (1992) have argued that due to the strict gender separation and absence of sex with females until marriage, pederastic sexual encounters between males have been a feature of some Muslim cultures, though generally socially reviled and condemned in the modern era. Four out of thirty five of my interviewees say they were sexually abused in childhood by adult men, a surprisingly high number. One might therefore wonder about the

degree to which pederasty still persists today in Arabo-Muslim lands. Certainly, as recently as twenty five years ago, Andreas Eppink was documenting its continuing and widespread presence in Morocco (Eppink, 1992).

4.5.4. Theologically-derived reverse discourses

A further significant strategy used by my participants in experiencing and managing homophobic discourses has been to creatively deploy theologically-based counter discourses, since the homophobia they encounter in their interactions within the Muslim community emanates frequently, as we have seen, from interpretations of the holy works of Islam. These participants try to interrogate, decentre, de-stabilise and subvert hegemonic narratives of heteronormativity by adopting many of the same strategies that have been documented in studies of LGBT South Asian Muslims, as outlined in detail in Chapter Two. I will firstly discuss strategies of resistance they use which attempt to deny that Islam's foundational religious texts actually refer to or condemn homosexuality, and they do this through questioning and re-interpreting traditional exegeses of, for example, the story of Lut. They also emphasise that the attitudes towards and Islamic theological rulings on homosexuality in a seventh century socio-cultural context have little relevance to Muslim lives in the twenty-first century. Secondly, my interviewees create reverse religious discourses that involve strategies of attack, assertively and combatively re-envisaging Islam as a homosexuality-positive or tolerant religion through their conviction of a theistic causation of their homosexuality, or by deploying a 'Merciful God' discourse. Furthermore, they also actively and deliberately attempt to undermine and de-legitimise the views and actions of heterosexual Muslims who are homophobic or non-gay friendly by highlighting their hypocritical behaviours, and by criticising and negating the authority rights of homophobic Islamic religious representatives to speak for the religion.

4.5.4.1. Strategies of resistance

One strategy of resistance involves participants reassuring themselves that there could be an accommodation of their sexual identities with homonegative Islamic discourses through a conceptualisation of their sexuality that entails distinguishing

sexual acts from sexual emotions, qualitatively differentiating physical, homosexual lust from emotional homosexual love. The former is interpreted by participants as clearly condemned in Islam, whereas the latter is conceived of more positively and elevated beyond the carnality of the censured acts into something more noble, pure and worthy. They can thus perceive their homosexuality as non-sinful, provided thoughts and emotions are kept internalised and not acted upon (Boellstorff, 2005a; Shananhan, 2009; Siraj, 2012):

> At first, I thought it was okay to be gay in terms of religion, as long as you're not doing anything sexual about it. That's how I was at first...as long as you don't do physically. [Jamal, 22 years old, gay]

> Well, for a while, I wasn't having any sexual relationships or intercourse at all, because I was thinking I'd prefer to be single and stay gay and not do anything bad like sinning. [Laith, 30 years old, gay]

There is also arguably Islamic theological justification for this strategy, since Wafer (1997) documents Islam's tolerance of emotional or romantic/platonic love between two males, in contrast to its vitriolic condemnation of sexual acts between men. This differentiation between homosexual orientation or attraction to the same sex and the genital act of homosexual practices has also been evident in contemporary Catholicism and Evangelical Protestantism in the West (Grenz, 1998; Dillon, 1999; Goddard, 2014: Kay and Hunt, 2014; Maher, Sever and Pichler, 2008) where a discourse of 'hating the sin but not the sinner' and advocating sexual abstinance is commonly heard.

A second strategy of resistance used by some of my interviewees who have a sufficient amount of theological capital to do so has been to deploy a revisionist sexuality-affirming hermeneutics to contest the supposedly homonegative content of Islamic religious texts (Kugle, 2010) by reasoning that homosexuality is not condemned in Islam. The quotes from Hashim and Jamal below, impressively demonstrate their acquired theological capital in their understanding that there are varying chains of transmission in the *Hadith* with some being weaker, and therefore more unreliable than others (as Kugle, [2010] has argued). Jamal's interpretation

also mirrors progressive Muslim arguments that the supposed homosexuality of the people of Lut can be interpreted as their indiscriminate and dissolute use of rape as a weapon and as a sign of the people of Lut's general inhospitality and immoral behaviour (Kugle, 2003, 2010; Schild, 1992):

> It's not very clear cut at all...when you actually go and look at a lot of what's been said around...the story of Lut...A lot of the *tafsir,* which means...the interpretation [that's] been done by the scholars at the time...comes from the *Hadith*, the sayings of the Prophet...The only problem is that you have so many levels of *Hadith*.. it's been orally past along...How can you kind of trust it?...And the *Hadith* was actually put together, I think, after his [Mohammed's] death...and all of the other interpretations which have been done by scholars living around that time...So it's a very complex thing, because a different chain, a weaker chain of it, reads completely differently to the actual authentic chain. [Hashim, 26 years old, bisexual]

> The homosexuality aspect of this tribe [of Lut] has been emphasised, not through the *Qur'an* but through people...God got rid of [Lut's tribe]...by some natural disaster...But the way I think of it is that he did that, not because they are homosexuals, but because they would rape everyone, and because they would cause destruction, and literally have no rules, no laws, nothing to say what's wrong and what's right. And basically, I think the moral of that story is that you must not destroy anyone's life whatsoever. [Jamal, 22 years old, gay]

These re-evaluations presented by Malik and Jamal are similar to those made by Muslims who have some connection with LGBT Muslim support groups (see Kugle, 2014; Siraj, 2012), yet Malik and Jamal have had no contact at all with such groups (organisations within which, as previously mentioned in Chapter Two, Yip, [2004a] and Siraj, [2006] claim much of this revisionist theological work is done). This might hint that gay Arab Muslims are finding alternative conduits to acquire the necessary theological capital to competently re-assess, re-analyse, and challenge traditionalist,

homophobic interpretations of religious texts. Though Malik and Jamal did not reveal in the interviews how they had arrived at their alternative interpretations, one possibility might be that more information on the subject is now becoming available from various online sources. For example, another interviewee recounted accessing revisionist sexuality-affirming pronouncements of progressive Muslim religious figures on *Youtube*.

A third kind of resistance strategy is questioning the relevance of Islamic texts' supposed pronouncements and rulings on homosexuality by emphasising the historical and cultural specificity of the context within which these texts were produced, and thus critiqueing any unexpurgated, wholesale or literal application of their content to a completely different set of socio-historical and socio-cultural circumstances prevailing in the twenty first century. Consistent with findings in Kugle (2014), Minwalla *et al*. (2005), Siraj (2006) and Yip (2005b), Ash casts doubt on the relevance of adopting an Islamic stance on homosexuality formulated hundreds of years ago in a different society, arguing the *Qur'an*'s teachings on homosexuality need to be updated to fit modern times, and homosexuality should not be condemned or carry a death sentence:

> And when Muslims get these such ruling that...a person should be thrown off a high cliff...for being gay...that's absolutely nonsense, because the *Qur'an* says that was the prescribed punishment for the people of Sodom at the time *of Lot,* when he was alive...But it doesn't mean that you do the same today...because we have to look at the context, that they were living in a very different time to us. [Ash, 37 years old, gay]

Some of my participants, typified by Fahad and Salem distance themselves from institutional religion and personally and selectively re-interpret, and update what they view as its anachronistic and antiquated aspects:

> Religion to me is my relationship with God, end of story...It has nothing to do with anything else...I'll interpret [the *Qur'an*] *for* myself, thank you very much. There's nothing in there against who I am. Not really. [Fahad, 45 years old, gay]

> I don't pray according to what the *Qur'an* says. I have my own belief...I'm religious to the religion *I* have created, and to my opinions and views, and, which is a mixture of different beliefs that I believe in...[Islam] needs to be modified, or it needs to be modernised, or made relevant to the current developments. [Salem, 24 years old, gay]

Philip, describing himself as 'spiritual' rather than 'religious', ceased all contact with the organised form of Islam, which he says condemns homosexuality, stating he believed 'in God but not Islam'. This adoption of a 'spiritual rather than religious' label has also become increasingly common under the influence of processes of individualisation and privatisation within Christianity in the West (Ammerman, 2013a, 2013b; Heelas and Woodhead, 2005; Lynch, 2007; Roof 1993), a trend discussed in Chapter Two. Hashim is another participant who has abandoned institutional Sunni Islam, gravitating instead towards the attractions of Sufi religious mysticism[6] which puts low emphasis on formal religious observance (Ruthven, 1997) and greater stress on interiorisation and personal experience in finding God's presence in one's life (DeWeese, 2010; Esposito, 1991). This may therefore imply that adherence to Sufism by LGBT Muslims facilitates the avoidance of censorious attitudes towards homosexuality encountered in and disseminated through institutional contact with mainstream Islam. My participants appear to possess sufficient agency to make pragmatic and instrumental personal choices to find what is most relevant or what works for them, to create their 'own personal, tailor-made meaning systems.' (Roof, 1993, p.5), more concerned with 'seeking' (Wuthnow, 1998) than having their religious identity imposed by traditional institution-centric practices and beliefs (Dillon, 2007; Roof, 1993). By privatising and personalising their religion, they reconceptualise and give new meaning to their religious identities, greatly facilitating the ability to resist and escape oppressive, powerful structural constraints like heteronormativity within the public narratives of

[6] Sufism or mystical Islam is 'characterised by an emphasis on prayer, aestheticism [i.e. forgoing the pleasures of the world for spiritual enlightenment] and withdrawal from society' (Elias, 2011, p. 41). 'The goal of Sufi practices is to have an intimate, personal experience of God in this world' rather than waiting until one dies. Ultimately, union with God is sought by losing conscious awareness of one's individual identity' (Elias, 2011, p. 43), and material worries through meditation (Elias, 2011)

discriminatory societal scripts in a highly conservative religion (Ammerman, 2007), thereby reducing dissonance and preserving both their religious and sexual identities.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, LGBT Muslims may turn to support groups whose functions include helping them reconcile the conflict between their religion and sexuality through the construction of a new sexuality-affirming theological hermeneutics of Islam's foundational works. However, only seven of 35 participants in my study had actually made use of LGBT Muslim support groups (in either their physical or online versions) and over a quarter (nine interviewees) had never heard of their existence, highlighting that greater awareness of their work among the LGBT Muslim population is needed.

Nasser who attended a workshop at the *Imaan* LGBT Muslim support group confirms assertions in the academic literature in this area that these organisations do attempt to open up alternative evaluations of Islam's stance on homosexuality:

> [T]he last part [of the workshop] was the relationship with homosexuality and how it's been understood differently, by different people…and that's why they think it's alright, it's not really bad in this culture…He [the workshop organiser] was just talking about how to read *Qur'an* and how you can understand different things by reading the same text. [Nasser, 27 years old, gay]

In fact, the workshop that Nasser refers to here was one that was run by Shanon Shah, described in detail in Shah (2016), and which I mentioned in Chapter Two.

As also outlined in Chapter Two, revisionist theological work that creates a new hermeneutics and new knowledge claims for the 'correct' religious interpretation (*ijtihad*) and contests the heterosexist and homonegative attitudes of institutional Islam may also take place outside the physical location of support group premises, in discussions and message exchanges on the groups' online versions (Shannahan, 2009; M.F. Khan, 2010). Three of my interviewees mention that they have made use of the *Imaan* group's website or its *Facebook* page, with Tariq confirming that LGBT Muslims put forward their own interpretations of Islamic theological texts on the group's forums as a means of debating and negotiating different truth claims:

> [It's about] how you interpret certain things, religiously. [I]t's just like any other forum, you know…you just disagree about things or you talk…we discuss things. You have some things in common, but you may not agree on things totally. [Tariq, 32 years old, bicurious]

Online support groups (and their offline equivalents) thus generate the space, empowerment and confidence to contest the 'savage text' interpretations 'produced by official or most powerful readers' (Thatcher, 2008, p. 5) which claim 'a privileged access to the truth' (p.9) and fixed, single meanings that foreclose all debate.

Furthermore, Kort (2005), M.F. Khan (2010), Shannahan (2009) and Tanis (2009) have emphasised the obvious advantage of greater confidentiality and anonymity of online support groups, where seekers of support can feel it is less high-risk to use them. Ahmad confirms this:

> I do go [online] sometimes, and, especially the forum, because I like talking to people anonymously, because…I wouldn't want them to see me...until and unless we have a certain comfort level...I wouldn't want to just walk in. [Ahmad, 22 years old, gay]

Two dissenting voices on a democratisation of hermeneutical rights in Islamic theology are Hashim and Ash. They doubt the credentials and therefore credibility and competence of people working for LGBT Muslim support groups to do theological re-interpretive work:

> To be honest, the cynic in me [is] thinking that, actually, you're saying it's okay [to be a Muslim and gay], what have you got to support that?....[T]hey'll probably be looking at it in a very similar way that I look at it, which is…not qualified to look at it…I kind of lost interest in [the online discussion forum]… it's just people off the street, it's people like me who's posing, trying to be scholarly…How can I trust them? [Hashim, 26 years old, bisexual]

Ash, who has taken courses to train as an *imam*, feels he has acquired a high level of theological expertise and capital and expresses a similarly disapproving

viewpoint towards LGBT Muslims who re-interpret Islamic texts without prior scholarly training:

> One of my friends…went to them [a LGBT Muslim support group] …He said they seem to be saying things which are not even in the *Qur'an*…and I said, 'No. That's not how the *Qur'an* says this.'…I said, 'Even the literal meaning is actually taken out of its context [in the support group interpretation]…it's a misrepresentation of the real information. [Ash, 37 years old, gay]

These quotes therefore appear to throw light on an ongoing epistemological debate among LGBT Muslims concerning the legitimacy of competing religious truth claims and interpretive rights (Yip, 2010).

While there is clear evidence of the appropriation of re-evaluative strategies by some of my interviewees, others do not use them. This is either because they completely disagree in principle with altering what they view as unchangeable truths, or else they have not accessed the LGBT Muslim support groups where the revisionist work is undertaken. Regarding the former, it appears not so much the case as Siraj (2006) contends, that gay Muslim men need theologically enlightening and educating and miss the opportunity to acquire sufficient theological capital to be able to competently re-assess and challenge traditionalist, homophobic interpretations of religious texts, due to their lack of contact with gay affirmative contexts like LGBT Muslim support groups. Some *are* aware of the revisionist work, but feel such work is categorically wrong, believing that Islam and its theological sources do explicitly and incontrovertibly condemn homosexuality as a heinous sin. They are determinedly unreceptive to the re-interpretive message, and assert in quite forceful and disparaging terms that LGBT Muslims engaging in these re-evaluations are simply trying to alter or distort the content of the holy works, self-deceptively creating a message they want to hear, and one which cannot be found in Islam. Yaaqub's response typifies this critical attitude when describing a discussion with members of *Naz Project* (a London based LGBT support organisation for Black and Minority Ethnic people):

> I don't see how it can be reinterpreted. The text is very clear…It was a sort of very heated argument, where they were saying, 'oh, it's all about interpretation and Islam accepts [homosexuality]' and...I have to say it's bullshit. They didn't really like that...And they're saying, 'Oh, it's the way Islam interprets homosexuality. It's actually very accepting and very loving,' and all this and I'm thinking, no, it's not, it's quite clear what they [the religious sources] say...and what they've always said about homosexuality. [Yaaqub, 26 years old, gay]

Some studies on LGBT Muslims in the U.K. such as Yip (2004a, 2005b) and Siraj (2006) have either failed to uncover, or else not addressed the fact there are critical viewpoints regarding the subject of revisionist strategies and Islamic texts. Instead, the use of these strategies is presented by Yip, for example, in only a positive light to illustrate how such strategies help LGBT Muslims with dissonance management, providing valuable theological capital to aid the process of reconciling religion and sexuality. Additionally, since many of the participants in previous U.K.-based research studies have been recruited directly through LGBT Muslim support groups, there could well be a positive bias in such groups towards the value and efficacy of revisionist hermeneutics, a bias not present in the broader population of LGBT Muslims, who have no contact with these groups.

Moreover, the impression given by some researchers (Minwalla *et al*., 2005; Siraj, 2006; Yip, 2004a) seems to be that LGBT Muslims' access to re-interpretive theological approaches within support groups is straightforward; it is not problematised in any way. However, my own research has uncovered several factors which actively deter gay Arab Muslim men from utilising these groups, depriving them of the opportunity to encounter theological re-interpretive work in the first place. Firstly, there are fears about anonymity and confidentiality, as Badr explains:

> I tend not to join there because I'll expose my identity to people who I don't really want to expose my identity to...If I will approach them and they know who I am, I will be vulnerable...because they will know my information, they will know who am I...Anyone can do anything, pick up the phone and call someone, the word will spread

> from one person to another, 'Ah, this [person] is from Saudi Arabia, and…is here'.

Secondly, issues of ethnicity intersecting with sexuality create a deterrent effect for some participants. Yassir mentioned being put off attending one support group by the fact that its ethnic profile was dominated by South Asians. In raising this issue, Yassir seems to consider support groups non-inclusive and therefore possibly non-empathetic or lacking relevance for his specific needs. Conversely, the idea that there might be other Arab men in attendance is actually a distinct disincentive to attend for another interviewee:

> I don't really like exposing myself in the gay context to other Arabs...I just struggle to make a link between the two and they're both, obviously, my identity, but I just can't link them...the whole gay Arab thing doesn't work in my head...I see them as two separate things. I can't bring them together. [Ibrahim, 26 years old, MSM]

Ibrahim clearly cannot conceive of his sexual and ethnic identities as intersecting and producing a viable subject position of a 'gay Muslim'.

The quasi-ethnic nature of LGBT support groups that arguably reinforces the notion of essentialised sexual identities (Epstein, 1992, 1996; Plummer, 1981) is a factor that puts Salem off attending, as he feels such groups are inadvertently segregating and isolating themselves from the rest of the community. His critical comments indicate he considers these groups reinforce heteronormative standards in society, underlining the marginalisation of LGBT people and positioning them as deviant:

> There's nothing wrong with being gay, it's normal. Well, it's not normal if you're creating these sort of segregated groups…It's like saying, if you're abnormal, come to this group...if you are not, then don't ...It's like those AA meetings…only alcoholics would go... And I think, actually, LGBT people are segregating themselves...from society. And it's pretty ironic, because they're the first people to try to argue for equality. [Salem, 24 years old, gay]

Additionally, geographical distance means that those living in small towns away from the big metropolitan centres where LGBT Muslim support groups are usually concentrated are denied access to face to face discussions, as Qais, a twenty year old who identifies as gay, explains: 'I didn't talk with them. I'm not really interested, because it's in London and I'm in [city's name].' As mentioned in Chapter Two, Taylor (2004; 2005; 2011) similarly highlights how geographical distance (combined with a lack of economic capital) can limit access to LGBT resources and facilities.

The intersection of language and sexuality presents an obstacle to accessing revisionist Islamic discourses in these groups for Nasser. English is not his first language and he tended to struggle when attempting to read documents on the support group's website about re-interpretive Islamic theology and homosexuality. While Kort (2005) sees the predominant use of the English language on such websites as a positive thing because, as a global *lingua franca,* it grants greater accessibility and equality, and prevents 'an Arab/Middle Eastern monopoly on Islamic discourse' (p. 364), the use of the English language could conversely be argued to be an example of linguistic imperialism (Philipson, 1992) that discriminates against and disempowers those who lack the cultural capital to speak and make use of it, as in Nasser's case.

Finally, the seeming over-emphasis on socialising and social networking of one support group is criticised by Rashad, who views this as trivialising the more legitimate and serious purpose of a LGBT Muslim support organisation: to help people experiencing problems reconciling their religion and sexuality:

> I didn't go…They [are] meeting for fun, lunch, a drink and…that's it! Only this. [T]hey sit down, they take picture[s] in the restaurant, or something like that. All the chat and the comment[s] [on the groups's *Facebook* page] are: 'It's nice…it was fun'...I couldn't see something [for] support…It's not serious about the situation. [Rashad, 34 years old, gay]

Overall, it seems that for the reasons described, many of my LGBT Arab Muslim interviewees miss out on support group opportunities to obtain theological capital to

create more sexuality-affirming, theological reverse discourses to counter the heteronormative and homophobic discourses perpetuated by the seminal Islamic texts.

4.5.4.2. Strategies of attack

The second main re-interpretive approach used by my participants involves them attempting to do much more than simply mute and neuter the supposedly homophobic verses and pronouncements of Islam's holy works (a kind of 'defensive apologetics' [Yip, 2010]). They, in fact, take a more combative and confidently assertive approach in several ways. Firstly, they insist that Islam is a homosexuality-affirmative religion, by evoking a theistic causation of their homosexuality, propounding that a loving God has intentionally willed them their sexualities, as part of his divine plan in creating a world full of difference and diversity, where everything is created as excellent (Cheng, 2011; Goss, 2004; Manji, 2005). They therefore contend that God would not want them to be unhappy by suppressing the sexuality that he has imbued them with. Qais' comment illustrates the use of this strategy:

> I'm gay because the God made me gay. So, I'm gay because he want that. So, it's not my fault. I still believe and I still worship my God and everything is fine. [Qais, 20 years old, gay]

His opinion corresponds with those of participants in Jaspal and Cinnirella's (2010a), Shannahan's (2009), Siraj's (2012) and Yip's (2004a; 2005b) studies. Using this argument seems then to be one way for my participants to reduce dissonance and unify their religious and sexual identities.

Secondly, a 'Merciful God' counter discourse is deployed by some of my interviewees to emphasise God's compassion in forgiving all sins. They feel God is supportive of them because, as Elias (1999) and Morgan (2010) state, fundamental characteristics of *Allah* are seen to be mercy, justice and compassion. My interviewee's opinions thus appear similar to Christian Queer Theology arguments that LGBT people should be considered part of the oppressed, marginalised and excluded of society that God favours in his 'preferential option' (Gutiérrez, 1988) and that 'God is queer' (Goss, 2006, p. 528) in his intent to offer unconditional and

inclusive salvation and compassion to all people including LGBT people (Althaus-Reid, 2000; 2003; Countryman, 2006; Pires 2006). Some of my participants contend that if homosexuality is indeed sinful in the religion and in God's eyes, then God, in his love for all humanity, would be merciful and forgiving:

> Well, we say in Islam, and in the *Qur'an* it said, God will forgive you for anything. God is merciful. [Karim, 46 years old, bisexual]

> I do my prayers for religion purpose, and if I am wrong [for living a homosexual lifestyle], for God to forgive me...because I'm a human being, okay? I'm not an angel...I hope that God would sort of forgive me. [Wail, 32 years old, gay]

However, Laith and Philip are very critical of gay Muslims who expound this discourse:

> Many people have told them [gay Muslims], 'Yeah, but God loves everyone, homosexuals or straight, and God is forgiving us.' Yeah, whatever! [laughs]...[I]f you're a proper Muslim, you just agree with what God decided. And God decided that homosexuality was a sin...so, yes, it's a sin. [Laith, 30 years old, gay]

> They kind of live in the sin, and accept it. And I'm like, this is bonkers. [Philip, 38 years old, gay]

Explicitly linked by several participants to the 'Merciful God' discourse is the adoption of a strong moral behavioural code. They feel that following this code could facilitate the accruing of a theological capital that convinces them they can still be good Muslims, and that they can also find favour with God through selfless actions, counterbalancing any supposed sin committal related to homosexuality:

> It is fact that Islam have a negative attitude to homosexuality.I did not ask to be gay…having sex with men, if it's one sin, I like to think that I do plenty of good…There are other attributes to me as a

> person that are regarded as good deeds in Islam and society. I am decent, hard-working, earn honest living, don't hurt others; contribute positively to society. [Yassir, 38 years old, gay]

The above quote reflects Islamic teachings that ask its followers to behave in a morally correct way by acting justly to others and not mistreating poor people (Norcliffe, 1999), upholding '[v]alues such as respect, decency, honour, mercy, kindness, self-sacrifice, generosity and love.' as advocated in the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* (Gilliat-Ray 2010, p.133). Yasir's comment also appears to typify Ammerman's (2013a; 2013b) concept of 'ethical spirituality' or 'Golden Rule' religion, shaping how one lives one's life in a morally correct way.

Apart from utilising a theistic causation and 'Merciful God' discourse, participants also construct a further reverse discourse by taking normative theological beliefs in Islam and cleverly adapting them to specifically criticise and de-legitimise the homophobic views and behaviours of heterosexual Muslims (and, by extension, the perceived dominant heterosexist and homophobic discourses that characterise Islam more broadly). Thus, one participant reverses traditional understandings of whose faith it is which is being tested by his being homosexual. Khalid posits that perhaps the existence of homosexuality might not be a test of faith for LGBT Muslims (Yip, 2004a) but rather, a test given by God to *heterosexuals* in order to assess their tolerance of LGBT people:

> They say being gay's a sin, and it's a sort of a test from God...to see your degree of tolerance and patience in life, how would you stick with your faith, and your belief in God...But then I thought, why is it not a test for *other* people, to accept homosexuals, like, the other way around. [Khalid, 26 years old, gay]

In addition, those heterosexual Muslims who insist that homosexuality is condemned in Islam and is against God's wishes, are regarded as blasphemers by several participants. Ash, for example, accuses them of interfering in God's will and implies that it is *they* who are therefore committing a sin, being guilty of sacrilegiously usurping the role and authority of the deity (participants in Jaspal and Cinnirella, [2010a] M.F. Khan, [2010] and Siraj, [2006] use similar arguments):

> [I]f God says, on one hand, that it's 'I who create you', so if God has created somebody gay, lesbian, bisexual, straight, whatever, that's God's business....'And, for me to create people in different ways, it is to exemplify to you, what my talents as a God are, and what my creation is.' For a person to try to go and interfere in that would be an act of blasphemy, according to me. Your job as a human is not to judge other people. [Ash, 37 years old, gay]

A prevalent counter narrative that emerged in my participants' criticism of heterosexual Muslims involves accusing them of and censuring their (perceived) hypocrisy in transgressing Islamic sexual ethics and teachings on extra-marital heterosexual and homosexual relations:

> He's [Ash's acquaintance] an *imam* almost...he's married, and he's having an extra-marital affair with another woman. I mean, what would Islam say about that?...There have been so many instances that *imam*s in a mosque for thirty, thirty five, forty years, they've had a mistress, all along...Many of these Muslims are hypocrites deep down...I knew of somebody, he was having gay sex with a man...and yet, he used to tell people, 'Oh, these fucking gays are like this and like that.'...At the same time, he's married but he's got five kids... So, he doesn't see that as a problem...just because he thinks it's hidden...and people don't know... [H]e's like a respectable elder in the community. [Ash, 37 years old, gay]

In criticising the credibility and legitimacy of institutional systems and their arbiters, these interviewees create narratives that contest the religious condemnation of their sexuality, and strengthen their sense of spiritual and personal well-being (Yip, 2005b). Ash's comments regarding hypocritical sexual morality also appear to reflect Schild's (1992) assertion that really '[i]n practice, it is only public transgression of Islamic morals that is condemned' (p. 617), and things done behind closed doors can escape censure.

The application of a counter narrative of heterosexual Muslims' hypocrisy as a means of de-legitimising and disqualifying their right to pass judgment on gay Muslims is extended by my interviewees beyond the confines of sexual mores to other activities censured as sinful in Islam such as gambling, levying interest on financial transactions, and consuming intoxicants and illicit substances. Indeed, Ali criticises heterosexual Muslims for being extremely selective in the elements of the religion that they follow:

> I know many Muslims who drink or do other things that they're technically not supposed to do, so really everyone is picking and choosing what is convenient to them, so I really don't think anyone is in any position to judge me or try to change me. [Ali, 20 years old, gay]

A fourth reverse discourse of attack involves the expression of a wariness of what were felt to be rigidly prescriptive pronouncements from religious figures who might have limited life experiences and outdated perspectives, non-adaptable to other contexts:

> You can't just take...some guy in a mosque saying you should do this, this and this. How has he experienced life, what are his experiences of life been? How do they reflect on what he tells us now? Because he might have had a very sheltered upbringing, where that's all he was taught...and, as a result, he has a very fixed idea of what religion should be...when in actual fact, I feel that religion is a lot more fluid and in different situations, and in different circumstances, it applies differently. [Haitham, 28 years old, bisexual]

Haitham's words appear to criticise Islamic views and interpretations of the religion's holy texts which emphasise literalism, trans-historicity and immutability in providing guiding principles for Muslims (Espositio, 1991), where community interpretation essentially remains 'medieval' (Barlas, 2002; Mernissi, 1987). Furthermore, the

suspicion is expressed by Rashad that the representatives of organised religion are largely motivated by a self-interested pursuit of power:

> To be honest...the Islamic people, they are liars...They need money, and they need just people to follow [them], like donkey and carrots...They think they are in the top…[and] any Muslim, he is donkey. [Rashad, 34 years old, gay]

Interestingly, this distrust in religious authority figures has been prevalent among Muslims who rarely participate in mosque activities. They, in fact, attempt to usurp the authority rights of religious figures, institutions and communities as intermediaries to convey the divine message (Bergland, 2012; Turner, 2008, 2011; Smith 2006; Smith and Denton, 2005), highlighting once again how modern religious Muslim identities are being shaped by a strong religious individualism.

Among my participants, a reverse discourse identified in the extant literature that is *not* used is that of actively attempting to 'queer' the religion through creatively cruising or befriending religious texts (Goss, 1993; 2004). As mentioned in Chapter Two, this strategy relies on a sophisticated hermeneutics to uncover within the scripture, evidence of the existence of LGBT people, examples of same-sex sensuality and sexuality, and instances of empathy and solidarity towards gay people from major figures like the Prophet Mohammed (Yip, 2010). The lack of cruising and befriending texts among my participants should not be surprising though, since, as Yip argues, such work is still very much in its infancy in Islam, having been mostly conducted within Christianity heretofore.

4.5.5. Seeking out other LGBT Muslims for emotional support

Apart from using non-theological and theological counter discourses as a means of helping integrate their religious and sexual identities, a third major strategy used by participants has been to contact or join LGBT Muslim support groups to develop a more positive sense of worth (Ramirez-Valles, 2002) by seeking solidarity, support, strength and empathy (Cserni and Talmud, 2015; Sandstrom, 1996; Skoric, Ying and Ng, 2009)) from peers facing exactly the same issues and challenges. Contact with well-balanced, contented role models can be an inspiring testament to the fact that

apparently contradictory identities can be reconciled. Idris exemplifies this well when describing his contact with a LGBT support group:

> I went to one of their meetings…and you talk…It feels quite good, because I thought I was the odd one out, but I wasn't actually, because there were several people with my situation…I think I consider myself as religious, but there were people who were more religious than me. Religion was a strong part of their lives, but then, so was homosexuality, and they were managing it well, and they were happy with who they were…So, it just was an inspiration, I mean, if they can reach that level, so can I. [Idris, 34 years old, homosexual]

Accessing like-minded peers allows gay men like Idris to make positive identifications and comparisons with their own identities, exchanging and learning from others' stories/experiences instead of comparing themselves to stigmatised representations of sexual minorities within the wider heterosexual community, and they learn that they are not alone (Herek and Glunt, 1995; Meyer, cited in Frost and Meyer, 2012), and, thus, the ontological reality of being a gay Muslim through belonging to a bigger social collective can be concretised and strengthened (Corey and Corey, 1992; Rappaport, 1993). In fact, almost all interviewees who visited LGBT Muslim support groups or their online equivalents emphasised they mostly valued the opportunity to meet and socialise with others who would have similar life experiences and challenges, a function of the group discussed and praised far more than the groups' work on theological hermeneutics regarding homosexuality.

Empathy and commonality are also sought and found by some of my participants in the gay Arab Muslim friendship circles they construct out of contacts made on gay dating websites. Such friends are important because they can become 'families we choose' (Weston, 1997) providing the consistent affective support that is not available from family and kin who have not been confided in, and who may display routine homophobia (Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, 2001). As social actors, my participants are able to instrumentally benefit from their membership of and relationships within these support networks, accruing a degree of 'bonding social capital' (Putnam, 2001), of connections centred very much on the shared

characteristics and experiences of a common religion, sexuality and ethnicity (Cserni and Talmud, 2015).

4.6. Summary

This chapter has analysed how participants experience their ethnic, religious and sexual identities at a personal level and it has illustrated how these identities are very much intersectional ones. In terms of their ethnic identities, intra-categorical variation has been highlighted through their varying affiliation with the identity marker 'Arab', differences in geo-political, historical, religious and socio-cultural contexts, and differences in wealth and social class. Regarding the intersection of their sexuality and religion, their experience of a religious and culturally-engendered homophobia has meant that many have suffered cognitive dissonance, manifested in feelings of stress, depression and unhappiness. Many strategies are utilised in an attempt to moderate dissonance levels. These include abandoning their religious identity completely or adapting it in some way, such as by distancing themselves from the religion's organisational form (seen to be the source of the dissemination of homonegative discourses) or by gravitating to a branch that is perceived to be less dependent on institutional diktats and thus less homophobic. The majority of participants, however, have not abandoned institutional Islam but attempt to manage their experiences of homophobic Islamic discourses, preserving both their religious and sexual identities and reducing experiences of dissonance. They may psychologically compartmentalise dissonant elements, deny their homosexuality to themselves, and/or attempt to pass as heterosexual. They also try to rationalise and validate their sexual identity by differentiating homosexual acts from homosexual emotions. Finally, they attempt to achieve consonance by integrating their different identities by reconceptualising their stignatised identities in a more positive light. Here, they have deployed three kinds of approach. Firstly, they have used non-theologically based counter discourses of essentialism to claim that their sexuality is the result of genetic and biological factors that cannot be changed, or that they might have become homosexual as a result of childhood sexual abuse. Secondly, they have utilised theologically-derived reverse discourses actively challenging homophobic Islamic discourses and their espousers. In this respect, some have had the theological capital to re-interpret Islam's seminal theological texts that

purportedly condemn homosexuality, and create new sexuality-affirmative versions; they emphasise that the socio-cultural historicity of these texts means that their messages are outdated and lack relevance to the twenty-first century and cannot therefore legitimately speak on matters such as homosexuality. Many attribute a theistic causation to their homosexuality, that God had intentionally created them as gay and loves them as much as he does heterosexuals, while some assert that if they are committing a sin by being homosexual, God is benevolent and merciful and will forgive them. They also criticise heterosexual Muslims for often behaving hypocritically in contravention of Islamic teachings, and also censure religious representatives for their narrow perspectives and limited knowledge of the world. The third approach to achieving identity integration has been to seek out other gay Arab Muslims, where, through social contact with peers in a sexuality and religiously-affirmative context, they can achieve greater ontological security and self-worth, as their collective coming together helps stabilise, nurture and empower their identities as *both* Muslim and gay.

CHAPTER FIVE: GAY ARAB MUSLIM IDENTITIES AND THE NEGOTIATION OF FAMILY AND KIN RELATIONSHIPS

5.1. Introduction

Having examined the intersection of my interviewees' ethnic, sexual and religious identities and the outcomes produced at a personal level in Chapter Four, in this chapter, the discussion broadens out to investigate intersectional identities specifically at the interpersonal level, examinining gay Arab Muslim mens' relationships with family and kin, arguably the most foundational, enduring and closest of relationships (in Chapter Six, I expand the analytical scope still further to investigate my participants' wider social relations in white spaces). In particular, I will examine how religious and socio-cultural influences intersect with family relationships and how this affects the construction and management of the interviewees' sexual identities. Related to this, the chapter also seeks to explore to what extent the participants feel able to disclose and discuss their sexual identities with families and kin. Relevant to the depiction of Arab family relations here is Morgan's (1996) definition of the 'family' as the everyday relational actions, and the enactment of practices, 'expectations and obligations' (derived from socialisation, historically constructed experience, class, gender and ethnicity) which influence, shape and legitimise these morally or personally important practices to social actors, in connection with concepts such as kin, parenting and marriage.

In this chapter I will demonstrate that the fact of whether or not the family know about their relative's homosexuality has distinctive effects on the relationship. Just under half of the interviewees (17 males) had not disclosed their sexuality to any family members and kin, though some of these felt that perhaps their relatives suspected they might be gay. For the remaining 18 interviewees, some family members did know about their sexuality, with a small minority of five stating that their sexuality was known to all members of their immediate family.

The chapter is divided into two main parts, both of which focus on the central theme of sexual silence that emerged from the interviews. The first half of the chapter discusses the main reasons why discussion or acknowledgment of their sexuality is silenced within familial circles. I next explore strategies that are actively used by participants to manage and maintain this sexual silence. The second half of the

chapter examines the outcomes when the silence is broken, either voluntarily or involuntarily. The chapter concludes by highlighting the processual nature of family responses to disclosure and how initially negative reactions may change over time.

5.2. Sexual Silence

A silence around the topic of discussing homosexuality operates at two levels in Arab Muslim communities: at a broader societal level, and permeating downwards to affect the individual family. Here I concentrate on the latter level. One reason why gay Arab Muslim men do not wish to disclose their sexuality to family and kin relates to issues of preserving family honour. A second reason is because they have witnessed instances of religio-cultural homophobia from relatives. And a third reason is because they deeply value their family relationships and fear these might be irrevocably damaged by disclosure. These three reasons are now discussed in greater detail.

5.2.1. Honour and sexual silence

Stewart (1994) defines honour as 'the right to be treated as having a certain worth…as a right to respect' (p. 21). 'It is closely linked…with moral worth, reputation, [and] self-respect.' (p. 33). It depends on observing and expressing a behavioural code. Stewart says that in Arab society, there are two ways in which a person's honour can be despoiled. The first is when a close relative is treated in a disrespectful or degrading way and, second, when this person themselves commits a reprehensible act. *Izzat* (respect and honouring of parents), is a socio-cultural value of paramount importance due to the close-knit structures of Muslim families (Jomier, 1989; Yip, 2004a). According to Ajrouch (1999, p. 131) in Arab societies, the '[s]ocial order is represented by family honor, which represents a core aspect of Arab culture.' This is because these societies tend to have collectivist value orientations placing importance on 'the group, hierarchical relationships, harmony, and conformity' (McIrvin Abu-Laban and Abu- Laban, 1999), where all members of the Arab family take responsibility for its wider social standing, so the actions of one member reflect on every other member (Ajrouch, 1999; Barakat, 1993), a system which Sweder *et al*. (1997) term an 'ethics of community'. Honour here is thus linked

to culturally disseminated systems of 'socially defined rules and prescriptions for reputation gaining and maintaining' (Gilbert, Gilbert and Sanghera, 2004, p. 126). My participant Salem, reflecting on the culture in the United Arab Emirates where he had previously lived, sums up this notion of ties of familial obligation:

> It's all about pleasing your family, and…if you try to follow your desire, you're actually being disrespectful. [Salem, 24 years old, gay]

Furthermore, honour is fundamentally connected to the concept of shame (*sharam*), the latter arising when the former has been impugned. Gilbert, Gilbert and Sanghera (2004) say that in collective cultures, shame/dishonour can be reciprocally transferred between the individual and the group, such as the family (termed 'reflected shame', Gilbert, 2002). Indeed, within the interview narratives of my study, one motivation for interviewees to, what I call, self-closet, and completely silence any public expression of their sexual identity is to prevent parents being stigmatised in terms of their honour being besmirched, and to avoid creating reflected shame were their son's sexuality to become public knowledge. Thus, Qais, though 'out' to his parents, suppresses selfish desires by not leading an openly gay lifestyle when home in Palestine specifically to protect his parents' and siblings' reputations:

> As a gay, I can't be out there and tell everyone…it's not really about myself. It's too about the family. I don't want the people [to] talk that the son of the professor, he's gay. They will not say 'Qais is gay'. No, they will say, 'The son of someone and someone, he's gay.' So, I don't want that to [affect] my family…for example, if I got a sister, her chance to…marry, it will be low, because she have got a gay brother. [Qais, 20 years old, gay]

Qais' narrative here clearly also resonates with Minwalla *et al*'s. (2005) caution that disclosure of a Muslim male's homosexuality to fellow Muslims needs to be evaluated in light of its potential to taint female siblings' marriage prospects. Thus, as I mentioned in Chapter Two, the sister of a known homosexual would be shunned as a potential marriage partner. My interviewees, Fahad and Tariq, similarly discuss the

damaging reputational effect public knowledge of their sexuality could have on the family's honour within the wider community:

> In somewhere like Qatar…if it's known that I'm gay, it's not me who gets affected, it's my dad…it's my mum, it's family, because it's guilty by association, so to speak. [Fahad, 45 years old, gay]

> All the stereotypes about our community are right, you know. You keep a good appearance outside of the house, honour, keeping the family name clean and stuff, And if they [his family] found out [he was gay], even outside the family like my cousins or my uncles, it would be a big shame on them, as well. [Tariq, 32 years old, bicurious]

Perceptions about disclosing one's sexuality may therefore fundamentally be influenced by the consequences for the maintenance of *izzat* (Jaspal and Siraj, 2011).

Ajrouch (1999) Barakat (1993) and Butt (1997) are among writers who highlight the gendered nature of honour, where it is Arab *women's* chasitity and fidelity that are central to the notion of honour, and which have to be controlled. Women have been murdered in some instances by male relatives when their sexual behaviour is perceived not to conform to prevailing respectable religio-social norms and seemingly subverting the sexual social order (Ajrouch, 1999). Little appears to have been said in the literature about honour killings of male homosexuals who might also be viewed as shaming their family's name by being gay and failing to conform to masculine gender role norms. In the West, it seems that popular and media discourses on Islam and honour killings have also usually focused on female victims. Yet from the words of my interviewees, public knowledge of a male's homosexuality would equally be considered a threat to the societal moral code and a stain on the family's reputation. The stain would need to be removed so that the honour could be restored (Butt, 1997). The fear of being a victim of an honour killing was clearly on the mind of Philip, the night he came out to his father as gay:

> I didn't sleep well that night…I had this nagging feeling that he may flip, and come and kill me as an honour killing. Oh yeah, there are stories of that in the Middle East…of people being killed because they suspected they're gay. [Philip, 38 years old, gay]

Ironically, Philip believes his father would not, in the end, have resorted to such an action precisely because knowledge of the murder and the motive that gave rise to it would have become public, and therefore would have disgraced the family name. Wail whose family do not know about his sexuality has similar fears about honour killings:

> It's a shame for a family…it can reach to a point where…they might even kill me…The family name and the family reputation is very important, you have to keep clean. [Wail, 32 years old, gay]

Rashad thought that the topic of honour killings of gay Arab Muslim men was clearly important enough to contact me again out of the blue, four years after his interview, to stress that I must highight this issue in my thesis (He had been applying for permanent leave to remain in the U.K. but the Home Office insisted that his country, Israel, was a safe country for gay people, yet Rashad had heard of an honour killing of a gay Muslim man there recently).

Muslim parents may also attempt to uphold family honour by ensuring children conform to the religious and socio-cultural norm of marrying, which links two families and their wider connections to build harmonious communities and avoid creating *sharam* (Jaspal, 2014a; Samad and Eade, 2003; Sedgwick, 2006). Rashad is clearly aware of the connection between *izzat* and marriage: 'You know [in] the Arab community, Muslim community, you have to marry to support your mum and dad.' Many of my participants spoke of parents directly raising the topic of marriage with them, as Malik explains:

> In our culture, it's probably early to mid twenties that you should be getting married, so I've already had those questions…there's definitely been the pressure of marriage. [Malik, 28 years old, gay]

Two interviewees mentioned that a lot of the pressure to get married was less from the immediate nuclear family structure in cases where close family members might suspect their relative's sexuality, but, instead, questioning and surprised reactions at the apparent reluctance to marry often came from aunts, uncles and brothers/sisters in law. I will say more about the pressure to marry in the section 'compartmentalisation and passing' later in the chapter. But it is clear from the foregoing discussion that the importance of family honour and of marriage as one of its key components forces gay Arab Muslims to keep silent about their sexuality in relationships with family members.

Apart from one interviewee who actually married, and another who got engaged (mentioned in the preceding chapter), unlike in some previous studies with British South Asian gay men, there was little evidence in my study of interviewees accepting marriage as an identity management strategy to buffer against the worst effects of dissonance produced by the socio-cultural expectations to marry, as identified by Jaspal (2012b), nor did they consider marriage to be an inevitable part of their life trajectory due to the fact that coming out and a gay lifestyle were deemed impossible (Jaspal and Siraj, 2011). Several of my interviewees stressed they have had the full agency to decide not to marry and have rejected pressure from parents, while others anticipate that they will not be put under any extreme pressure to marry.

5.2.2. Religiously and culturally-derived homophobic experiences and sexual silence

Witnessing religiously and culturally informed displays of homophobia from family and relatives is a further motivator for some gay Arab Muslim men to silence their sexuality with their kith and kin. As discussed in Chapter Two, homosexuality is generally seen by Muslims to be unequivocally condemned in the traditional interpretations of foundational theological works of Islam such as the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* (Boudhiba, 2004). Heterosexuality occupies a hegemonic status in Islam (Yip, 2004b) and Islam plays a powerful role in engendering homophobia within the Muslim family (Jaspal and Siraj, 2011). Bouhdiba (2004) Siraj (2006) and Yip and Khalid (2010) describe how, for Muslims, their identities, roles and social relations are sanctioned through heterosexist religio-cultural norms and ideologies that position homosexuality as against nature. It should therefore not be surprising that, in my study, close relatives often exhibit insidious homophobic attitudes in front of

participants in everyday contexts, as Malik and Jamal, (who are not 'out' to their parents), describe:

> All my family's quite openly homophobic. Little things, like, say someone would be gay on the TV, or something really silly, like in *Eastenders*, when there was a gay romance or anything like that, my parents...they'd have to just change the channel, or be like, 'Oh, turn this off.' And in fact, my parents even used to watch *Eastenders*, really quite dedicated. And then, as soon as that [a gay relationship storyline involving a Muslim character] came up, they stopped watching the whole programme...And any little things like that, any gay sort of affiliated situation, they'd be very negative against it...openly towards me. [Malik, 28 years old, gay]

> I've seen how my family are around homosexuals of the community…how they would talk about him…It's very, very negative. For example, if my cousin does something that might be considered homosexual…like wearing or doing something specific…their dad would say something like, 'Oh, do you want to be a homosexual and go to hell?' [Jamal, 22 years old, gay]

In such quotidian incidents, the interviewees have clearly become aware of 'negative social representations of homosexuality' (Jaspal and Siraj 2011, p. 185) within the family, having been socialised into a 'moral career' (Goffman, 1990), of learning what constitutes a deviant sexual identity and realising they posess one. They therefore keep silent about their sexuality in front of family members, for fear of negative reactions that might inflict a heavy cost on their relationships (as will be discussed later in the chapter). Chakib and Malik are among those who explicitly make a link to the religious antecedents of familial homophobia, when explaining why they feel forced into silencing their sexuality from relatives:

> They are gonna use it straight away, the religion, 'God is not happy.' and 'He's watching you.' And 'God make men for women, women for men.'…They will say, 'we, the Muslim, we have the book [The

> *Qur'an*]. We have to follow the book in *anything*. [Chakib, 35 years old, gay]
>
> As their son, they want me to take part in that religion, and consumed by it…and to maybe adhere to their ideologies in terms of homosexuality, or homophobia…They're religious enough. [Malik, 28 years old, gay]

Malik's comment here exemplifies how LGBT people become especially aware of the prescribed heterosexist and gendered relations and ideology propagated in relatives' assumptions that all members of the family will share antigay sentiments and join in with antigay comments (Valentine, 1993). This can reinforce to the gay relative that their sexual identity is likely to be subjected to familial scorn on disclosure and is thus something to be ashamed of, which only re-emphasises their feeling that they need to remain silent about it. It seems then that the notions of honour and dishonour/shame and religious and cultural values in Arab Muslim societies are mutually constitutive.

5.2.3. Valuing personal relationships inside the family

The broader silencing of homosexuality in Arab cultures due to the dominance of heterosexist norms is reflected within the famly as a microcosm of society. A realisation that the close networks they belong to and value are homophobic can evoke stress and psychological dissonance (Jaspal, 2012). Some of my participants feel obliged to closet their sexuality because they find the prospect of disclosing it extremely threatening (Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010a; Jaspal and Siraj, 2011; Siraj 2009). Many keep silent because they fear family ostracism and disownment as a consequence of parental knowledge of their sexuality, (anxieties common among all LGBT young people [Valentine and Skelton, 2003]). Such fears may be well-founded, as Karim, reenacting a conversation he had with his mother and sister, attests:

> What about if I came to you, my mum, and I said that "I'm gay". What's gonna be the response?' My mum, she said to me straight

> away, 'Then, you're not my son…and I'll make sure your father kick you out from the house and take your name from the birth certificate.' Then my sister turned to me, she said, 'and for us, our brother is dead. We don't have a brother.' [Karim, 46 years old, bisexual]

There was also a fear that disownment could have financial repercussions, hence underlining the disincentive to disclose. For example, Philip worried that he would not be able to support himself, and therefore delayed coming out to his family:

> I decided I'm not gonna say anything until I finish my PhD…I thought I'm not gonna do this [come out] without getting some [security], because I didn't want to take a risk at any point in my life…And I didn't know how they'd react…so I needed to make sure I'm financially independent and I have a passport. [Philip, 38 years old, gay]

Philip's actions reflect Binnie's (2004, 2007) view that coming out may need to be considered in relationship to other factors outside of the immediate sphere of sexual relationships such as economic risk.

Some participants fear that, if not disowned by relatives, family relationships, valued for their sense of closeness, would fundamentally change or be irrevocably damaged, as Jamal and Haitham hypothesise:

> They might treat me differently and I really don't like that…even though I know for a fact that obviously they would still love me…the truth is, they would never treat me the same way. [Jamal, 22 years old, gay]

> I don't want there to be some kind of weird environment between me and my family. I think I just want it to be the way it is now and continue like this, basically. [Haitham 28 years old, bisexual]

Vignoles *et al*. (2006) have identified that the threat to relationships with significant others and being denied by them is therefore a great incentive to pass as heterosexual, as will be discussed in the next section.

Perhaps relating to *izzat*, some participants, like Ehab and Idris, mentioned silencing their sexuality in family spaces as a protective measure, to prevent their parents becoming emotionally hurt or upset:

> Why on earth cause that discomfort to my family… It would upset them. I think it will create unnecessary tension. [Ehab, 38 years old, gay]

> I'm happy with who I am, but obviously, you know, it's not something I can tell my family, or my mum…I'm scared, especially with my mum, that it will break her heart. [Idris, 34 years old, homosexual]

Phellas (2005) has termed this strategy 'keeping mum' and has a conveniently passive nature, essentially relying on inaction for its effectiveness. Avoiding coming out to prevent parental hurt was also documented in Valentine, Skelton and Butler's (2003) study of non-Muslim LGBT youth, indicating it may be a universal motivator. Hunter (2007) has mentioned that gay people in general, in weighing up whether to disclose, can feel responsible for their parents' welfare, worrying about hurting and disappointing the people who are the most important and valued in their lives. In fact, Savin-Williams (2001) in a study of U.S. LGBT youth found that anxieties about parental well-being after disclosure outweighed fears of ostracism. LaSala (2010) says that, traditionally, parents are a source of protection and support for children in difficult times. For gay Arab Muslim men, it may well be that in order to cope with experiences of racism and Islamophobia which may also be prominent issues in their everyday lives (see the evidence I present in Chapter Six), they need and value the support of their ethnic communities, and especially their family, and do not want to risk angering or alienating them. The intersection of their sexual, racial and ethnic identities might therefore mean that they may be happy to partake in a trade-off where they keep silent about their sexuality in order to benefit from family support to manage racism and Islamophobia.

As we have seen, the fear of negative outcomes for both themselves and their families inhibits participants from disclosing their sexuality to their relatives (though, as I shall demonstrate later in the chapter, the nature of the silence is relationally contingent and selective) and the imperative remains to continually withhold aspects of their sexual identities from family members. Achieving this involves the enactment of various strategies and practices, which I discuss in the next section.

5.2.4. Maintaining the sexual silence: Compartmentalisation and passing

As mentioned in Chapter Four, LGBT Muslims may attempt to simultaneously preserve their sexual identity and avoid disclosing information about it to family through a process of compartmentalisation, which primarily involves keeping their religious and sexual identities separate. As described in Chapter Two, compartmentalisation involves either their sexual or religious identity assuming prominence or being downplayed, depending on whether the particular context is perceived as safe or threatening (Siraj, 2006; Yip, 2004a). For LGBT Muslims born and brought up in the U.K., putting geographical distance between themselves and their families by moving out of the family home or to a different city allows them the freedom to live out their sexuality (Siraj, 2006). It was also clear that migration to the U.K. from Arab Muslim majority countries facilitated the ability to compartmentalise their lives; as these participants felt able to conduct their sexual lives in a more hospitable environment with a greater tolerance of difference, thereby achieving emotional balance and ontological security (Gorman-Murray, 2007) whilst completely silencing their sexual identity on family visits to the homeland, thus preserving harmonious family relationships. Certainly, some interview narratives confirm that in moving to Britain, participants feel that they can more openly and safely express their sexual identities being far away from their Arab Muslim families:

> [T]he culture here, it's different than where I came from, so it's not so a struggle by being gay here…because I don't have lots of family here, so I'm not scared to, someone see me with a boyfriend, or someone see me in gay places, or someone might discover that. [Mohamed, 31 years old, gay]

> [T]he reason why I moved to London as well was because I couldn't lead my gay life in France, as my family is very kind of religious. So, when I'm back in France, I'm like a straight guy...I can't have a boyfriend. I can't go out with him. I can't really go out to the gay areas. I can't really...be myself...because if my family catch me, I won't be part of the family anymore, so...it was better for me to move, so that's what I did...Paris is very free, as well...but my cousins are everywhere...They are working in clubs as security guards...I always have to be very careful. In London, I'm not hiding myself, at all. I mean, if I wanna kiss my boyfriend in the middle of the street, in front of every single tourist, I will do it. I don't care...Since I moved from [France], I feel free. So, I'm just living my life and...enjoying myself. [Zakaria, 24 years old, gay]

Zakaria's compartmentalising behaviour here, like many of my interviewees', is characteristic of Brekhus' (2003) 'chameleon' or 'sexual commuter' identity type, (as discussed in Chapter Two), where his sexuality is fore-grounded only in particular situations and contexts, Through transnational compartmentalisation, he maintains good familial relationships, passing as heterosexual on his once-monthly visits home to France, whilst being openly gay the rest of the time in Britain. Migration probably makes passing a more sustainable strategy, since the frequency with which one needs to pass is greatly reduced in these circumstances, and hence, stress and dissonance can also be ameliorated. For a few of my interviewees, migration was also utlised as a preventive strategy to avoid their parents potentially suffering stigma in terms of their honour being besmirched, or to prevent their hurt if their son's sexuality were to become known. Migration and transnational compartmentalisation also served as a means to escape, to a large extent, family pressure to marry and what some saw as the inevitable consequence of leading inauthentic, double lives by marrying:

> Being away from my parents just doesn't make any pressure, that you need to get married, and people questioning. If you are in a different country, then people don't care. [Nasser, 27 years old, gay]

> [O]ne of my reasons of leaving Sudan, is that I was under pressure to get married. [Wail, 32 years old, gay]

Of course migration like this requires adequate economic capital and, in the case of participants who came to the U.K. for study or work purposes, sufficient cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), meaning the possession of appropriate educational entry qualifications and/or vocational skills or professional expertise, as well as social capital, in terms of networking and helpful contacts to realise their move.

An emphasis on affective/emotional motivations to migrate, and the negative emotionality of familial space (Bondi, Davidson and Smith, 2005; Gorman-Murray, 2007) clearly resonates with and is descriptive of the migration motivations of many of my participants. For them, family space in the home country tends to be associated with feelings of wariness, fear, stress and unhappiness regarding their sexuality, while life in the U.K. conversely allows them to experience emotions of happiness, peace, comfort and security. Similar findings have been uncovered in the interview narratives in the hitherto small number of research studies focusing on gay migration (Bianchi et al. 2007; Diaz, 1998; Jaspal, 2014a; Morales, Corbin-Gutierrez and Wang, 2013; Parker, 1997; Pilkey, 2013; Smith, 2012) and the same factors that have motivated the participants in my study to migrate, described above, were also identified in these studies. The migration of my participants is clearly emotionally imbued, as they seek an escape from the dissonance of family relationships and the pressure of silencing their sexuality in front of their closest relatives.

Deliberately passing as heterosexual to family was often undertaken by many of my participants in order to maintain their ‘secret’ and avoid the likely more serious consequences of a public acknowledgement of their homosexuality (Breakwell, 1986). For Harun, passing involves an understanding and appropriation of a semiotic code involving clothing and body grooming practices to signify different sexualities as the context requires. In the domestic setting of a family visit, it necessitates the performance of a masculine gender identity, avoiding any clothing, hairstyle or appearance that might index a gay identity, effeminacy or unmanliness which might arouse suspicions within his family about his sexuality, while, for the gay scene, the clothes he wears will be very different:

> To protect my gay scene, my gay life...when I meet [my family], I'm totally different. I change my personality, I change my attitude, everything. I don't want to them to doubt one percent, that I'm a [heterosexual]...I don't go there with the same clothes that I go with my gay friends...Sometimes, I like to wear tight jeans and tight shirts, but with my family, no...I remember, I was with that clothes, my mum, she got angry at me. She was telling me, 'Why you are wearing this tight trousers? You are not a woman. You are a man...Why are your eyebrows like that?...Why your haircut is like that?...I don't wanna to be in argument with my family. I don't want my family to ask me that kind of questions. [Harun, 32 years old, gay]

Harun describes the boundary between his family and gay world as being 'separated like a gate.' His mother's reaction here seems to reflect the fact that Islamic societies endeavour to maintain their hegemonic, heteronormative social order partly by setting strict gender-defined codes of dress and behaviour (Hidayatullah, 2003; Boudhiba, 2004), so in his mother's eyes, Harun fails to conform to her expectations of the heterosexual, masculine gender role. Greene (1998) has argued that a direct association is often made in minority ethnic communities between traditionally stereotyped social gender roles/appearance and sexuality, with the erroneous deduction that those who fail to match this stereotype are 'defective' men or gay. Zakaria, like Harun, says he tries to comply with what he perceives as masculine gender norms of appearance and behaviour by dressing in a leather jacket and sitting in a 'masculine way', i.e. 'not with legs crossed', when he visits his family.

Karim and his husband, who normally live openly gay lifestyles, hide their sexuality from Karim's mother on her visits from Morocco by performing the readily available, non-suspicion arousing, alternative personas of simply family relatives:

> My partner said, 'If we were living in Morocco, or your mum was living here with us, then you have to tell your mum. But…since she lives in another country…and you're living here, I don't see the point telling her'. Everyone is happy...So, when she comes, for her, he's my brother-in-law, because his sister [is] married to my brother…So

> therefore, I'm living with my brother-in-law. [Karim, 46 years old, bisexual]

For two individuals, passing seemed facilitated by socio-cultural norms of platonic intimacy between males in Muslim cultures. Minwalla *et al*. (2005) have described masculine gender identities in Eastern cultures as involving greater public homo-sociality, with men holding hands and with more open admiration of male beauty, without this necessarily being relating to sexuality, femininity and homosexuality, as might be the case in Western cultures. Rather, it is seen as 'cultural brotherhood, deep friendship and masculinity' (p. 124). This homo-sociality can actually provide convenient cover for homosexual individuals to exchange intimate body contact without raising suspicions, exemplified in Ehab's re-telling of his mother's reaction on discovering him and his boyfriend in bed together:

> [To the family] we were friends…I remember once he was teasing me sexually, and my mum came into the room, and…then she said something very kind of out off the planet…basically,she will never even *think* two men will be sleeping together [laughs]…So, for her, it was kind of 'Stop teasing each other'…as friends, that's it. Mum, he was almost fucking me! [laughs] [Ehab, 38 years old, gay]

Some interviewees feel they need to avoid any actions that might undermine their ability to pass to family or which threaten disclosure, and to this end, relationships with white British gay men seen as especially undesirable if those men would expect their gay Muslim partners to disclose their homosexuality to family members and lead openly gay lives:

> Let's say he was a British guy who came out when he was sixteen, and his parents are completely fine with it...he would expect his boyfriend to have the same kind of lifestyle and so, if he expects that…[he] will be pushing me that he wants to meet my parents and I go 'No, you're not gonna meet my parents. And even if you met them, you're gonna only be my friend....And if we go back to Egypt together, you'll always have to act as my friend, and that's it'. It might

> be hard for him to accept that…If it's a Muslim, I will expect that he will understand more. [Nasser, 27 years old, gay]

Related to this, Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010a), Whitaker (2011) and Yip (2003) highlight how participation in supposedly gay affirmative social contexts such as the gay scene (see Chapter Six for a full discussion of my participants' interaction with such spaces) may have the potential to threaten LGBT Muslims' sense of belonging within their family.

For those interviewees who pass as heterosexual, it certainly has the short term benefit of helping them to avoid disclosure and any potentially negative outcomes from families (reflecting Abraham's [2009] espousal of its efficacy as a temporary solution). But it also has the negative effect of increasing psychological dissonance. For example, as mentioned in Chapter Two, there can be stress and anxiety about a homosexual's deception being exposed, a heavy cognitive load, as the passer has to constantly monitor his actions within social situations (Goffman, 1990), and tension due to the continuous effort of passing (Abraham, 2009; 2010). The words of Fethi clearly reflect this:

> It's something you can't just go and say to your family…You have to be very careful. Sometime you have to hide it, and you're doing something, and no one knows about it. You try to keep it to yourself, and sometimes this can put a lot of pressure, because you start lying and making story and try to cover yourself and ...it can take you deep and deep and make you unrelaxed. [Fethi, 36 years old, gay]

Some of my interviewees sought help with the dissonance they experienced in situations where they had not disclosed their sexuality to family members; more specifically, this was social and emotional support obtained through contacting LGBT Muslim support groups (see the discussion in the previous chapter of the role of support groups and interviewees' relationships with them).

Passing dramatically increased feelings of stress and depression among some participants because their family, assuming that their son was heterosexual, started to raise the issue of and make plans for his marriage, and this became a more frequent and unavoidable topic of discussion. It is something which creates

great pressure (Siraj, 2014a). Jaspal (2014b), Minwalla *et al*. (2005) and Yip, (2004a) have described how Muslim parents adopt important organisational and facilitating roles in making sure their children marry, including suggesting potential matrimonial partners. When this happened in the case of my participants, it was felt that continuing to pass as heterosexual had reached a level of such serious consequence it greatly heightened their dissonance, as Idris describes:

> [They're] taking my pictures, handing them to families, and my mum was like, 'Oh, I met this person and she's got a daughter and you could get married.' And I don't feel comfortable because psychologically, til last year, I was taking therapy. I went to deep depression…They [his relatives] all ask me why I'm not married…I got a lot of pressure to the point that I said I didn't want to talk…For like quite some time, I wasn't speaking to anyone at home. [Idris, 34 years old, homosexual]

Idris initially used a blocking strategy by refusing to discuss the topic of marriage with family, and later refused to speak to them at all to reduce his feelings of dissonance. This approach mirrors that of participants in Jaspal's (2014b) study of gay South Asian Muslim men, who, in the same situation, re-evaluated the significance of their interpersonal networks, subsequently withdrawing from and dis-identifying with the enthno-religious family grouping. According to Jaspal, this, though, can create yet further dissonance by disrupting hitherto close and prized family bonds.

Some of my interviewees expressed conflict in their wish to show loyalty and respect to family by marrying, yet still preserve their homosexual identities, as Elias explains:

> Especially in my country...when you getting older, your friends in the same age [are marrying]. You will be under pressure sometimes from your families to ask you to get married. My sisters, they said, 'Oh yeah, you're going to get married soon…But when they mention that, I feeling depressed because I couldn't tell them, and I couldn't do what they want, because I'm always keeping good relationship

> with my family…and I never used to be bad boy. [Elias, 36 years old, gay]

One strategy to deflect or deter parental attention from the subject of marriage is to create postponement excuses, claiming that prospective matrimonial partners were unsuitable. Some participants, like Malik, can also plausibly argue that they are too young for marriage and wish to have the freedom to explore life further before settling down (as some young heterosexuals would):

> I've told them…I still feel young and want to live with what freedoms I still have as a young male, before I settle down, which is true, whether I'm straight or gay. [Malik, 28 years old, gay]

Phellas (2005) has described this type of approach as an information disclosure strategy that involves adopting a counterfeit role 'to allow the individual to tender the manifestations of one's real stigma as evidence of a lesser taint' (p. 71). One of my participants deflects marriage talk by citing the examples of older relatives that have never married. For three interviewees in their early twenties, the subject of marriage has not been broached, and they feel that their youth is, for the moment, helping shield them from both the pressure to marry and awkward questions about their sexuality. Nasser and Rashad actually gave into parental pressure. Nasser, as a reaction to the conflict and guilt experienced after enjoying visiting a gay bar in Spain, attempted to use the intra-psychic strategy of denial (a strategy discussed in the previous chapter) and agreed to marry. But he cancelled the engagement and started a secret relationship with a man. Rashad was the only participant to actually get married (while living in Palestine), but avoided any form of conjugal relations with his new wife, thus creating suspicion amongst his wife's family as to the reason why. They initially thought he was possessed by *jinn*, spirits that can take possession of individuals and control their thoughts and behaviours (Rothenberg, 2006). The strain of passing and sense of dissonance is evident in Rashad's description of his guilt about tying his wife down into a loveless, sexless marriage:

> When I married, as I [am] gay, I know that I can't do this anymore., and I married, like it's not longer, I think, one year and I couldn't

> continue…It's not fair for me to keep this wife for nothing…cos, she need[s] as well a life. She need[s] sex. I make a problem to her too. And I say, 'It's finished. We have to separate…I told her I can't continue…six month, seven month, I didn't touch my wife. [Rashad, 34 years old, gay]

Passing, then, is used by my participants as an effective means to prevent disclosure to their families, but also generates stress (especially when the passing is so successful that parents start planning their son's marriage), and it often has undue influence on participants' sexual relations and dating partner choices.

Though they pass as heterosexual/allow family members to presume they are heterosexual, five of the interviewees mentioned that they feel family might have guessed about their homosexuality, which appeared to have generated a type of tacit acceptance, through a mutual 'don't ask, don't tell' understanding (Whitaker, 2011):

> (Speaking about his father) I don't think [he doesn't know], cos he's seen the difference between me and my brother, the things I like, the things he likes, interests, and even clothes and stuff…Maybe the way I interact with people…compared to my brother, I will be very camp...They know...It's obvious. [Khalid, 26 years old, gay]

> I feel that my mother knows about my real identity, my sexual identity…because in our culture, usually, when you reach…late twenties, your parents start to talk to you about getting married, having children. My mother hasn't told me anything about that. [Omar, 34 years old, gay]

Khalid's quote above ties in with the point made by Savin-Williams (2001), who writes that parents may become suspicious of their child's homosexuality through its display of non gender-appropriate behaviour or interests. Acosta (2010) describes the type of unspoken 'don't ask, don't tell' agreement that seems to operate in Khalid and Omar's households as a means whereby family members can avoid the shame and harmful consequences a disclosure might bring, while simultaneously

maintaining a harmonious family relationship. The child, meanwhile, can take comfort from imagining that their parents have accepted their sexuality, if only tacitly, and for that reason, everyone has an interest in preserving the sexual silence. Brown (1989) refers to this as the 'I know you know' approach and Ponse cited in LaSala (2010) uses the term 'counterfeit secrecy' to describe this conspiracy of silence, arguing it can, in fact, make the distance in family relationships grow.

The above three sections have focused on the theme of sexual silence, the reasons why gay Arab Muslim men suppress their sexual identities when interacting with family members, and strategies that are used to preserve the silence in their relationships. The remainder of the chapter proceeds to analyse the consequences for my interviewees and their family relationships when the silence is explicitly broken.

5.3. When the Sexual Silence is Broken

The sexual silence is broken when parents and family become aware that their relative is gay. Sometimes disclosure is voluntary: for example, several interviewees strongly emphasised the longstanding, very close, emotional bond they enjoyed and valued with family members, and stated or implied that they had decided to come out in order to preserve this sense of closeness and to maintain honesty in the relationship (to keep the relationship 'pure, transparent and frank' in Bilal's words), something concealment would inhibit. Hunter (2007) terms such revelations 'relationship-building' disclosures, and points out that through disclosure, one can 'feel authentic and experience higher levels of social…functioning' and achieve more intimate personal relationships (p. 89). Sometimes the sexual silence is broken through selective disclosures to particular relatives. As mentioned in Chapter Two, young LGBT people rarely come out to the whole family simultaneously, but rather make disclosures to individual members based on the strength and quality of their relationships (Valentine, Skelton and Butler, 2003); in other words, they make a calculation that the person disclosed to will react in a supportive way. Orne's (2011) term 'strategic outness' is useful here because it illuminates the inter-personal and interactional dimensions of a process dependent on the nature of relationships with others located within that social context. With regard to my interviewees, it was noticeable that they tended to confide mainly in members of the immediate family

(rather than extended family) – though, exceptionally, Malik confided in two cousins, living in two different countries – and crucially, the personality of the confidant/e played a role in the choice of individual he disclosed to: they had to be deemed to be trustworthy (expected to keep the confidence), open-minded, understanding and non-homophobic:

> I just felt like we'd got so close, and these people aren't just my cousins but they're like my brothers and sisters. I *can* confide in them, and I think I've chosen well in the people I've confided in...It's more because I know that they'd be okay with it...Everyone else, I have doubts about, and I feel like it might change our relationship...For example, if my brothers were more open, like my cousins are, I'd probably tell them...Because they are homophobic, I'd have difficulty in kind of broaching that subject. [Malik, 28 years old, gay]

Walid discloses that the revelation of his sexuality to two younger siblings had no ill effect on the relationship because they had always enjoyed and valued a mutually good relationship, and, because he occupied a higher status position in the family hierarchy, age-wise, this conferred a certain amount of deference and respect.

In four cases, the disclosure was firstly or exclusively to a female sibling. On the whole, male siblings and relatives were perceived as more homophobic and as potentially reacting very negatively to the disclosure, and were thus not confided in. There was generally a lack of voluntary 'coming out' to parents among the sample. Exceptions were Fahad, Philip and Qais, (the latter disclosed to his mother, in the first instance). The gendered dimension of these preferential disclosures reflect findings in D'Augelli, Hershberger and Pilkington (1998), Valentine (1997) and Yip (2004a) who posit that females, generally seen as assuming more nurturing, care-giving roles in society and being more used to/capable of doing emotional labour, might be more understanding and receptive to a disclosure of homosexuality by their sibling or child (though, as will be seen later in the reaction of Philip's mother, this is by no means always the case). Male figures, on the other hand, are more associated with the patriarchal power to discipline, and can be particularly strong exponents of heterosexist ideologies (Herek, 2002), since they may feel homosexuality more

strongly threatens their gender identity (I say more about this below), and so have greater potential to react negatively, and therefore might be confided in less. Corrigan and Matthews (2003) highlight how selective disclosures can have the benefit of increasing support from peers, although the secret still has to be collectively maintained to oblivious others.

At one point on a spectrum of 'degrees of outness' is 'implicit and non-direct disclosure' (Legate, Ryan and Weinstein, 2012) through which 'clues' are subtly given and intended to be picked up on that allow family speculation about a relative's sexuality (Orne, 2011). Amine, for example, though not out, nevertheless has strategically tried to drop subtle, implicit hints to his family:

> My boyfriend went to Algeria with his parents…and I called my mum [there], I said, 'Listen. Can you make a nice dinner...and invite him over?' And they did, and my sister cooked for them, and they're really pleased and stuff, so, this is my way of telling them this is my boyfriend...my way of introducing my boyfriend to my family. [Amine, 38 years old, gay]

Amine did not state in the interview if the meaning behind this hinting had actually been understood by family members.

In some cases, disclosure was accidental and undesired. For example, technology played a role in unplanned disclosure in four instances, as sexually compromising photographs were discovered on a computer, or the participant was inadvertently seen by a family member watching gay pornography on their device. In a few cases there were involuntary or indirect disclosures in the form of 'revelations by proxy' (or 'third party revelations' [Afifi and Steuber, 2009]). For example, cousins who were confided in broke that trust and told siblings, and those siblings told parents, as in Khalid's case. For Zakaria, he was seen visiting gay clubs by his sisters' friends, who then reported this to his sisters, who directly confronted him, asking if he was gay. Fahad was inadvertently 'outed' by his sister to his parents after she became angry when the parents continually raised the topic with her of his getting married, The latter two examples seem to reflect disclosure as more a 'spontaneous function' or 'slip of the tongue' (Cain, 1991; Corrigan and Matthews, 2003).

Sometimes the sexual silence was broken by incidents where it was suddenly made clear that family had indeed suspected/known about the participant's homosexuality. During our discussion about coming out, Amine mentioned an incident involving his brother whose comments he took as referring to Amine's sexuality:

> He was a bit drunk and one day, he said, 'Don't care about anyone, do whatever you want. I love you. You're my brother'…When he told me that, I was shocked…I thought it was amazing. [Amine, 38 years old, gay]

Karim, 46 years old, who identified as bisexual gave an example of an occasion when a complicit, fraternal consensus of silence broke down during an argument with his brother, with upsetting consequences:

> Karim: I had my brother with me for a week. He lost his job…And all he was doing was just Internet, chatting to girls, playing games. And I was frustrated he was not looking for a job... So, I turned to him. I said, 'Enough is enough…[Y]ou need to find a job to take care of yourself…to have a responsibility…So, then it went from a small talk to an argument and he turned to me and said, 'Well, you look at yourself. Look at *your* life. Look the way *you're* living. Look what *you're* doing. I'm disgusted 'bout what you're doing'…He knows that I'm married to a man, and yet, he allowed himself to come and live with me, for a week, because he couldn't support himself. He knows the situation. But it suits him that time.

This quote highlights how the breaking of the silence can arise out of a quite sudden and unexpected turn of events in everyday interaction.

5.4. Negative Family Reactions to Disclosure

5.4.1. Incomprehension, abuse and violence

The participants experienced a range of negative reactions when their family found out they were gay. Emotional upset, incomprehension and intolerance were common. Philip describes his father's reaction as follows: 'He crashed. He went on his knees. He was crying. He couldn't handle it.' Alternatively, there was a reaction of confusion and disbelief from Yaaqub's mother:

> She said, 'How can you be gay? You have facial hair and you wear men's clothes and…you're quite masculine and you're quite kind of macho.' So there's this misunderstanding of what gay means or what gay is…[that] if somebody's gay, then they just get fucked, and they wear women's clothes, and they're almost looked down on as being the woman in the relationship. [Yaaqub, 27 years old, gay]

Gender and gender norms are important here. As Yaaqub describes, it seems his mother discursively reproduces common Muslim social representations of gay men in her condemnation of homosexuals, feeling they have lost their masculinity by taking on the role and behaviour of a female, thus subverting traditional socio-cultural gender norms (Bereket and Adam, 2006; Siraj, 2010; Whitaker, 2011), and this more broadly represents a destabilising threat to the prevailing heteronormative order.

Philip evokes his surprise at his mother's reaction to his coming out. Her comments centred on concepts of defilement and disease, reflecting a moral position on homosexuality that equates it to something like alcoholism (Gillis, 1998) with the disease discourse based on stereotyping and demonising the homosexual other, primarily due to a lack of understanding and knowledge about gay and lesbian people (Sibley,1995):

> My mother's side, I really thought she's gonna handle it alright…I've met gay people who know her, and they told me she's so cool about gay people and I thought, oh then, that's brilliant…But she flipped

> completely. She started saying I'm gonna have AIDS, I'm gonna be involved with drugs…and she's not spoken to me in six years…She's cut me off, completely…I mean, she was in hospital…so, she did not handle it well at all. And then she started throwing those religious emails on me, then after that, she told me, 'Either you change, or don't talk to me.' And then she changed her number, changed her email, changed everything. So, I couldn't contact her even if I wanted to. [Philip, 38 years old, gay]

There were also threats of physical violence and death threats from family members (reactions also empirically documented by Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010a; Minwalla *et al*., 2005 and Whitaker, 2011). Bilal and Ali recount incidents of actual physical attacks that accompanied verbal abuse by male relatives:

> And one time, my brother…found that I am texting guys and flirting with guys in [the] mobile [phone]…He, said, 'Let's go together, I want to go shopping. Come with me, just in the car', and then, he took me to a dark place...he said 'What's in the phone?' I said, 'I'm sorry, I didn't mean [to]'…And he punched me in the face, and he bit me and he called…my oldest brother, and he lives in the U.S…and my oldest brother also talked to me and he said, 'You piece of junk. You don't even deserve to live…You should be ashamed of yourself, burnt! [Bilal, 27 years old, gay]

> It did get violent at first which is why I decided to leave…for my own safety. My dad would throw pots from the top level of the house, smash glass, throw me against the wall, kick me, step on me, you name it. [Ali, 20 years old, gay]

Herek (2004) and Gillis (1998) argue that the violent nature of such attacks is consistent with the fact that anger and disgust appear common emotional responses among heterosexuals to LGBT people, and that these emotions are central to the dehumanising, sexually stigmatising rhetoric and hostility against minority groups by the dominant group, so LGBT identities are discredited and devalued, and hostility

and aggression from this 'sexual prejudice' (Herek, 2004) are therefore seen as suitable or necessary reactions to gay people. Of particular relevance to Arab Muslim communities and the importance they place on honour and reflected shame is Mackie, Devios and Smith's (2000) point that the emotion-arousing event does not necessarily need to directly involve the aggressor, but rather that they are affected in terms of their perception of the degree to which the action harms the broader in-group which he/she represents.

In general, threats and violent responses towards my participants emanated predominantly from male relatives, reflecting findings in research that heterosexual males display greater hostility towards homosexuality than heterosexual females (for example, Kite and Whitely, cited in Siraj 2009; Sears and Williams, 1997). Valentine, Skelton and Butler (2003) state that statistically, gay men are most likely to be assaulted in the family by their brothers. It may be that brothers are perhaps taking on patriarchal disciplinary roles in such instances. Interestingly, and I would argue of particular relevance to Arab Muslim cultures, Smyth and Jenness (2014, p. 13) say that '[m]uch of the research on cultural influences on anti-LBGTQ violence suggests that what is often termed "homophobic" violence can, in the first instance, be understood as gendered violence, that is…in response to perceived transgression of a given culture's approved gender norms more so than by fear and/or loathing of same-sex desire per se.' Pressure to conform to gender codes is greater for men, thus, some with a heightened sense of masculinity and rigid gender construction can feel pressured by masculine gender role stress to conform to behaviours expected of hegemonic masculinity and prove their manhood to themselves and others (Parrot and Zeichner, 2008) by devaluing, rejecting and attacking the 'other', those having feminine qualities/not embodying masculine traits such as toughness (Parrot, Adams and Ziechner, 2002) for violating gender norms and peforming gender inappropriately (Perry, cited in Daley *et al*., 2007). These men's reactions of anger might also conceivably be due to a conflict between their own denied or unrealised homosexual urges and their belief that homosexuality is wrong (Adams, Wright and Lohr, 1996; Zeichner and Reidy, 2009). Based on the discussion of religiously engendered homophobia among families I described at the beginning of the chapter, it may also be likely the incidents of homophobic anger and related violence from male relatives of participants, as described above, may also reflect psychological concerns in that their religious beliefs teach them that being gay is wrong (Parrot and

Peterson, 2008). It should, though, be acknowledged that family reactions of great upset, verbal abuse, threats, physical assaults and ejection from the home as consequences of disclosure that have been experienced in Arab Muslim families in my study have also been found among non-Arab, non-Muslim families in the United States (see Rivers and D'Augelli, 2001). There are thus certain cross cultural similarities concerning anxiety about victimisation from family members, and it is clear the home is sometimes not a safe space for LGBT children from many different types of ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds.

Initially negative familial reactions to disclosure can very quickly dissipate, however. Ash, who had previously trained as an *imam,* was able to use an acquired theological capital to manage the situation when his mother had discovered a photograph of his boyfriend in his wallet and confronted him, by creating a reverse discourse of justificatory Islamic scriptural hermeneutics of verses in the *Hadith*, to try to garner a more accepting attitude from his mother, and this strategic reasoning seemed successful:

> I'm gonna tell you, which I told her. And it's from the *Hadith*…I said, Mum, if I was born deaf, dumb or blind would you have smothered me with a pillow, or would you have done something to me, or…killed a young boy.' And she goes, 'No, I would never do that.' So, I said, Mum, if your son is different from the rest of your kids, do you see that as a problem?' She goes, 'No.' And then, I told her, the Arabic word is actually [*quotes in Arabic*] the beauty of Islam is that you leave out which doesn't concern you…So, I told my mum this *Hadith*. I said, 'The Prophet has said that the thing that doesn't bother you, you shouldn't even touch the subject…And she's never said a word after that. [Ash, 37 years old, gay]

After Qais' father's initial shock had worn off, he moved very quickly to demonstrate support and reassurance towards his son:

> After two days he told me, 'You are my favourite son…and I really proud of you. Not because you are gay, but because I love you. You are the youngest one…and you were the best one in the schools',

> and because I got prizes...from the Prime Minister and the King of Jordan…he was proud and he said, 'Look, here is your picture with the Prime Minister, so you are better than your brothers...so, I can't say you are a bad boy…because you are gay…You did something in your life…You're being gay, it's not your choice.'…But somehow, I don't really believe what he said, to be honest. Sometimes, I think that he say that, just, he don't want to hurt me, or something like that. [Qais, 20 years old, gay]

Qais' slight unease and doubt about his father's full acceptance of his sexuality appears to reflect Jadwin-Cakmak, Pingel and Bauermeister's (2015) parental reaction categorisation of 'ambivalent acceptance', where the genuineness of the response still remains to be tested over the longer term.

5.4.2. Denial

Bilal's family attempted to re-impose a strict silence on discussing the topic after he came out as gay in order to preserve a comforting fiction that his homosexuality had been just a passing phase. By refusing to discuss his sexuality, they can avoid any explicit re-confirmation of it, and hope that it will disappear. Bilal has also complicitly co-operated with this façade maintenance by keeping silent:

> From that time [of experiencing problems after coming out to his family], I felt that I had to just…completely pretend that this fade away. And I think I succeeded. Everyone now thinks that this is a stage and passed…And all the conversation happened between me and my family, is based on when am I gonna find the right girl to marry…and I think they have the impression that this is just a phase. And I think they are naive to that extent [laughs]. [Bilal, 27 years old, gay]

This strategy by Bilal's family can be seen as a collusive attempt by all parties to virtually 'render the [previous] disclosure unheard altogether' and allow the continuance of otherwise ordinary family relationships (Acosta, 2010, p. 79) by

allowing a sexual silence to be re-imposed. A gay son like Bilal is thus in a 'paradoxical space: being simultaneously "out" and in the closet' (Valentine, Skelton and Butler, 2003, p. 494). Phellas (2005) has written how such circumstances may, on the surface, appear to illustrate a quiet tolerance of the son or sibling's sexuality, but, in fact, this is the opposite, a denial of it, where the son is only welcome as long as he does not raise the issue of his sexuality. As a consequence, this can psychologically reinforce a stigmatised self-image within the gay individual.

Further evidence of parental denial can also be seen in Ibrahim's conversation with his mother, who, like Bilal's parents, tries to view her 26 year old son's homosexuality not as a permanent condition but a temporary aberration, and that he will eventually become heterosexual again:

> She said that we all go through phases and that's something that she was sure I was over by now…she just wanted to hear me say that [it] was something I did, and it was something that…I'm over, or I regret. [Ibrahim, 26 years old, MSM]

Her strategy here seems to be one of psychological denial to avoid experiencing her own cognitive dissonance that would likely be produced through self-acknowledging her son's sexuality. Such denial can certainly have the advantageous function of providing a psychological 'buffer zone, [which can allow] parents to regain their bearings and equilibrium' (Savin-Williams, 2001, pp. 37-38). Fahad's parents, to whom he has already come out, seem willing to tolerate his sexuality, provided they can keep blotted out from their minds any images of sexual activity between him and his boyfriend and not be overtly reminded of it:

> With my previous boyfriend who I was living [with] in the flat above my parents…they said, 'you know, he can come and visit, but he can't spend the nights'…So, I said, 'I'm sorry. I'm not living in *your* flat. I'm living in my own. And they said, 'We don't care'…[T]hey couldn't handle the fact that there was a guy spending the night in my bed. [Fahad, 45 years old, gay]

As indicated in Chapter Two, there may be various reasons which underlie the use of the kind of denial strategies used by participants' parents described above. They might be indicative of a self-protective mechanism to stave off feelings of loss and mourning for the child they thought they knew, and to blank out the saddening thought that their child will not marry and have a family and so they won't become grandparents (LaSala, 2010; Savin-Williams, 2001), or else to suppress feelings of anxiety and guilt that they might have contributed to causing their son's homosexuality by somehow being ineffective parents (LaSala, 2010; Savin-Williams, 2001). As we have seen, sons' desires to protect their parents from experiences of hurt is a reason why they do not disclose to them (Savin-Williams, 2001).

5.4.3. Pressure to marry heterosexually

There was evidence that even when parents become aware of their son's homosexuality, in order to maintain reputation in the wider Arab Muslim community, they may actually conspire in helping to create and preserve a sexual silence that aims to prevent others from finding out about their son's sexuality, signalling a willingness to tolerate the son's homosexuality in return for his co-operation. They may advise him that he can compartmentalise his life, passing as heterosexual to others by marrying and maintaining outward 'respectability', thereby fulfilling cultural and religious obligations, and living up to a hegemonic Islamic masculinity by continuing the family name via marriage and procreation (Boellstorff, 2005b; Murray, 1997), whilst also leading a secretive and discrete gay lifestyle, as Salem explains:

> Fulfil your duty, and then, what you do after, we don't give a damn. Produce children, support your wife…financially, and then, if you wanna be in love with a man, it's alright, it doesn't matter, we don't care. But you must fulfil your duty. [Salem, 24 years old, gay]

Fahad was outraged by his parents' suggestion that he get married and live a double life after he came out to them, and he expressed his concern to them for the welfare of a wife who would be the unwitting, innocent victim of an elaborate deception:

> [They said] 'Well, there are others, and they get married, and they just have their life.' And I'm like, 'Seriously? You have a daughter, my sister. Would you like her to get married to a gay guy who then cheats on her with tons of guys?' And they're like, 'No,' 'So, why would you let me to do that to another girl?' I'd rather live the truth of what is me, which is my life. I'm not gonna live somebody else's life, or pretend to be something, as if I'm embarrassed about who I am. [Fahad, 45 years old, gay]

These kinds of parental reactions seem to illustrate how Muslim families may actively cultivate 'a will not to know' regarding homosexuality (Murray, 2007). Ash has also had direct familial pressure to get married, but he resisted it, since he is aware of and determined to avoid what he sees as the potential extremely negative consequences:

> I was almost forced to marry. But…I was quite lucky that I stood up for myself…I've got Arab and Muslim gay friends, who are in their late forties and early fifties, that got married at a young, early age and then they couldn't survive the marriage…because of their sexual orientation. And in the end, it came out, and it was so painful to them…that, in fact, some of them would go to the lengths of committing suicide…I do know one or two cases like that…I was brave enough that I had a bit of support from someone…and I just didn't get married at all. [Ash, 37 years old, gay]

Jaspal (2014b) has written how in some cases, '[t]he pressure to enter a heterosexual marriage may be so potent…that the cultural expectation amounts to a…coercive, form of forced marriage' (p.444), and it seems that Ash was fortunate to avoid this consequence. The words of Fahad and Ash above (the former being born in, and the latter having grown up in the U.K.) appear to highlight that, in their cases, at least, they were able to assert their own agency and successfully prioritise their wishes over issues of familial honour, possibly because they and the family structure have been subject to the influence of processes of greater individualisation, choice and a democratisation of intimacy within families said to be at work in Western

countries in late modernity (Giddens, 1992; Jamieson, 1998; Yip, 2004a), causing a shift from deferential attitudes to parental authority to greater negotiation, bargaining and reasoning of roles and respect (Giddens, 1992; Jamieson, 1998; Yip, 2004a), within more egalitarian relationships (Giddens, 1992).

5.4.4. Pressure to 'change' their sexual identity

A second common reaction of family members after being disclosed to, or them having found out about their relative's sexuality, was to pressurise him to somehow change his sexuality. On the one hand, they imagined that their relative could do this through a process of self-denial, removing homosexual thoughts from his mind. The reaction of Bilal's family typifies this:

> She [his sister] said, 'No, no. This is wrong. Dismiss everything like that. Don't ever think like that…My mother said, 'No, no. Why are you feeling this? You should always dismiss these ideas.' And my father would call me from times to times and preach me to say…'Dismiss all these idea, and don't [act on this]'…They will take the shortest way to deal with it. 'Well, religion says this is wrong' then, they will say, 'Forget about it and try to change it. End of the subject.' [Bilal, 27 years old, gay]

Philip describes his father's reaction thus: 'Well, he handed me seven *Viagra* pills and told me to try it with a woman, and maybe I'll change my mind.' Such a statement indicates the father considers that his son can be cured of his homosexuality by performing a traditional heteronormative gender role for men by penetrating a female, and thereby magically recovering his masculinity. The quotes above from Bilal and Philip also appear to confirm Whitaker's (2011) assertion that, in Arab Muslim cultures, a prevalent view is that sexual orientation is voluntary, and therefore homosexuality is an intentionally deviant behaviour, perhaps as a result of being corrupted by the sexual mores of white Western cultural influences.

Some families felt the son's homosexuality could be changed through medical counselling. Whitaker, (2011) claims that homosexuality viewed as a mental disease and curable by psychiatric counselling is a common discourse in Middle Eastern

Muslim societies (Interestingly, Valentine, Skelton and Butler [2003] found similar beliefs in non-Muslim families in the U.K.). This assumption about the possibility of 'restraightening' and thus righting a supposedly broken or defective sexual orientation, just as damaged limbs are repaired in a medical operation, is reflected in the actions of my interviewee Bilal's family, who consulted psychiatrists about their son's condition. These recommended waiting to see if he could change voluntarily, and, if not, that he should then adopt a celibate lifestyle. During this time, Bilal experienced internal conflict, wrestling with contradictory thoughts and emotions:

> I felt guilty, 'Someone help me. I need to get out of this' although deep inside of me, when I'm on my own, I feel like I don't want to change myself, I like it…but I feel like it's so much pressure or such a heavy burden that I want to change it, and because it's abnormal. [Bilal, 27 years old, gay]

5.4.5. The deterioration of family relationships

Another significant effect of disclosure was how family relationships were sometimes felt to have deteriorated, either temporarily or irrevocably (as noted earlier, fear of this consequence was an important reason some interviewees had avoided disclosure). Ibrahim describes the situation with his brother, who had discovered compromising photographs on his computer and reported it to their mother:

> I just felt betrayed. If I'd have found anything, I'd have asked him about it first, and not just gone straight to mum, because, for me, it was the most damaging thing in our relationship…It means that our relationship never will be the same…ever. And that's quite sad. [Ibrahim, 26 years old, MSM]

Ibrahim says that he and his brother never now discuss topics about sex and relationships. In addition, he perceives that his relationship with his mother has changed and become less close, and he also talked about having to sever connections on social networks with family members so that they can no longer

access details about his personal and social life. For Yaaqub, the atmosphere in the home changed in that he came under increased parental monitoring:

> At the time, I was going out to clubs and bars...and I was having contact with men on *Gaydar* etcetera, so I was kind of living my life. But I was restricted. I had to be home by a certain time, and if I'm not ...my mum would call me. I remember once, I had like eighteen missed calls in two hours. [Yaaqub, 27 years old, gay]

Such a response of rigid rule imposition is more typical of 'positional', authoritarian family structures which can result in the son being infantilised, being seen as at risk or vulnerable due to his sexuality (Valentine, Skelton and Butler, 2003). To escape the strict monitoring and restrictions, Yaaqub chose to leave his home city and move to another, (an example of intra-national gay migration, whose most common form is an urban-urban movement according to Gorman-Murray, [2007]).

5.5. Supportive Family Responses to Disclosure

Gorman-Murray (2008) rightly criticises most of the literature on family reactions to coming out for focusing only on the negative ones of trauma, anguish and hostility. He asserts that some heterosexual relatives challenge hegemonic heteronormativity by actually welcoming sexual difference, without feeling their own identity is threatened. In fact they do not behave and think in ways that reproduce essentialist, heterosexist and homophobic norms. The quotes from the participants below are a good illustration of this, and a corrective to the predominantly negative coming out experiences depicted in the LGBT Muslim literature. There was evidence of positive reactions and strong inter-personal relationships in Fahad's family:

> My mum told all her brothers and sisters, and therefore all my cousins on that side know, and it's completely fine…Not a problem. They love me to death. My aunt invited me and Simon [Fahad's partner] to her daughter's wedding…as a couple. Not a problem…He [his brother] was fine, no problem…He's my younger brother, but he's my older brother…If I have any problems, he's the person I go

> to and talk to…He's this wise, young man…Whenever I've had any fights with Simon…I've gone to my brother…[He's] someone who's always gonna be on your side, and always looking out for you. [Fahad, 45 years old, gay]

Ali describes the very positive and supportive attitude of his uncle and aunt who even adopted the role of surrogate parents when he became estranged from his natural family after disclosure:

> My mother has one brother, who was the most supportive. I moved out at 14 into my uncle's house where I lived for two years…He took the role as parent…The whole family was so supportive of me being there, I almost never wanted to leave. The mum always made sure I had the same life, if not better, that my parents gave me, and they always kept me included in the family events and dinners so it's not like I was just living in a room at their house. He financially supported me, as well, which was important because I was only 14 or 15 at the time...He really helped me get accepted into college, helped expose me to other open minded Arabs who had no problem with gays…He also did not speak to my parents for years simply because how they treated me and what they did to me. My uncle was from the same Muslim background as my mother, yet was hundred percent supportive from the start, so it really goes to show that every person is different, and people cannot categorize a whole culture, religion to treat people a certain way. [Ali, 20 years old, gay]

Some family reactions were more neutral, fairly nonchalant and displayed a lack of surprise, as in Laith's case:

> They didn't really react. It was like, 'Okay. Well, yeah, kind of knew. But we're just waiting for you to tell us'…I guess I'm lucky…considering our background…and considering some stories I've heard…[that] they got kicked out, or things like that. [Laith, 30 years old, gay]

This type of reaction from Laith and Fahad's relatives certainly contradict the 'grief and mourning' initial stage of parental reactions in traditional coming out models (see Chapter Two for more information about these), highlighting that family reactions are not inevitably and universally traumatic, aggressive or vengeful as such models tend to suggest (Savin-Williams, 2001). Savin-Williams thus appears correct to assert that 'parental reactions to […] disclosure appear to be individualized, diverse, and complex' (p. 53).

5.6. Coming Out as a Process

Hetherington and Lavner (2008) argue that much research into the coming out process focuses only on outcomes during the initial revelation period without exploring if outcomes change and if families adjust longitudinally, and I would argue that this omission is also generally true in studies of LGBT Muslims. Useful here would be the application of Butler and Astbury's (2005) developmental continuum, describing a parental reactive sequence that may move from initial upset to eventual acceptance of their son/daughter's orientation. D'Amico, Tremblay and Chartrand (2015) cite some of the limited empirical research in this area, indicating that parents' initially negative reactions gradually dissipate over time, as they reconcile themselves to their child's sexuality. Consistent with these findings, some parents of the participants in my study gradually became much more accepting, so the relationship naturally evolved in a more positive direction, indicating that coming out is not about a specific 'once only' event, but rather is processual, and that time may be required for parents to reconcile themselves with the revelation that their son is gay. Fahad mentioned how his mother initially cried and was anxious that he might go to hell on his death, but as time passed, accepted his long-term gay relationship to the extent that, when he and his male partner broke up, she encouraged him to try to resolve their differences and re-establish the relationship. He describes how his father's reaction also changed:

> It took dad years after, to be able to do that [come to terms with his son's sexuality]…But he did…He's just like, you know, 'What you do behind closed doors is your own business, nobody else's business.'

> He's maybe basically trying to say, 'I love you.' [Fahad, 45 years old, gay]

Salem's relationship with his brother who had initially threatened him with a knife eventually improved again:

> We just said that maybe we should just put aside things that had happened, and start off, and that we're brothers, and there's no way we can cut relations with each other…We have to be humane with each other. And he's actually alright with me now. [Salem, 24 years old, gay]

Not all parents came around to accepting their son's sexuality in the longer term however (Philip still had a totally estranged relationship with his mother, six years after the disclosure).

Overall then, while a small minority of relatives reacted to the sexuality revelation positively and tolerantly, the majority reacted negatively initially, sometimes with aggression or violence, but in a good number of cases, the negative reactions have subsided over time as more tolerant approaches take over, and relatives try to salvage formerly close-knit and harmonious relationships.

5.7. Summary

This chapter has considered the intersection of gay Arab Muslim men's sexual, cultural and religious identities within the context of family and kin relationships, and 'sexual silence' has been a key theme. Many participants have not revealed their sexuality to family members due to the following reasons: their awareness that they need to protect family honour and the family's reputational status within the wider Arab Muslim community; their experience of homophobic attitudes from family members which means they fear homonegative reactions including disownment if they came out; and finally, they value the close and good interpersonal relationships that the family has provided them with in their lives, and are worried about a deterioration in the closeness of such relationships if they break the silence and come out as gay. Therefore, in an attempt to maintain this silence and avoid

disclosure and its potentially harmful consequences, they have used the strategies of compartmentalising their lives and passing as heterosexual. Passing, however, has often had the negative outcome of family members pressuring them to marry heterosexually and engaging in matchmaking, and passing has influenced dating choices through the need to find romantic partners willing to be complicit in concealment. These experiences have increased stress. Strategies to reduce this have included: leaving the family home, or, for those living in Muslim majority countries who had sufficient economic and/or cultural capital to do so, migration to the U.K., in a quest to find a location far away from their families, in a country perceived to be more tolerant of homosexuality and, where their sexuality would not need to be silenced; and seeking support from LGBT Muslim support groups or fellow gay Arab Muslim men. Deploying these kinds of identity management strategies demonstrates that participants are able to express some degree of agency, though they are still often locked into lives of secrecy and deception.

When the sexual silence has been broken, either voluntarily or involuntarily, family responses have been extremely negative, including homophobic anger, threats of and actual physical violence, ostracism, deteriorating closeness of relationships and pressure to 'change' their sexuality, breeding negative feelings about the self within the gay individual. On a positive note, not all families or all family members have reacted in a negative way to the disclosure. A small number resisted and refused to adopt the dominant heterosexist and homophobic discourses circulating in Arab Muslim communities and cultures; they have been supportive and maintained close and warm relations with their gay relative after disclosure. It also seems that with time, some family members who initially reacted in a negative manner gradually have become somewhat more tolerant. Sometimes harmonious family relationships are sustained through a mutual closeting of the topic after disclosure. Some participants feel that the breaking of the silence means they no longer have to experience negative consequences of passing and that they are leading more 'authentic' lives.

CHAPTER SIX: LIVING OUT GAY ARAB MUSLIM IDENTITIES IN PREDOMINANTLY-WHITE SPACES

6.1. Introduction

In Chapter Four I discussed how the interviewees experience the intersections of their Arab, gay and Muslim identities at an individual level. This was followed, in Chapter Five, by starting to broaden the analytical focus out beyond the purely personal realm to focus more on the interpersonal, specifically, the outcomes of interactions with close family and kin in family spaces, to examine how these interactions intersect with and affect my participants' lived identities as gay Muslims. In this chapter, the focus of enquiry expands further outwards from family space to the wider white-dominant spaces of the social environment that gay Arab Muslim men traverse and spend much of their time in. The dominance of Whiteness in these spaces is reflective of the broader racial make-up of the British population, where 86% identified as white in the 2011 census (ONS 2012). Furthermore, my participants' religious identities are minority ones within these spaces. In light of this, I am interested in investigating the specific effects on their lived experiences produced by the intersection of their racial, ethnic and religious identities with such spaces. I argue that these intersections operate in complex and contextually contingent ways, producing positive or (more frequently) negative effects, depending on the space and the people interacted with.

The spaces I focus on are 'gay scene' entertainment venues such as bars and nightclubs that are largely oriented towards and patronised by a LGBT clientele, and cyberspace with its (gay-oriented) dating websites such as www.Gaydar.co.uk www.Manjam.com, and www.Planetromeo.com which my participants access within the U.K. to find profiles of and send messages to other gay/bisexual/MSM males. Gay venues represent a 'geographical scale' that is useful for analysing gay sexual relationships (Brown, Browne and Lim, 2009; Johnston and Longhurst, 2010), with the scale being that of a 'community' and which represents 'the intersection between a range of different people and places' (Johnston and Longhurst, 2010, p. 6) and which helps highlight the very particular social interrelationships, interactions, (power) dynamics and perspectives *distinct to particular types of places*, that are being enacted and that materialise themselves when different people come together

inside specific locations (Brown, 2000; Valentine, 2001). In this chapter, I will also discuss non-gay white spaces, understood as any other white-dominant urban social locations and environments *excluding* gay white spaces. Warner (2008) has said that analysing the effects of intersectionality on identities is best done through investigating the social practices that construct such identities, and in my study, usage of gay dating websites and participation in gay scene venues are two examples of such social practices that are considered in detail. I aim to provide examples of the discourses and practices which generate hierarchising and marginalising power dynamics (Caudwell, 2011) that shape the experiences of my gay Arab Muslim interviewees as they negotiate gay scene and cyber-spaces.

6.2. The Gay Scene

In this section, I document the frequency and nature of my participants' contact with the gay scene, examining the reasons for visiting or not visiting its spaces.

Among the participants, (almost all of whom live in very large U.K. cities) only a very small number said they had never or rarely visited the gay scene. For those who still visit it, many typically speak of their visits declining over the years, as the novelty gradually wore off. Idris describes how, on first arriving in London, a trip to the gay scene was an exciting proposition, offering a hitherto absent outlet to explore his sexual identity:

> God, it was like Disneyland for me [laughs] being unrestricted and coming up to Soho, where everything was so open and easily acceptable. I tried *everything*, believe me...That's probably why I was more active on the scene when I was new to London. But now...it can take a back seat. [Idris, 34 years old, homosexual]

As discussed in Chapter Two, the gay scene provides important networking, relationship, and mutual support opportunities, allowing LGBT people to understand meanings and norms around their sexual identities, and to find self-affirmation and a sense of belonging in the exchange of experiences. And for many of my participants, the gay scene does clearly perform such an important social function, in that they

can enter spaces where they can simply relax, feel at ease in their sexual identities, and 'have fun' by socialising with existing gay friends, as well as making new ones:

> Most of friends [go] there, we meet there, and they live near that place, and it's very central to everyone...and it's a very relaxing and friendly [place]...You talk to people and you meet people there...so it's nice to go there.' [Fethi, 36 years old, gay]

I previously dicussed how LGBT Muslim online and offline support groups fulfil a very similar function (see Chapter Four). At the same time, gay scene spaces are also viewed as offering the possibility to meet sexual partners:

> I will not pretend I'm here *just* for a chat with my friends, because otherwise, I can go to a straight bar, if I really wanna have a conversation with my friends, and not look around. That would be very hypocritical of me to say. [Amine, 38 years old, gay]

Indeed, several participants mention preferring to meet other gay men for potential sexual encounters/relationships face to face than online, gay scene venues providing a valuable outlet for this. Many, though, prefer to visit gay pubs/bars than nightclubs, because these are seen as quieter, more sedate spaces and more conducive to socialising and meeting potential partners/boyfriends. On the other hand, a major motivation for visiting gay clubs is the music played and/or the opportunity to dance.

In terms of those interviewees who had never visited or else now avoided the gay scene, they tended to cite the same negative factors as reasons. Some lamented they had no-one to go with, and might therefore feel self-conscious and shy attending on their own. Some have become bored with the bars and clubs. Additionally, there was criticism of the prevalence of excessive alcohol consumption, which is consistent with attitudes expressed by LGBT Muslims in Yip (2005c). Sometimes, the fact that participants themselves were teetotal made them feel awkward on the scene about the behaviour of intoxicated clientele they experience:

> [On] the gay scene...people are just looking for sex and they get drunk and I don't drink, you know. And for somebody who doesn't

> drink...all you find is drunk people, trying to take you to their house and have sex with you...[I]t's not something I feel comfortable with. [Idris, 34 years old, homosexual]

There were also criticisms about the music in clubs being loud or not to their taste. Furthermore, there were complaints about the frequent presence and abuse of drugs in venues. My interviewees' anxieties in this respect might appear to have some foundation since Stall *et al*. (2001) similarly document how young MSM commonly associate gay bar venues with widespread drug and alcohol abuse, while Grov *et al*.'s (2013) study of gay men in the U.S. found that concern about drug use in these venues was second only to that of HIV and STDs. Greenwood *et al*. (2001) depict a correlation between visiting gay bars and consuming various drugs, and Grov, Rendina and Parsons (2014) empirically document that young American males who patronise commercial gay venues have high use of hallucinogens, crack and cocaine.

A further common criticism of gay scene bars and clubs by my interviewees (typified by Salem's comment below) was that they are considered overtly and highly sexualised spaces that encourage licentious and promiscuous behaviour, (sometimes enacted on the premises itself):

> If you go to the gay scene, it's very trashy, it's full of drugs, it's full of sex. It's more like the red light district...If you go into the toilets there, people are fondling with each other. It reminds me of some sort of bar in some brothel area...I went into a bar on Old Compton Street. I walked in, had a drink, needed to go to the toilet, but I had hands touching me left, right and centre [in the toilet]. And that's not nice. [Salem, 24 years old, gay]

This depiction of casual and promiscuous sex as characteristic of gay scene venues reflects what Kates (2002) describes as the 'excess of sexual imagery and meaning...[of such] commercial institutions [which are]...devoted exclusively to the satisfaction of gay male sexual desire' (p. 387) with much explicit talk about all aspects of sex (Kates, 2002). My findings contrast with Flowers, Marriot and Hart (2000) who found that monitoring by peers, as well as self-monitoring and

impression management (Goffman, 1959) produced a tacit code of 'proper' conduct among Glasgow gay bar patrons so that they did not use these public spaces for sexual recreation, for fear of acquiring the stigmatising label of sexual promiscuity.

Related to the idea of 'monitoring', the gay scene is depicted by one of my participants as populated by those who constantly judge and evaluate the appearance of others. Green (2011) adopting Goffman's (1959) idea of *fronts*, argues this monitoring of physical appearance shapes and reinforces a hierarchical 'structure of desire' within the gay scene, whereby those conforming to a certain prescribed look are deemed more attractive and thus valued more than those whose appearance deviates from the norm. According to Drummond (2006, p. 60) gay men are 'immersed in an aesthetic driven culture' and are greatly concerned about body image, while Flowers, Marriot and Hart (2000) and Kates (2002) describe the unwritten rules of gay scene consumption as a competitive striving to display status via body image, such as in dress-sense. Hashim rebels against these norms and therefore experiences negative sanctions:

> [W]alking into Soho [gay district in London]...you've got a lot of people who are very, very well-dressed, or dressed to the nines, and they're looking at you, and the judgement comes out...[I]t's an extremely judgemental place, and it's very blatantly judgmental, as well. So, people will just really stare at you either in disgust, or in bemusement. I'll wear what I'm wearing now, and I'll go to the scene [in] a hoodie, and black jeans and dodgy trainers. I don't have to wear a tiny, net tank top or something. [Hashim, 26 years old, bisexual]

Related to appearance, for some of my participants, the intersection of their age and sexuality also characterised how they positioned themselves relative to the gay scene; they felt they had naturally transitioned beyond the phase of going to gay nightclubs, perceiving themselves as too old:

> I mean, Central London, *G.A.Y.* [club] and all these places, you feel like a grandpa, because they're so young. They are like sixteen year olds all around. You feel really bad. You don't enjoy it anymore. At

some point...I thought, like, I'm the oldest person in this whole club. I'm not staying here. [Philip, 38 years old, gay]

Philip's comment also connects with Green's (2011) and Slevin and Mowery's (2012) observations that hegemonic images and attitudes promoting ideal gay desirability firmly emphasise youthfulness. Casey (2009) argues that a cause of this is capitalist processes that increasingly commercialise, gentrify, and mainstream gay spaces, creating pressure to generate 'homonormative' (Duggan 2002) representations of a gay community, where only *certain* images and representations of LGBT people are deemed respectable and valued (i.e. the young and beautiful). The gay community has been called particularly ageist by Cahill, South and Spade (2000). Casey (2009), Cronin and King (2014) and Simpson (2013) have empirically found that older gay men are positioned as sexually undesirable and experience feelings of alienation and social exclusion in Western gay communities. Furthermore, Campbell (2004) identifies an obsession with bodyism in gay scenes, where the idealised hegemonic masculine form is fit, athletic and youthful. Hakim (2011) argues that one of the reasons for this is because of the generally short term nature of gay relationships and high turnover of partners, which means there is a constant quest to look for and evaluate the sexual attractiveness of potential new partners. Those of my participants who commented on gay scene ageism tended to mitigate its effects by frequenting pubs and bars (rather than gay clubs), which were often considered more suitable gay scene venues for their ages. Interestingly, there may be a gender dimension to LGBT ageism, since lesbians perceive lesbian-oriented spaces and communities as placing less importance on age/being less ageist (Heaphy, 2009; Heaphy, Yip and Thompson, 2004; van de Ven *et al*, 1997).

To sum up, there are clearly both positive and negative factors that influence my interviewees' participation in gay scene spaces. On the plus side, such spaces are valued for facilitating the acquisition of social capital through opportunities for friendship formation, networking, and sexual identity affirmation. They also offer opportunities for meeting men for romantic/sexual purposes. Off-putting factors include perceived excessive drug and alcohol consumption and sexually promiscuous behaviour in venues, and ageist attitudes. Having examined gay Arab Muslims' contact with the gay scene, I now move on to discuss their experiences

within a different kind of gay space, cyberspace, and their use of gay dating websites.

6.3. Dating Websites

I begin this section by analysing the frequency and nature of my interviewees' use of these websites, and outline what they feel are the advantages and disadvantages of using them.

Grosskopf, LeVasseur and Glaser (2014) found that, in their sample of 126 American MSM, 55% used such dating sites at least once a day, and Mustanski, Lyons and Garcia (2011) also document a high frequency of daily use. In my own study, the websites are visited very regularly by the majority of men. In terms of my participants' usage, they are accessed by the vast majority of men in the sample, which is unsurprising, since almost all participants were recruited through private messages on these websites. Two interviewees said they had been visiting these sites for over a decade (in one case, since 1996). They are accessed daily by several; one accesses them several times a day, claiming they are addictive. Others have phases where they use them daily for a period, but then become bored and avoid using them for a while. Some use them 'a few times' a week, while in one extremely atypical case, they were visited only approximately once a year.

Of the 35 participants, only two stated that they had never used the sites. These argued that visiting the gay scene was a more personable, sociable and enjoyable way to meet other gay men, offering more 'real' or genuine encounters, as Khalid mentions:

> I've never been on these sites...[I]t's just out of my comfort zone, to be honest. I don't feel comfortable posting a picture of me and information about myself...I don't think it's a good way to socialise. It's not as good as meeting people in person...face to face...I did go out by myself before, and I socialised with so many people...cos it's easier for me to approach people this way...rather than send a message and wait. [Khalid, 26 years old, gay]

One reason some participants gave for not attending the physical spaces of the gay scene is that they think cyberspace offers them an equally good substitute for forming gay friendships. Gudulenas (2012) has also highlighted how visiting dating websites facilitates gay men's acquisition of social capital by helping them make friends (as mentioned earlier, this motivation was also a reason for some interviewees visiting the bars and clubs of the gay scene). In my own study, one function of dating websites, as stated by four participants, was to meet new gay friends or like minded individuals. Three even said they had met their best friends on these websites.

Several of the advantages of online dating mentioned by my interviewees match those of the '7A Engine' theoretical model (McKie, Lachowsky and Milhausen, 2015) that has analysed the popularity of this form of dating. The model started off as 'The Triple A Engine' (Cooper, 1998) which listed the criteria *accessibility*, *affordability* and *anonymity*. Four extra 'A's were subsequently added to Cooper's model: King (1999) added 'acceptability' (e.g. the greater level of tolerance online of non-mainstream sexual interests), Ross and Kauth (2002) added 'approximation' i.e. the degree of established truthfulness of online representations by others. McKie, Lachowsky and Milhausen (2015) added 'assessment', which they define as 'the ability to pre-screen potential mates and assess compatibility' (p. 29) and 'affirmation', defined as 'the ability to explore and confirm one's [sexual] identity using technology' (p. 29).

Finkel *et al*. (2012) McKie, Lachowsky and Milhausen (2015) Ross *et al*. (2007) and Rosser *et al*. (2011) emphasise how, online dating has a fundamental advantage over more traditional means of dating in its unique convenience and speed of access to potential partners. Consistent with this, my participants view these websites as providing an easier, more practical, energy and time-saving method of meeting other gay and bisexual men (also reflecting the 'accessibility' component of the 7A Engine):

> [Y]ou fill out a profile, you know immediately what they're like, or...at least what they're into, so half the work is done. You see a profile, 'Oh, he likes this type of music. So, do I.' There's something immediately we have in common, whereas, if you go to a gay bar,

> you've got to do all the asking the questions. [Tariq, 32 years old, bicurious]

A further advantage of gay men using the Internet to contact each other identified by Brown, Maycock and Burns (2005) is the perceived safety and discretion it offers, minimising the risk of public disclosure of their homosexuality. At least two of my interviewees also cited the value of the discreteness offered by online contact, (reflecting the 'anonymity' component of the '7A engine' theoretical model), stating they deliberately avoid any contact with gay scene venues such as bars and clubs for fear of being recognised.

Some specific websites are preferred by my participants because of the perceived advantages they offer such as unlimited, free messages, or when they require detailed profiles (a profile that needed a lot of time to create is seen as a more likely sign that a potential partner was serious about romance), or when they are considered less sexually charged (again an advantage for those looking primarily for relationships rather than 'hook ups'). Finkel *et al*. (2012) have similarly pointed out that the patrons of online dating websites may prefer the 'culture or brand at some sites more than others' (p. 15) such as whether the ethos of the site is geared to encouraging longer term relationships or casual sex, or whether or not one has to pay fees to join. *Grindr*, a location centred, GPS (Global Positioning System) technology detailing the physical proximity of other users (Raj, 2011) was particularly mentioned by my interviewees for its benefits of saving time and offering mobility:

> [M]ost of time, I go to *Grindr*...because it's easy, it's on my phone...Even when I'm on a bus, when I'm walking the street, I check. When I go to different area, when I go to the coffee shop, I check. [Harun, 32 years old, gay]

Related to Harun's comment, Blackwell, Birnholz and Abbot (2015) Van de Weile and Tong (2014) and Visser (2013) argue a consequence of using mobile applications like *Grindr* is that the spatial restrictions of traditional meeting points and venues such as the gay bar in the gay village are transcended and re-imagined through a new emphasis on proximity and immediate meetings, and as a result, gay sociality is increasingly moving into predominantly heteronormative spaces.

Similarly, Tudor (2012) argues *Grindr* 'queers' heteronormative space and Mowlabocus (2010) writes how mobile dating applications facilitate 'queer congregation', the process of gay men becoming aware of and recognising each other in heteronormative spaces, providing positive affective factors such as feelings of sexual communality, reassurance and reinforcing ontological security (factors further reflecting the 'affirmation' element of the '7A engine').

Another advantage of using dating websites cited by two participants who had shyer and/or less sociable personalities was that meeting online initially was an easier and less stressful way than meeting face to face on the gay scene. Hashim's comment is typical:

> For me, who I'm not a people person, it [meeting people online] works, because I don't have to strike up some very awkward conversation in a very awkward manner, and get an awkward response and then just stand there very awkwardly, in an awkward silence, as I probably would at a bar...I think there's a big mental block when you're actually doing it in person...[W]ith websites, you've got time to actually sit there and think about your responses, whereas in a bar, you have to appear like you're [clicks fingers] ...You have to [be] on the ball...and if you're not a people person, it's very hard. [Hashim, 26 years old, bisexual]

Despite the aforementioned perceived benefits for gay/bisexual and MSM males using dating websites to meet, these sites are also considered to have several disadvantages for users. Firstly, one or two participants argue that they *waste* rather than save time:

> [I]t's time consuming. You have to connect yourself and sit down in front of your computer, and browse profiles, and check if you have messages. And then, you have to reply, and sometimes you really don't know what to reply. [Laith, 30 years old, gay]

> There's a lot of crap you have to kind of filter through, as well, weird requests, weird guys...like, 'Please let me buy your socks.' Okay. Block! [Hashim, 26 years old, bisexual]

McKie, Lachowsky and Milhausen (2015) likewise suggest that the process of browsing through many online profiles is time consuming and not especially enjoyable, while Finkel *et al*. (2012) investigating online daters generally, quantified this time, and found that 5.2 hours per week was typically spent simply on browsing profiles and 6.7 per week hours responding to messages, and Frost *et al*. (2008) mention that similar hours of effort only result in 1.8 hours of actual off-line face to face contact.

A second drawback is that, while some of my participants say that they had enjoyed fulfilling offline relationships that developed from online contacts, the majority have come to the conclusion that the prospect of becoming involved in a longer term relationship (as opposed to casual encounters and one night stands), despite their desire for one, is remote. Their attitudes reveal great cynicism and disillusionment:

> It's not really easy to find someone online and have a relationship with them...I don't like doing sex for just sex...And I reach a point where I don't think it works, for me a least...so I stopped really looking. [Nasser, 27 years old, gay]

> Having joined two or three over the years my current view is rather cynical about them as such websites are only good for hooking up and casual encounters...A very small proportion are seeking long terms relationships. [Yassir, 38 years old, gay]

Such frustration about encountering people on dating websites who are only interested in sex rather than relationships is consistent with the views of young MSM participants in Kubicek *et al*. (2011) and Brubaker, Annany and Crawford (2016). Ross *et al*. (2007) even claim that the use of gay dating websites for the purpose of fast casual encounters means that they function, in effect, mostly like anonymous offline gay *cruising* venues such as bathhouses, parks and public toilets.

The comments of my participants above also seem to reflect arguments propounded by Bauman (2003) who describes in highly negative terms, how intimacy in late modernity is focused on hyper-individualism, and that online dating websites can be seen as evidence of a disposability culture, a type of consumerism which stresses instant gratification, where relationships, or 'connections', in Bauman's terminology, are easily begun and quickly ended and forgotten, producing weak and fragile bonds between humans (that devalue love and intimacy), rather than long term relations. Sex and people become just another commodity to be self-gratifyingly and quickly consumed within the market of sexual exchange under objectifying and fetishising gazes (Bauman 2003; Bech, 1997) within a process of 'relationshopping' (Heino, Ellison and Gibbs, 2010). Online sexual/romantic relationships of the type that my participants complain about can arguably be said to epitomise Antony Gidden's 'pure relationships' (Hardey, 2002; Henderson and Gilding, 2004; Valentine 2006) since they are often transient, self-oriented encounters that lack broader commitment, with fewer regulations and rituals than in the past, but also more risks (Valentine, 2006). Giddens (1992) himself views 'pure relationships' in a positive light, as liberatory, emphasising agency, begun for their own sake and maintained by each partner only as long as the investment in them is felt to be beneficial for themselves. Jaspal (2017b) certainly found that, as far as gay men are concerned, they have greater numbers of casual sexual encounters from contacts established online compared to contacts established offline.

A further major disadvantage of using dating websites can be the contrast between online appearances and offline reality. On the one hand, Davis *et al*. (2006) argue gay men on dating websites spend considerable effort trying to anchor the real within the virtual, to ensure that they are able to move the online interaction into an anticipated fruitful offline face to face meeting. To this end, they try to present *as real* an image as possible of themselves, engaging in only very minimal deception (Toma, Hancock and Ellison [2008] p. 474). The latter point matches the 'approximation' element of the '7A engine', described earlier, as well as one of Goffman's (1983) 'interaction order' rules, where self-protection, harm prevention and trust building strategies, pre-empt any possibility for negative reactions in any real-life follow up offline meeting, when untruths can easily be uncovered. On the other hand, Toma, Hancock and Ellison (2008) argue that the innate competitive pressure on dating websites, with millions of members, ensures that deception is

sometimes resorted to, to make a person seem as attractive as possible to potential sexual mates. And Green (2011), Finkel *et al*. (2012) and Kubiceck *et al*. (2011) have argued that much 'front work' to impression manage such as using outdated photographs of oneself to try to increase erotic capital (this term is discussed fully in the next section) is extremely common online. Related to this, Gibbs, Ellison and Heino (2006) found that more than 85% of their 349 interviewees felt that others do not truthfully describe aspects of their physical appearance online. Other researchers have identified 'deception' about appearance and character of potential partners (because of the relatively anonymous nature and large degree of control over how one presents oneself) as one of the biggest causes of concern for those dating online, especially those looking for relationships (Grov *et al*., 2008; Gibbs, Ellison and Lai 2011; Madden and Lenhart, 2006; Ross et al 2007) since individuals have the agency and opportunity to create multiple selves and identities in surrogate virtual bodies (Ross, 2005). Jaspal (2017b) documents the character-distorting impact of online dating media in that they facilitate the ability of men to present much more confident selves to potential partners than they could live up to in a subsequent real life encounter, producing in these men feelings of disconnect and unease with the image they have created online. Gibbs, Ellison and Lai (2011) sum up the situation well in that using online dating websites necessitates a continuous process of self-reflexivity, to assess the veracity of the identity claims of others, and monitor what one discloses about oneself. Some of my participants feel that, after initial cyberspace interaction, there is sometimes disappointment in a subsequent face-to-face meeting because of the actual appearance and character of the other person. The websites are felt to facilitate the presentation of a deceptive and illusory version of reality:

> How many times you've been having amazing conversations with guys and then you meet, and they're just far away from what they look on their pictures, or there's just no connection. [Ali, 20 years old, gay]

Jamal highlights an interesting phenomenon by accusing some men of deceitfully wanting to participate *only* in virtual relationships:

> I've met a lot of guys that would seemingly look like they want to date you…but, actually, they never plan to do that. And I got one to confront with me. I really begged him, I was like, 'Listen, the show is off, just stop making a fool out of yourself, and please tell me what you are here *for*.' And he basically said he doesn't allow himself to be actually with a guy ever, even as a friend…He takes pleasure out of just chatting with gay guys...I kept wanting to meet with this guy, and I kept asking him, and he kept giving excuses...I was actually very naive to believe those excuses... [But] what they're doing is really mesmerising you and really putting you deep into a relationship that's virtual. [Jamal, 22 years old]

Another criticism of the dating websites expressed by my participants was that they can become boring because the same people are always encountered. They were described by Samir as 'incestuous and cliquey', and obsessed with 'who had slept with who'.

In summary, the majority of my participants accessed dating websites regularly, and felt they offered similar benefits to gay scene venues with respect to acquiring social capital. The websites can provide an often faster, more convenient alternative method of meeting other men than gay scene venues. However, there was widespread cynicism about the possibility to develop longer term relationships from using them, and concerns about the greater potential for deception through online communications than in face to face meetings. The next section of the chapter analyses the relationship between ethnicity and sexual desirability within gay online and offline spaces.

6.4. The Erotic Capital of Arab Men in Offline and Online Gay Spaces

Here, I utilise Green's (2008a) 'sexual fields' approach, as discussed in Chapter Two, to analyse and highlight the complex relationships and power dynamics operating between gay male Arabs and non-Arab British men that play out in both gay offline and online spaces. Green (2008a) argues that the location of a social actor within a sexual field (that is, the matrix of inter-relations that gives rise to hegemonic and hierarchical power structures that construct 'tiers of desirability' and

position the individual within them) is dependent on the amount of *erotic capital* they are seen to possess. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Arab men's relative location within this hierarchy of desirability seems not to have been researched. However, my participants, recalling discussions with non-Arab website users, indicate that Arab men are positioned very high up in the order of racialised sexual preferences:

> The non-Arabs...on *Manjam* or *Gaydar*, most of the time, when they want to mention the ethnicities which they are attracted to, you find the first thing, Arabs, and after that, Mediterranean, Latino. [Walid, 31 years old, gay]

Samir mentioned that many of the profiles he views on gay dating websites state 'No Asian, looking for Arab.' and he claims that 'a lot of' South Asian men 'try to pass themselves off as Arab.' because they think they may otherwise get rejected, and since they know that Arabs are considered attractive.

Structures of desire can be physically viewed on the *fronts* of people in certain bodily traits and skin shades, which provide erotic currency (Green, 2008a), and many of my participants, when asked to explain what they perceived to be the attraction of non-Arab (white) men towards Arab men, talked of the appeal of phenotypic opposites, i.e. white skinned gay men were viewed as being erotically attracted to the stereotypical dark looks and brown skin of Arab men:

> I was told that they prefer Mediterraneans, Middle Eastern kind of look...I think it's like darker skin...This is what I got the last [white British gay] guy I was dating, yeah, this is what he said. [Nasser, 27 years old, gay]

> Because you're an Arab guy, because you're dark-skinned...it's different for them [white British men], okay. So, when you're Arab, there is something special about you. [Karim, 46 years old, bisexual]

Green (2008a) points out that an individual's erotic capital is downgraded if they do not physically conform to the ethno-racial characteristics that are collectively agreed to confer desirability on them. This phenomenon is also apparent in my

study, where one or two participants who have lighter skin indicate that in gay spaces, there are sometimes disappointed and disbelieving reactions when they tell white British men that they are Arab, since their physical appearance does not conform to the stereotypical image, as recounted by (the Lebanese) Philip:

> When I've put 'Arab' [on the online profile], I've had people accusing me of being a liar because I don't *look* Arab [in my photo]....And if you look at me, you see that they have a point...They'll be looking for olive skin complexion, with dark hair and dark eyes. I don't fit that criteria. [Philip, 38 years old, gay]

In addition to darker skin tones, many participants feel that in white British gay men's mental representations of Arab males, they are seen as both hyper-masculine and hyper-sexual. Han (2009) has documented the historically central importance and value of masculine appearance within the gay community, and in terms of the intersection of gendered and ethnic identities, the male Arab body has long been othered through exotic western orientalism as hyper-masculine, hairy, aggressive and sexually dominating (Massad, 2002; McCormick, 2011). When surmising reasons for white gay male attraction to Arab men, my participants often posit that Arab men are desired because their bodies are frequently assumed to be 'hairy', 'an iconic aspect of masculinity' according to my interviewee Samir. This connection between body hair and masculinity is also evinced by Walid:

> [Arabs] are more handsome...hairy, for example...[M]any of the gay people prefer the hairy people because it gives them more masculinity, or something like that. [Walid, 31 years old, gay]

The participants also feel that Arab men are highly desired by gay non-Arab males because of a presumed sexual potency (including frequent assumptions that Arab men have large penises) and related to this, that Arab men will invariably wish to fulfil the role of the active penetrator in the sexual act, and, further, that white British gay males fuel their sexual fantasies by perceiving and expecting Arab men to be controlling and dominating in bed:

> [British white men] have this idea, kind of fetish, Arabs are active, they're gonna just fuck you...That's like the first thing they think about. [Chakib, 35 years old, gay]

> So many [are] interested in meeting Arabs. Let's say they stereotype, they think that any Arab is hung and have a big tool. [Wail, 32 years old, gay]

This image of the hyper-sexual Arab stud is perpetuated by some of my own Arab participants such as Karim:

> I'm sorry. You can't beat an Arab when it comes to sex (laughs)... [A]n English [man] he has to be gentle sex. It's like you're not having sex...But with an Arab, it's rough, it's macho...[A]n Arab guy will not make love to you, alright? An Arab guy will not just come, hug you, kiss you, touch you. No. An Arab guy, he will just come, drop your trousers and bend you over and fuck you. That's it. He [a British gay man] wants to be the sub one, he wants to be the dominated one...cos he knows with an Arab guy, he's gonna dominate him...They have this fantasy. You talk to them, chat to them [online], but they want to tell you, 'you're an Arab guy...you're gonna have a big cock. You're gonna fuck me. You're gonna dominate me. [Karim, 46 years old, bisexual]

Some of the user names on gay dating websites also help illustrate how some Arab men are happy to play up to these stereotypes: *Arabianstallion*, *Arabianhorse2005, Arabtotaltop, Arabstud30, Arabknob, Hothungarab* to name a few.

The above points indicate that in gay spaces, for some white men, the Arab male becomes hotly desired and has high erotic capital, but that this capital is accrued from their Arabness being racially fetishised and objectified. In this respect, their position appears to be extremely similar to black men who have long been stereotyped as hyper-sexual, hyper-masculine and having very large penises (see Chapter Two). I will say more about racial fetishisation as it relates to Arab men in the next section.

While moving in online and offline white gay spaces, gay Arab Muslims will sometimes encounter their peers, and the interviewees discussed the desirability or otherwise of entering sexual/romantic relationships with fellow Arabs in the U.K. On the one hand, such partnerships could be seen as desirable because there would be a mutual understanding and appreciation of shared cultural and ethno-religious traits and traditions, and this therefore implied a possible enhancing of the potential for relationship success:

> [With a] Muslim Arab, just basically the whole cultural thing, you just don't have to deal with it, so it's kind of easier. You know, you understand the culture, you understand the traditions, you understand it's Ramadan, what is Ramadan and why it's important… [I]f I'm meeting the Arab Muslim, he probably will know the same figures as I do…So, it will be easier to talk. We have kind of similar history, we have similar upbringing…our likes and dislikes seems might be similar…and our taboos would be kind of similar. [Ehab, 38 years old, gay]

Related to this, three interviewees stressed that circumcised men (as Arab Muslims would normally be) were preferable to date since circumcision was considered more hygienic.

However, these socio-cultural/ethno-religious commonalities could in fact be the very reasons not to date other Arab Muslim men. It was felt by two interviewees (one of them being Bilal quoted below) that being so very culturally similar, the potential for a romantic relationship was precluded, since it was considered to assume a fraternal character and thus, an almost incest-like quality, which would evoke feelings of discomfort:

> For me sometimes, I feel that having someone who is…so close to me, as in looks, language, behaviour, culture, gives me impression more to brotherhood and friendship, rather than someone that I would have relationship…So, I feel that might give me an odd feeling and I'm dating a brother or something like that [laughs]. [Bilal, 27 years old, gay]

A further reason why participants would avoid dating other Arabs seems to be the evocation of stereotyped hegemonic Islamic masculinity where the Arab Muslim male is seen to be too possessive of partners treated as property:

> Arabs, they're thinking they have the habits of owning things. So, if you are in a relationship, that mean[s] you'll be more like owned, you're property of someone else. This is how they thinking, because the blood, the culture come in, and you know, you're protecting what is yours. [Badr, 35 years old, gay]

Ehab explains how he was on the receiving end of this type of complaint from his white British partner, whose comments highlight this purportedly unattractive personal trait:

> I was with this English guy for one year…and broke up…I think he always attributed it with the cultural aspect of things…how Arabs express themselves. I'm cuddly, I'm very attentive. I think that's an Arab thing. [But] Westerns would call this…possessive or obsessive, something like that…I think it's the perception…Arabs are too bossy in the relationship. [Ehab, 38 years old, gay]

Tariq feels that he would prefer to have a relationship with non-Arab white men as he believes that Arab men are less emotionally expressive and use less sophisticated sexual techniques in bed, and are therefore less satisfying and desirable partners:

> Europeans and English people…they know how to be gay better than us, just in terms of performance. You sleep with an English guy, you're gonna get a better night generally…the range of moves, he'll surprise you with dinner…just the whole kind of relationship thing…Arab guys don't like kissing, as much as an English guy kisses…An Italian guy I was sleeping with [was] very much more sexual and expressive than an Arab…Some moves when you're

> having sex, you've got to push them [Arabs] to do it…[T]here's an understanding with Europeans and English people that sex is a two way thing. With Arabs…sometimes, you've got to ask for them to give you a blowjob. If you ask someone to give you a blowjob, you do not want to sleep with them again, because it's quite humiliating. [Tariq, 32 years old, bicurious]

However, some of the other interviewees tended to paint a more varied picture of the supposed romanticism and sexual performance in bed of Arab men and, interestingly, there was evidence of an emerging nationality hierarchy. It appears that the prejudiced attitudes towards Gulf Arabs derived from socio-cultural, geo-political, religious and class factors (that were discussed extensively in Chapter Four) are also transferred to the sexual sphere. Thus, gay Lebanese Arab Muslims are positively indexed by Zakaria as being more sexually adventurous, experimental and versatile in their sexual roles due to the influence and assimilation of different sexual behaviour mores that might exist in the non-Muslim Arab communities in Lebanon, allowing the adoption, to a degree, of the Western gay identitarian model of sexuality (Bereket and Adam, 2006, 2008), and highlighting the relevance of factors such as the amount of gender segregation within an individual country or region, and the degree to which the country or region is both religiously conservative, and religiously and culturally homogeneous:

> Maybe Lebanese would be more innovative, because they have kind of this…Christian, which is open minded, mentality. They will try everything…The rest…which are very closed mind, they're just doing the same things. Okay, he's top, he won't try and to be bottom. [Zakaria, 24 years old, gay]

> Interviewer: But what if he's a Lebanese *Arab*? Would he still be influenced by [this mentality]?

> Still. Because by living in Beirut, in Lebanon in general, half of the country is Christians and you have this kind of mix.

Gulf Arabs, on the other hand, are frequently othered by many participants as being selfish and unsatisfying sexual partners: of being too aggressive, lacking empathy and as not taking 'No' for an answer. They are therefore positioned at the bottom of a sexual satisfaction hierarchy compared to other Arabs, a hierarchy vividly constructed by Haitham in the following quote:

> I started to realise that based on where you are from, they do it different techniques…I've had sex with most Arab guys and I would say for me, Egyptians are really the best…They're very, very passionate in bed…You have the Gulf Arabs. They do it too aggressive to the point that there's no passion in it, and they don't care whether they're hurting you or not…They're just doing it for their own pleasure, which I don't like. A lot of them, not all of them, the majority…Most of the guys that I've met in Egypt…they care about you…they involve a lot of kissing…body contact, hugging, touching…As long as [Gulf Arabs] come, at the end of the day, that's all they care about…I had a scenario once in Dubai where I met up with this guy. I found him very attractive. And we arranged just me and him, but when he took me to his place, his friend was there…He wanted us to do a threesome. And I refused…They didn't take this as an answer, and both of them tried to have sex with me…They treat you like a commodity sometimes. [Haitham 28 years old, bisexual]

Three other interviewees made the same point about Gulf Arabs as Haitham. It would appear that, in their stereotyped disparagement of Gulf Arab sexual performance and supposed negative character traits in bed, these participants have focused only on those Gulf Arabs who participate in situational homosexuality and have generalised the possible lack of emotional connection and empathy in such circumstances to all Gulf Arabs who have participated in homosexual activity. My interviewee, Salem, explains this point well in saying that many Gulf Arab men indulge in gay sex acts only as the active partner, having grown up with strict gender segregation and a lack of access to women, so their gay acts are a type of situational homosexuality and therefore, there is less emotional attachment:

> I would say that the Gulf guys…they would have sex with anything… [It's] very detached. It's just like, 'Let's just close our eyes and hope it's a hole. Whose hole it is, we don't really care…because their culture is much more segregated, right?...Okay, so now let's talk about the other category [Lebanese, Syrian and Egyptians]. I would say, because their culture is less segregated, they sort of have more option in terms of who to have sex with…So, in picking a person, emotion has a little bit more of a factor there…[W]ith the Gulf people, they don't. It's like beggars can't be choosers, right? [Salem, 24 years old, gay]

Despite the prevalent sexual stereotyping and essentialising of Gulf Arabs in the interviews as inconsiderate and ineffective lovers, the stereotype is occasionally debunked, by Zakaria quoted below, for example:

> I've never had this kind of aggressive feeling... cos I've been having sex with someone in Saudi, who's married there. I mean, I wasn't as responsive as him. I was not complaining. [Zakaria, 24 years old, gay]

There was an interesting intersection of ethnicity, gender, and sexuality in that, for at least two interviewees, the influence of gender-inscribed sexual roles in male-male sexual encounters which is common in Arab cultures (where partners exclusively perform either the active or passive role with no versatility) rather than the Western idea of sexual *identities* (Bereket and Adam, 2006, 2008) with greater flexibility in terms of sex roles performed, comes through in some participants' sexual relations with men in the U.K. The following quotes clearly highlight how in the gender-inscribed Arabo-Muslim model, the 'female' role of 'the penetrated', brings with it a very high level of social stigma, and to accept the role of the penetrated has associations with femininity, weakness and a threat to one's masculinity (Bereket and Adam, 2006; Whitaker, 2011), whereas little stigma exists for the man performing the active, penetrator role, as he is seen to be fulfilling his normal-gendered, masculine role in sexual intercourse (Bereket and Adam, [2006, 2008]; El-

Rouayheb, [2005]; Murray and Roscoe, [1997]; Schmitt and Sofer, [1992] and Whitaker, [2011], have all confirmed the centrality of *roles* as the organising principle of sexuality in Muslim majority countries, both historically and in the modern era). Reflecting findings in Minwalla *et al*. (2005), my interviewees Amine and Ibrahim, who were born and brought up in Western European countries (France and the U.K. respectively) illustrate how culturally and/or religiously engrained attitudes regarding this gender-inscribed system, mean it can be difficult to avoid being influenced in their own sexual behaviour:

> I am a top, so when I came here, for me, when I see two guys doing versatile, I just don't get it…Versatile, is something I learnt [about] in Europe, to be honest [laughs]. [Amine, 38 years old, gay]

> Interviewer: Okay. But in the Arab countries, like in North Africa, though, isn't there, this association with the bottom role that it's very insulting?

> Oh, yeah. Yeah, definitely. I think that's why I have locked in my head that that I don't wanna go bottom.

> I definitely divide into roles…I think you'll find that most Arab guys will say that they're top…And I think there's an element of psyche behind it, in that taking it is less masculine or means that you're more gay…Arab culture always negates the homosexual thing, and I think that's almost evidence that you *are* [homosexual], because you've been on the receiving end, whereas, if you haven't, then it's not really confirmed [laughs] in a way. [Ibrahim, 26 years old, MSM]

Having confined the discussion thus far to *gay* spaces when investigating the intersection of Arab gay male racial/ ethnic and sexual identities, I now broaden the context for the remainder of this chapter to include non-gay spaces, as I move on to document experiences of discrimination and prejudice in the form of, firstly, racism and then Islamophobia.

6.5. Racism in White Spaces

For many of the gay Arab Muslim men in this study, they encounter everyday racism, as their racial and ethnic identities intersect with white-dominant gay and non-gay spaces, highlighting that it is a problematic issue that has to be managed in addition to any conflict that is experienced between religion and sexuality. Indeed, the intersection of religion and sexuality may not always occupy a master status in their lives.

It should be pointed out at the outset, though, that several of my own research participants stated that they had *not* experienced any racism, attributing this to their non-typical Arab appearance (light skin tones and less dark looks). They said people kept mistaking them for Brazilians, Italians or Spaniards. Participants were thus thought to be (or could pass as) nationals of European or Latin American countries, which implies persons of these nationalities might experience less racism, since they appear whiter and somehow less 'foreign'. Indeed, Paul, Ayala and Choi (2010) found Latino MSM suffered much less racism on gay dating websites than African-Americans and Asians. On the other hand, many of my participants claim that they have had direct experience of racism in both gay and non-gay spaces:

> I did [experience racism] on the gay scene and these were surprising and shocking experiences in Blackpool, Glasgow and London where I was blanked, ridiculed or verbally abused. [Yassir, 38 years old, gay]

> The first time was in McDonalds. I was waiting on the line. It was my [turn] to go and there was a British girl, she just go there [i.e. pushed in front]. I said [makes coughing sound] 'Excuse me. But I think it's my [turn]'. She said, 'Oh, just go to your fucking country'...The second thing was at the tube in London. Someone by mistake hit me or something. So, I said, 'I'm sorry.' And after that he was looking like that [pulls angry face]. He said, 'Fucking foreigners'...The third one, was at Friday, after midnight. There was a guy, he slapped me and said, 'Just go to your fucking country. We don't want you here'...for no reason, with two of his friends. And I...was walking and

> wearing my headphones on the night. And I walk and he say, 'Take that.' and he slapped me and, after that, he say that, 'We don't want foreigners here.' [Qais, 20 years old, gay]

Sometimes racist comments are passively tolerated, with the interviewee deciding not to react, but, occasionally, interviewees take a more combative approach by swearing at the perpetrator or answering in a more reasoned manner. As an example of the latter approach, Karim, dealing with a work colleague who was always targeting him with comments about 'bloody foreigners', rejoined with:

> I'm a foreigner who's working, okay. I don't go and ask for dole from the government. Plus a foreigner who's more smarter than you…a foreigner who can speak five languages. Can you?' [Karim, 46 years old, bisexual]

In contrast to the overtly racist abuse in the quotes given above, Salem describes a more subtle form of racism while attending a professional event:

> One of the Vice President[s], he was an English guy; he spoke to me slower than he would have spoken to someone else. But when I responded, he noticed that there wasn't any need for him to speak slower. So, I can relate that to racism. Just because I was brown, why did he feel the need to initially...speak to me slowly, like he would speak to someone who English wouldn't be their first language. And he perceived [that] because of my skin. [Salem, 24 years old, gay]

In terms of specifically *anti-Arab* racism, Badr, who is Saudi Arabian, believes that white gay European men negatively stereotype particular Arab nationalities (Algerians, Moroccans and Egyptians) as occupying lower class and income positions than themselves, and deem them to have ulterior (financial) motives in seeking out contact with white European men (see also Chapter Four for a detailed discussion of the interplay between Arabness and social class). Badr complains that Arabs from higher socio-economic classes can also feel victimised as a result of

these prejudicial stereotyped attitudes during interactions with white Europeans on the gay scene:

> Because I look like Egyptian or Moroccan, there [in gay bars in London], I found it very difficult, because Egyptian, Moroccans, Algerian sometime come from a poor background; they are always suspicious, you know, even by the look. So, usually, the European, they will not prefer to deal with anything with people coming from that countries...I have a problem to distinguish myself from Egyptian, Moroccan...I'm Saudi.'...my background is not poor, I've somehow educated. They will run away from me, because they will think...if I was Moroccan, Algerian or North African...I will seek advantage...I will not be trustworthy. [Badr, 35 years old, gay]

The idea that (some) Arab men are perceived as untrustworthy is corroborated by North African Karim, from first-hand experience:

> I went to a nightclub. I met a guy, and he took me back to his place. And as soon as we got inside, he locked the doors...As I was leaving I said, 'I needed to know why you locked the door'. 'Why?' he said, 'Well, put it this way, this is my house. This is my belongings...You're an Arab guy. As far as I'm concerned, I can go to the toilet, you've nicked something from my house and you leave.'...He wasn't worried about having a shag with me, but he was worried about having stuff being nicked from his house. [Karim, 46 years old, bisexual]

Several participants suggest *Arab*-oriented racism, is much worse in countries such as France, Italy and Malta that typically have higher numbers of Arabs within their populations than the U.K:

> They are quite racist in France...If you are black, [or] Arab, they won't give you a job...At school [when] I was a child, they was like, 'Oh, you're Arab, you're stealing. Being the Arab was not good…In Paris, when you get into a shop...they always start to watch what you

> are doing, [as] if you are gonna steal something...I find it stupid. In London, I don't feel that. [Zakaria, 24 years old, gay]
>
> Not in England, I've never [experienced racism]...[T]he first time I actually experienced hard-core racism was in Malta...There's a lot of Tunisian guys over there, looking for jobs...They thought I was Tunisian when I was walking on the streets, and just imagine a thousand eyes staring at you...I was in a café, it took me twenty minutes just to order when it wasn't even busy, cos no one came up to me. When I went to pay, the lady goes, 'Oh, give me five minutes, I need to do something'…And she came back and there was another guy behind me, and she goes to the guy, 'Yes, sir?' She completely ignored me…I've *never* felt like this in my life, just because of the colour of my skin and my origins, that someone can be that racist. [Haitham 28 years old, bisexual]

In contrast, the city of London (where many of the participants live) was frequently characterised as extremely cosmopolitan, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and a markedly tolerant, not particularly racist place:

> I've been in this country for twenty two years, and...I've never experienced racism in London. [Haitham 28 years old, bisexual]
>
> Especially in London, everyone is coming from somewhere...I don't feel foreigner, I feel [at] home. [Amine, 38 years old, gay]

I have previously mentioned McKeown *et al*. (2010) and Green's (2008a) studies in which gay black men in gay spaces perceive themselves to be valued only for their supposedly superior physical endowment and sexual potency, while feeling discounted as relationship material and consistently sexually objectified. Teunis (2007) argues that such fetishisations of black men by white gay males is a form of racism, since the black male is positioned as functioning to service the white gay male's erotic fantasies and to preserve the privilege of Whiteness of the gay community by being made to feel obliged to assume the active, penetrative role in

sex, whatever their actual role preference might be (despite the superficial appearance that the white male lacks power because he is performing in the submissive role). The frequent sexual marginalisation of black men by white men in these spaces (Green, 2008b) is seen as racist and discriminatory by McKeown *et al*.'s (2010) black interviewees. However, several of my own participants strongly contend that their avoidance of black (and Asian) men is not connected with racism, but rather is simply personal preference for a look that sexually attracts them:

> [On dating websites] I've had people tell me off for stating what sexual preference I have towards what colour men I like…because on my profile, I might say, 'not looking for black guys' or 'not looking for oriental or Asian guys' or 'looking for Caucasian men'...I've been told off…cos they're conceived as being a discrimination sentence or as something that you are discriminating. [I]f I say I'm not looking for women, that does not make me sexist...that's just my sexual preference...I'm not saying I want to slaughter and kill all the black people in the world. I'm just saying I don't want to fuck them. It's as simple as. [Yaaqub, 27 years old, gay]

Han (2008) and Husbands *et al*. (2013) suggest that gay black males should not necessarily be seen as perceiving themselves as victims of discrimination and racism through objectification by white males. They may, instead, view themselves as exerting their agency to achieve their personal ends when only desiring sexual encounters with white men to satisfy immediate needs if they themselves are not interested in relationships. Amongst my own sample of 35 Arab men, only one or two raised the issue of feeling objectified by white gay men. The vast majority did not appear to perceive themselves in any way as victims of discrimination and racism in this regard, and, in their talk, revealed no signs, I could detect, of anxiety or depression about being fetishised in the white gay male imagination. Instead, they seemed more than happy to conform to, and instrumentally take advantage of pre-conceived white notions about Arab male sexuality and sexual prowess, to gain sexual experiences from online and offline interactions (echoing Husbands *et al*.'s [2013] view above). This is not to say they never attempt to reduce the evident power differentials in sexual interactions with white gay men. As Husbands *et al*.

(2013) point out, some minority ethnic males use their agency to rebel against the sexual roles 'prescribed' to them, e.g. black males who prefer to take the passive role will refuse to conform to the 'active-penetrator' stereotype, though in doing so, they risk losing erotic capital (Green, 2008a). Indeed, several of my own participants refuse to conform to the stereotype of the 'active Arab penetrator' because of their natural preference for the passive role in sex acts.

On the other hand, Green (2008a) and Husbands *et al*. (2013) found that some African American gay men attempt to increase their cache of erotic capital with white men by adopting role-playing strategies, utilising stereotypical, racialised, sexual representations of them to their advantage as 'calling cards' (hooks; 2004), transforming historical, otherwise humiliating racial representations. Green documents how some willingly adopt the image of the tough 'black thug' character, though it may be far removed from their real personality, and even though they realise they are sexually self-objectifying in so doing. In my own study, Idris is willing to adopt flexible sexual positions to help fulfil British men's stereotypical fantasies about Arabs, and hence maintain and maximise his store of erotic capital:

> One of my [sex] partners...only likes Arab guys...Like for him, Arab is like, someone who takes control and makes them do things, and more of a macho kind of a person...they are aggressive, dominant [in bed]... I don't see myself...as that kind of person, but, because that's what he likes...if he wants to do that, it's fine...I'm more towards bottom, [but] with him, I'm top, because he likes that [Idris, 34 years old, homosexual]

For Amine, who prefers taking the active role in sex, enacting the stereotype of the hyper-masculine, aggressive penetrator has caused him problems when seeking a longer term relationship, since he keeps feeling objectified and devalued as a potential partner, seen fit only for casual sex, and otherwise ignored:

> [British white gay men] just wanna have a rough sex but when it comes to something more serious, they don't take you seriously...I remember a friend of mine, who was English said, 'Amine, these guys will not take you seriously, cos you are putting yourself as an

> ‘Arab fucker’. You should put yourself in a different light. He was right. I feel like I have to perform...I have to give them what they ask for, and then...they just call you for that. And I get upset...because I want to have a drink with this guy, cos I like him, but he will never call me for a drink. He will...call me [and say], ‘I’m naked in my bed. Come and fuck me.’ And then I said to him, ‘Yeah, but okay, but I’m a nice guy too. Why don’t you call me for a drink?’…There was this guy, his name was Derek, and we were dating. He just opened the door for his flat, and just grabbed my hand and took me to his room straightaway, without even asking me: ‘Do you wanna have a drink?’...I felt like I was a prostitute...I was really offended, and I was really upset. [Amine, 38 years old, gay]

Summing up this section, while sexual festishisation of the Arab male does not seem to be considered a sign of racism by the vast majority of my participants, it is clear that many participants, especially if they have darker skin tones, have experienced overt or more subtle forms of racism in both gay and non-gay white spaces. They also report experiences of Anti-Arab racism but assert that this is less common in the U.K. than in other European countries with larger Arab populations. Moving now to final part of this chapter, the focus on discrimination continues, but this time based largely on participants’ (ethno) religious identities.

6.6. Islamophobia in White Spaces

This section focuses on the intersection of my participants’ religious identities with white-dominant spaces (including those that make up the gay scene and other social spaces in U.K. society more generally that are populated largely by white British people) to illustrate that one outcome of this intersection as it relates to the intersectional concept of the matrix of domination (Collins, 2000), is the experience of Islamophobia or religious discrimination that, along with the racism described in the previous section, form two axes of oppression experienced by gay Arab Muslim men. Admittedly, some of my interviewees say they have not experienced Islamophobia for the reason that their religious identity is not overtly and semiotically visible, or because they don’t inform people of their religion:

> I never had [Islamophobic comments] directed towards myself, maybe because I don't identify myself as, or maybe from the outside, I don't appear to be as Muslim as other people...[since] you can look Muslim...you could have a long beard, and wear like a hat and have dress that would indicate that you are a Muslim...visually looking like a Muslim. [Malik, 28 years old, gay]

> Some of my friends have suffered real, real bad. I mean, my sister, who wears a headscarf, she's suffered a lot more than I have, because she's overtly a Muslim. [Tariq, 32 years old, bicurious]

Yet, many other interviewees do recount instances of experiencing Islamophobia in gay and non gay white-dominant spaces. The following quotes depict experiences online, for example:

> There was a guy online I was talking [to]. He was here in the U.K. And when I initiate conversation with him, he said, 'Sorry, I don't talk with Islamists.' [Bilal, 27 years old, gay]

> [E]specially in the gay scene... when you say you're Muslim...people tend to back up... [I say] 'I'm from Sudan' 'Are you Muslim? Are you Christian?' I say, 'I am Muslim.' and then the conversation says like 'Oh, I have to go. Let's meet another time.' and he just blocks you. [Wail, 32 years old, gay]

> A friend of mine [said], 'Oh, my God, look what the *XXL* [gay nightclub] boss put on his *Facebook*.' He put like 'We should be against all the product from the Muslims'. [Chakib, 35 years old, gay]

Disseminating hate for Muslims on Internet sites has been listed by Sayyid (2014) as one of his categorisations of Islamophobia, and Madden and Lenhart (2006) claim dating websites users are generally less religious than those who do

not date online. Cheng (2011) and Yip (2005c) writing of American and British contexts respectively, similarly describe the bars and clubs of the gay scene as overtly secular spaces, engrained with attitudes that are anti-religion and anti-spirituality, which would help to explain the presence of Islamophobic attitudes at these sites.

Several of my interviewees place very firm responsibility on the media for partly constructing and propagating Islamophobia in Britain, typified by Ash's comments:

> I think it's the media that fuels it up at times…I mean, I always tell people, 'Don't always believe the media…All these years you've believed everything what the News of the World and the Sun tells you…Go and research and you'll get to the truth of it, you know'. [Ash, 37 years old, gay]

The role of media narratives in the dissemination of anti-Muslim sentiment has also been highlighted by Allen (2005) Iqbal (2010) and Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010b).

Islamophobia is also interpreted by one participant as generalised assumptions by others about his religious identity:

> [People] feel I probably have extremely traditional Muslim values, which I don't...They might feel as if I believe in the whole stereotype of locking women in, or women should wear the veil, or I might be extremely strong believer in not drinking, or not having sex before marriage...I've had stuff like...people would speak in a patronising way, so they'd be like, 'Is your family going to arrange you and get married?'...'You've heard that Muslim people tend to get arranged marriages, and you've generalised that, and you're assuming that I'm going to get an arranged marriage. First of all, I'm gay. Second of all, my family don't believe in arranged marriage, so you've stigmatised that because I am a Muslim.' [Salem, 24 years old, gay]

The casual homogenising of beliefs and attitudes to all Muslims is an example of a more subtle form of Islamophobia which Nadal *et al*. (2012) call 'micro-aggressions'.

Marvasti (2005) describes strategies (or 'accounts') used by Arab Americans to manage Islamophobia. Accounts justify or explain one's own or others' actions that are considered unusual or unsuitable, and they are deployed to help shape a positive self-identity out of an identity that is being stigmatized within daily social interaction (Marvasti, 2005). Salem, who, in the above quote, reacts by correcting false, stereotypical assumptions, uses what Marvasti (2005) calls 'educational accounting', i.e. where negative stereotyping is directly confronted and debunked. Interestingly, several participants tried to mitigate the seriousness of Islamophobic experiences by attributing critical comments to ignorance rather than any malicious intent, behaviour typified by Ibrahim in the following quote:

> I don't interpret things as Islamophobia. I take it as a kind of a lack of understanding. But you get it all the time. People will always ask about stupid things, like 'Does your mum wear a *burkha*?' or 'Does your dad beat your mum?' or that kind of thing...because I think they just genuinely believe that that's the norm...I don't see it as Islamophobia. I just see it as people being stupid. [Ibrahim, 26 years old, MSM]

Nadal *et al*. (2012), however, have argued that asking Muslims a great number of questions about their religion in effect exoticises them and is, in fact, just another example of a micro-aggression.

The trope of the Arab Muslim male as terrorist (Abraham, 2009) in the U.K. which as mentioned in Chapter Two represents a contemporary 'Islamist' version of masculinity, and which Grosfuguel (2012) argues illustrates still existent colonialist racial discourses, occurred frequently in my interviews, often in narratives involving public transportation:

> Sometimes, I have a beard...a stylish stubble...Once I was in the tube, and I had a bag, which had my books in, no bomb, no nothing. But the way this woman looked at me, was as if I'm the new tube blower, like those people who blew up the tube. She thought that probably, she might be in another seven July attack. The way she

> looked, was like, 'Oh, God. This is gonna be my life's last tube ride.' [Salem, 24 years old, gay]

> When they see a person dark skin, with the brown or black eye, automatically, I'm sorry to say, especially if you're an Arab guy, they think you're a suicide bomber...They think you're a terrorist...And it happened many, many times, and with my partner. We took the train going to London, and I had my rucksack with me...I swear to God, once, they [the other passengers] just left the train. [Karim, 46 years old, bisexual]

These negative reactions based on semiotic indicators like phenotypes, beards and rucksacks of the kind described by Salem and Karim are also a type of racial profiling, according to Meer (2013). Additionally, state approved surveillance and monitoring of Muslims in the form of ethno-religious profiling can be viewed as an illustration of Islamophobia (Sayyid, 2014), and several participants, like Hashim below, describe examples of this by recalling experiences of suspected profiling at airports:

> I got stopped coming back in from Saudi...after an eleven hour flight, with a three hour stop over. So, you can imagine, I didn't look my best, like you know, stubble, crazy hair, probably crazy eyes, as well. It does go off appearance. The police guy was very polite...but walked over, while I was in the queue: 'Can you step aside for a minute? I wanna ask you a couple of questions.' So, it *is* all purely based on appearance...and it *is* profiling. [Hashim, 26 years old, bisexual]

Such profiling indicates the clear racialisation of the term 'Muslim' (Meer, 2013). Hashim politely acquiesced to questioning instead of expressing an account of defiance through an irritated or angry reaction. Consciously suppressing the impulse to act to change a situation, as in Hashim's case, is what Marvasti (2005) terms an account of 'cowering', that is, avoiding confrontation in circumstances where a power imbalance in official/institutional contexts (as here with airport security) would

underscore the futility of resistance and exacerbate stress in a confrontation. Ibrahim, a doctor, seems to use what Marvasti calls 'humorous accounting' to manage Islamophobic behaviour, diverting attention from the negative stereotyping that creates identity threat by trivialising it:

> I did once have a nurse...ask me if I ever felt like blowing myself up when I got stressed...she said it in a really aggressive way...It's never bothered me. I never get annoyed by it. I just told her, 'yes. I do.' And I just said to her, 'you shouldn't stress me out, if you're gonna be standing near me afterwards.' And it just defuses the situation. [Ibrahim, 26 years old, MSM]

All my interviews were conducted before highly publicised videoed beheadings of Western hostages (Press Association, 2014; Ilyas, 2014) carried out in Syria and Iraq by *Islamic State* (*I.S*. or *ISIL*) 'a transnational Sunni Islamist insurgent and terrorist group' (Katzman *et al*., 2014, p. 3), and before high-profile and high casualty Islamic terrorist attacks in Western European countries such as France and Belgium in 2015 and 2016 (Awan, 2017). The interviews were also carried out before regular media reports emerged of young British Muslims leaving the U.K. to live under and fight for Islamic State as *jihadists* in Syria (see Casciani, 2015; Ilyas, 2013), and the heightened concern about their possible return to the U.K. to commit terror atrocities as part of a jihadist ideology (The Economist, 2014; Ilyas, 2013). It would therefore be interesting to know if the frequency and/or severity of my interviewees' experiences of Islamophobia have increased in light of these recent developments.

6.7. Summary

This chapter has looked at the interaction of gay male Arab Muslims and white spaces, and the effects produced when their sexual, racial, ethno-religious and gendered identities intersect with these spaces. Among the reasons participants visit the gay scene is that such visits facilitate friendship-finding, gay identity reinforcement, and offer an escape from heteronormative homophobia. Those who avoid the gay scene do so because they are bored with it or consider it an overtly

sexualised space of excessive alcohol and drug consumption. It is also disliked for being largely youth-oriented and fixated on looking good and dressing well. Gay dating websites are used regularly by the participants. Like gay scene spaces, they provide social capital, but they are considered a faster, more convenient, more discrete way to arrange meetings with other men and better help those with more shy personalities. On the other hand, they are also seen to waste time, and there is cynicism about the possibility to meet men for relationships (rather than casual sexual encounters) and concern about the potential for deception in online interactions.

I have also discussed how these Arab men have a complex relationship with white gay spaces because of context-specific, interactional, hierarchical, racial power dynamics which position them as both desired and detested. Like black males, they are prized by some non-Arab gay British men for their dark looks and stereotyped hyper-masculinity and hyper-sexuality. Their erotic capital derives, however, from processes of racial objectification and fetishisation, though most of my participants appear content to be complicit in these processes for immediate sexual gain. At the same time, many experience overt racism in gay (and non-gay) spaces, though some consider this to be less of a problem in the U.K. (and especially London) than in some other countries. Many also experience Islamophobia, a mix of religious and cultural discrimination, but some of those for whom their religious identity is not obvious, seem able to escape this. Examples of Islamophobia range from being shunned on gay websites, enduring generalised assumptions about all Muslims, being considered terrorists and being profiled at airports. Some use accounting strategies to manage Islamophobia which include educational and humorous accounts as well as accounts of cowering.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS

7.1. Introduction

In the three preceding chapters, the voices of thirty-five men have, through describing their everyday, lived experiences of identity construction, illuminated what it means to be gay, Arab and Muslim in the U.K. in the mid 2010s. The main argument of this thesis has been that in order to more fully and effectively understand these men's sexual, religious, racial, ethnic, classed and gendered identities, they need to be considered as intersecting, and evidence of how these different identity dimensions intersect, as well as the outcomes produced at these intersections was also presented in the three preceding chapters. The analytical approach adopted was organised around a structural framework that imagined three concentric circles, with the innermost circle representing identity explored at the narrowest, personal level, with the next two circles broadening the focus to identity construction and management at the interpersonal level, within, firstly, the more intimate and immediate context of familial relationships, and, then, within the wider interactional social contexts of white-dominant spaces (representing the largest of the concentric circles).

Chapter Four examined the intersection of interviewees' ethnic, sexual and religious identities at the personal level, focusing on intra-categorical variation within understandings of the identity descriptor 'Arab'. Most of the chapter explored the strategies participants used to help reduce dissonance and intra-personal conflict that occurred between their religion and sexuality. Chapter Five, in examining relationships with family and kin, concentrated on how a sexual silence was preserved by those men who had not disclosed their sexuality to any family member, and how their family relationships were affected and managed in these circumstances. The chapter also detailed the varying reactions of family when the sexual silence was broken voluntarily or involuntarily. Chapter Six, investigating participants' contacts with predominantly white spaces, firstly examined the nature of involvement with the gay scene and online dating websites, revealing what were perceived to be the advantages and disadvantages of visiting such spaces. The chapter also examined the role of ethnic identity in dating, as well as of racism and Islamophobia in both these locations and in white-dominant spaces, more generally.

This chapter proceeds to draw conclusions from the data presented and analysed in Chapters 4-6, and puts forward claims for the study's major contributions to the literature on LGBT Muslim identities and academic knowledge about gay Arab Muslim men. The contribution section forms the largest part of the chapter and is divided into the following seven subsections: intersectionality and intersectional identities; gay spaces and erotic capital; the power of the family; managing the intersection of sexual and religious identities; culturally hybrid identities; giving voice to the experiences of gay Arab Muslim men, and utilising inter-disciplinary insights. The chapter concludes by making suggestions for further research opportunities in this area, whilst also acknowledging some of the limitations of the present study.

7.2. Contribution to Knowledge

At its broadest level, the major contribution of this thesis to the literature on LGBT Muslim identities in the U.K. is that gay Arab Muslim males are a group that has never been specifically researched before, in contrast to the vast majority of existing studies which have centred on LGBT South Asian Muslims and my study therefore provides a unique insight into the lives of these men. The next seven subsections set out and discuss the work's more specific contributions.

7.2.1. Intersectionality and intersectional identities

Power and oppression are key ideas in the writing on intersectionality. In relation to Collins and Bilge's (2016) notion of how power is structured through four interlinked domains, my research has described how a 'cultural domain of power' is operationalised by illustrating how Arab Muslim communities are dominated by heterosexist values extremely antipathetic to LGBT people. Within this domain of power, the prime socio-cultural importance of the values of honour and reputation that shape social interaction in these communities is upheld, and these values are realised through the performance of ascribed gender role norms. I have also clearly exemplified throughout Chapters 4-6 how such values permeate through Arab Muslim cultures, mediated and disseminated by institutions such as the family and religious institutions, thus illustrating Collins and Bilge's 'structural domain of power'. At the 'interpersonal domain of power', I have shown how gay Arab Muslim men

often have to struggle to be who they are in their navigation of relationships with family members who do not accept their sexuality and are homophobic towards those they view as not performing their gender identities correctly. In combination, the cultural, structural and interpersonal domains of power propagate a 'disciplinary domain of power' that attempts to enforce conformity to hegemonic norms. For example, in the interpersonal domain of family relationships (Chapter Five), negative reactions to disclosure such as verbal and physical abuse; attempts to erase the fact that the disclosure has been made by shutting down any discussion of it afterwards; the pressurising of the gay relative to marry heterosexually, or undergo conversion therapy in an effort to make him clearly aware that his sexuality is not acceptable and goes against the family's heteronormative values, and the demand that he 'change' his sexuality, are all clear examples of the disciplinary domain of power. The gay male's interactions with individual family members are set within the wider social structure of the institution of the Arab Muslim family and, beyond that, the broader Arab Muslim community and culture, which all communicate the same disciplinary discourses and values around gender and sexuality which are hostile to LGBT people. Similarly, in dealing with white, non-Muslim, homosexual and heterosexual individuals, some interviewees have been racially discriminated against and have experienced Islamophobic attitudes. This is related to the fact they struggle with power dynamics where Whiteness, whether within the gay milieu or the heterosexual world and its institutions, has a hegemonically superior status. The racist and Islamophobic actions some participants are on the receiving end of can therefore be viewed as an exercise of disciplinary power, whereby the presence of those who are not white, Christian/secular is rejected and delegitimized in this cultural domain.

Relating to Collins and Bilge's (2016) key themes of intersectionality, it should be clear that the notions of 'power' (whose operationalisation can be seen in both diverse intersections and domains of power [Collins and Bilge, 2016]) and the 'social inequality' produced by a lack of power and multiple discriminations, very much chime with the lived experiences of the gay Arab Muslim men in this study. Such inequality and discrimination has been understood through their contrast with the hegemonic norms and privilege of heteronormativity. This reflects 'relationality', a third core idea of intersectionality. Relationality has also been a fundamental feature of the thesis in another way: rather than exploring identities through a 'either/or

binary thinking' (p. 27) a *both/and* analytical approach was adopted, investigating the inter-relationships and mutual influences of different identity dimensions which, I would argue, has been a very effective means to achieve a deeper insight into the identity construction processes of gay Arab Muslim men.

Collins and Bilge's (2016) concept of the role of 'social context' for intersectional analyses, has also proven relevant for this study, in that I have demonstrated how the intersecting identities of my participants can produce different experiences of, for example, their sexual identities, depending on the amount of time spent living in Britain. Some of those born and brought up in the U.K. seem to feel that aspects of living in a supposed Western liberal democracy such as increasingly greater social tolerance of homosexuality, legal rights for LGBT people such as gay marriage, and the availability of infrastructural community spaces catering for LGBT people, as well as the greater visibility of LGBT people in all forms of media, have helped them cope with or reconcile conflict between religion and sexuality (I discuss this further in the section on cultural hybridity below). But some of the men interviewed grew up in very different contexts that lack these perceived benefits and some of these have struggled to live out their sexual identities in home countries viewed by them as far less accepting of homosexuality; indeed, some said they migrated to the U.K. precisely because they wanted to escape these less tolerant socio-cultural contexts.

The thesis has also utilised McCall's (2005) theoretical concepts of intra-categorical intersectionality (which refers to internal variation within social groups) and intercategorical intersectionality (which refers to the co-presence of different identity dimensions that interact and mutually influence each other). They have been extremely useful constructs for developing a deep understanding of the complex identity construction processes and lived experiences of gay Arab Muslim men in the U.K. With respect to intra-categorical intersectionality, I have highlighted how the category 'Arab' is a contested term and must not be understood as a homogeneous and monolithic concept, but instead encompasses a multitude of differences. The gay Arab Muslim men in this study came from a diverse geographical range of Arab speaking regions (the North African Maghreb, the Middle Eastern Levant and the Gulf States) as well as those born and brought up in the U.K, and also from religious backgrounds shaped by different Islamic theological schools with different attitudes towards homosexuality. I have shown the importance of understanding that such

internal differentiation may produce differences in the salience of their ethnic versus national identities, and shed light on classed identities which can generate internal antagonisms and discrimination that create different experiences of Arabness. Consequently, one major finding of the study, has been the uncovering, at the intersection of social class, sexuality and ethnic identity, of a bidirectional, intra-ethnic prejudice that forms an axis of oppression shaping these men's interactions with and social constructions of each other, an intra-ethnic prejudice of the kind not previously documented in any study of LGBT Muslims in the U.K. Gulf Arabs are discriminated against and resented by other Arabs because of their ascribed higher social class status and the undesirable personal characteristics this supposedly lends them. This prejudice also crosses over into the bedroom, where Gulf Arabs are positioned as aggressive, selfish and unsatisfactory lovers. Other Arabs, particularly those from North Africa, may be looked down on by some Gulf Arabs as being less authentically Arab, and as second class citizens. A serious weakness of the vast majority of studies of South Asian LGBT Muslims is that the participants' ethnic identities have seemingly been homogenised and essentialised with little effort made to consider the existence of intra-categorical differentiation, and the relevance and effects of this variation on South Asian LGBT Muslims' relations and perceptions of each other. Thus, the opportunity to achieve a fuller insight into their identity experiences has been missed (one rare exception is Jaspal's [2012b] comparative study of Indian and Pakistani gay men and the intersection of sexuality, religion and ethnicity). My study thus underlines the importance and necessity of adopting an analytical approach that considers intra-categorical variation in any investigation of LGBT Muslim identities. I have also shown in this study how Brekhus' (2003) typology of gay male identity ('peacocks', 'chameleons' and 'centaurs') can be usefully adopted to refer to Arab ethnic as well as sexual identity to help highlight intra-categorical variation.

The thesis has demonstrated the conceptual significance of considering identity dimensions such as sexuality, religion, race, ethnicity, gender and class not as discrete or additive but as interlocking and mutually constitutive, whereby the intersection of particular dimensions produces very specific outcomes (Collins and Bilge, 2016; Grzanka, 2014a). In relation to Collins' (2000) concept of the 'matrix of domination', I have highlighted how sexuality, religion, race, ethnicity and social class form the specific axes of oppression in the lives of gay Arab Muslim men that

generate experiences of multiple discriminations. Racism and Islamophobia are important concerns in these men's lives, concerns existing alongside fears and experiences of homophobia in the heteronormative world around them, and especially in the family. Importantly, this study provides the specific empirical examples of racism and Islamophobia which have been all too often lacking in the extant literature on South Asian LGBT Muslims, helping to provide further breadth and detail to this facet of LGBT Muslim identity. The study has also uncovered how Islamophobia may be characterised by a specific anti-Arab inflection, especially regarding Arab males, where there is a widespread discourse around terrorism, resulting in experiences of institutional monitoring and surveillance simply due to ethnicity. In its discussion of 'accounts', the study has uncovered the particular kind of strategies that gay Muslim men use to manage instances of Islamophobia, strategies that have not been well documented in any of the extant literature. In terms of developing an understanding of experiences of racism as an axis of oppression, the study has identified a class-derived, anti-Arab racism from non-Arab gay men that is directed more towards North African Arabs, based on stereotyping them as poor and inclined to criminality. Interestingly, anti-Arab racism at a general level was experienced much more strongly in other European countries that had higher concentrations of North African Arabs among their populations, while Britain was perceived to be a less racist country.

7.2.2. Gay spaces and erotic capital

My findings significantly add to the extremely scant research available on the intersection of LGBT Muslim identities with white-dominant gay spaces. More particularly, no previous study has focused specifically on gay Arab Muslim men and their contact with white dominant gay spaces in the U.K. This study expands on the work of Yip (2003; 2005) who, focusing on LGBT South Asian Muslims, made only very cursory reference to their contact with these spaces, and of Jaspal (2017a), who focused on gay South Asian (Muslim and Sikh) men's experiences of ethnic prejudice on the gay scene (though Jaspal largely appears to homogenise the experiences of these two groups, a criticism I have already made of the majority of studies concerning LGBT Muslims). My work provides an in-depth analysis of inteviewees' reasons for participating or not participating in these spaces and what

they perceive are the advantages and disadvantages of visiting them. In addition, as far as I know, mine is the first study of its kind to focus on LGBT Muslims'/gay Arab Muslim men's use of, experiences of, and views on gay dating websites. In this respect, the findings provide a completely unique and extremely valuable insight into the intersection of Arab ethnic identity with gay spaces.

In relation to the literature on erotic capital (Green, 2008a, 2011), one key finding of my study has been the important role Arab ethnicity plays in gay male sexual attraction. My research has uncovered the dialectal position of Arab men in the context of white-dominant gay scene spaces in their possessing a very high level of erotic capital on the one hand, through their supposed hyper-sexuality and hyper-masculinity, but their objectification and fetishisation on the other. Furthermore, ethno-racial stereotypes were utilised by some interviewees for their own sexual advantage, but in perpetuating them, they can simultaneously create problems for themselves if looking for deeper emotional relationships, precisely because playing up to the stereotypes reinforces processes of objectification.

As mentioned in Chapter Six, one of my participants declared that he did not want to date black men, stating this was just his sexual preference, and he strongly took issue with accusations from others that he was being racist in holding such an attitude. Interestingly, the role of racial phenotypes and ethnic stereotypes and related questions and contentions surrounding the interplay of race, ethnicity and sexual attraction in contemporary gay dating were also reflected in comments by interviewees in a recent BBC 3 documentary series *Queer Britain* (2017), where, in one episode, there was discussion of precisely this topic, of whether one is simply exercising one's sexual rights in excluding the possibility of dating men of particular ethnicities, or whether doing so, is, in fact, racism. Two of the programme's interviewees felt that there was a very fine dividing line between preference and prejudice that was difficult to determine precisely, and, even if some statements on dating websites appear to strike an apologetic tone: 'Sorry, not into black guys' 'No offence, Blacks please block me.', it was clear such statements were perceived as hurtful and could produce discriminatory effects like feelings of worthlessness. I also raise for debate here the converse situation: is indicating that one is *attracted* to persons of a particular skin colour/ethnic look an expression of one's personal preference or of racism? While attraction may be viewed as a positive emotion, the fetishisation of bodies of a particular look and colour would seem to be less so. The

recent Channel 4 programme *Is Love Racist?* (2017) also addressed the issue of racial preferences in the context of dating websites, arguing that whilst people may claim such preferences are individualised choices, these may in fact be the result of unconscious biases based on racial stereotyping that seem widespread within the British population. Using data from its *Yougov* commissioned online survey of 5000 people, the programme uncovered the existence of an ethno-racial hierarachy in terms of sexual partner preference, with white men and women positioned at the top and South Asians at the bottom, reflecting what Green (2008a) in academic parlance has termed 'tiers of desirability', as discussed in Chapter Six. With attention given to this issue by academics like Green (2008a), Raj (2011) and Riggs (2013) and the popular media, there now seems to be a fascinating contemporary debate developing about whether comments about attraction to particular ethnicities are preference statements, expressions of prejudice, or both, as sexuality is racialised and race sexualised.

The emphasis in my study on other aspects of appearance such as being well-dressed and well-groomed and especially the need to look youthful was also seen to be particularly important in gay spaces in order to maximise erotic capital in the competition to attract sexual mates. The study has shown how this can be problematic in the realm of cyberspace since appearances can be very much deceptive, when, for example, outdated images are used on profiles. The findings suggest that processes of individualisation (Giddens, 1992; Bauman, 1998, 2003) certainly seem to be at work in the context of gay dating websites, and viewed as having negative effects on romantic relationships, as far as several participants are concerned, feeling interactions on these websites emphasise and lead to short term sexual encounters rather than long term relationships. This lends support to Bauman's negative description of 'liquid love', relationships in late modernity that are more transient, superficial and unsatisfactory.

7.2.3. The power of the family

In identifying the strategies used for maintaining non-disclosure and managing family relations post-disclosure, it was found that they were very similar to those of South Asian LGBT Muslims identified in previous studies (for example, Yip, 2004a), therefore indicating a wide degree of cross cultural similarity. In connection with

family reactions to disclosure by LGBT individuals, the thesis has discovered that such reactions do not necessarily follow theoretical grief and mourning stage models. Interestingly, this is consistent with findings with non-Muslim, white LGBT youth in Savin-Williams (2001), and again therefore highlights cross cultural similarities.

The present study has determined that many of the factors that have motivated migration for LGBT people as documented in previous research studies (for example, Jaspal, 2014a; Morales, Corbin-Gutierrez and Wang, 2013; Pilkey, 2013), such as the desire to escape the intense familial pressure to marry, to escape the stress of passing to family and kin, to avoid disclosure to them and its likely negative consequences, and to seek the freedom to live out their sexual identities in a more tolerant society, have also given impetus to gay Arab Muslim migration. My work also underlines the link with the emotionality of migration, supplementing that done on emotional geographies (Bondi, Davidson and Smith, 2005; Mai and King, 2009) by confirming family space is a site dominated by heteronormativity, a conduit for the modelling and channelling of heterosexist values and also a space which is often seen as threatening, unsafe and associated with unhappiness, whereas moving to a new country is associated with feelings of safety and contentment. The study findings are also relevant to the contemporary debate on the supposed democratisation of intimacy in families in the U.K. and support the contentions of writers like Rahman (2014) and Yip (2004a) that the supposed far-reaching effects of modernity's processes of societal change: greater negotiation of roles and desires within families, individualism and, as propounded by Giddens (1992), the construction of reflexively organised, internally-referential identities with the individual's gradual uncoupling from the influence of structural institutions like the family, and the accompanying reduction in these institutions' power to limit that individual's agency and choice in life decisions and actions, are often much less evident in Muslim cultures, where family ties appear to exert far greater influence and control. The study has further identified that, as in South Asian Muslim cultures, the role of honour as a socio-cultural influence is an extremely important consideration in Arab communities, and that its effects such as pressure on gay men from within Arab families to follow and respect parental wishes and marry, and the fears these men have about becoming honour killing victims show a cross-cultural similarity with, for example, Pakistani culture, as discussed by Jaspal (2012a).

The intersection of participants' sexual identities with family and kin relationships and the negative outcomes they experience: living in the 'closet' and undertaking elaborate strategies to prevent family members from discovering their sexuality, and fearing violent reactions to disclosure, that often later come to pass, would appear to suggest the persistence, pervasiveness and power of ethnicity and religion as structural forces, continuing to dictate conformity to heterosexist values and gender norms and emphasising 'social obligation and responsibility' (Yip, 2004a, p. 285). I have presented evidence that the power of these forces profoundly shapes and affects the institution of the Arab Muslim family, which discursively mediates and disseminates religio-cultural values to its members. The similarities in this respect to the relationships South Asian gay Muslims have with their families once again suggest strong ethno-cultural cross-group commonalities. The homophobia, dissonance and emotional turmoil the majority of my interviewees experience means they often face great challenges in resisting these structural forces. And since my study suggests little appears to have changed over the last fifteen years since the bulk of research into LGBT Muslims has been published, it may take a long time yet to attenuate the oppression caused by these social structures or to dismantle them to any significant degree.

7.2.4. Reconciling the conflict between sexuality and religion

In terms of cross-cultural comparison, and focusing on how religious and sexual identities intersect at the intra-personal level, this study has also found that the main strategies used to manage the conflict berween sexuality and religion experienced by Arab Muslim gay men are no different to those found among South Asian LGBT Muslims (as documented by Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010, 2012; Yip, 2004b; Yip and Khalid, 2010). This may indicate that for these two groups, ethnicity may not produce any salient difference in experiences at this intersection. The extent of the similarity of strategies also suggests that there may well be a finite number of them which LGBT Muslims deploy in challenging homophobic Islamic discourses. It is interesting to speculate, then, whether the experiences and strategies uncovered here with Arab Muslim men would be the same for gay Muslim men from other ethnic/nationality groups such as those of, for example, West African or Indonesian heritages who are living in the U.K..

With respect to the strategies used to reconcile religion and sexuality, the study has uncovered what seems to be an debate among its participants, reflected within the wider LGBT Muslim community, concerning the democratisation of theological interpretation, and the question of where religious authority should be located. This kind of debate, and especially criticisms from some of my interviewees that LGBT Muslims may not have sufficient religious training or qualifications to legitimately position themselves as interpreters and arbiters of the religion hardly seems to have been discussed in the existing literature. Even more significantly, with respect to the defensive strategy of developing a re-interpretive sexuality-affirmative theology, my findings clearly demonstrate that not all gay Muslims are in favour of this type of work, and indeed some are expressly sceptical and vocally condemnatory of it. Negative attitudes towards this revisionist work do not seem to have been adressed by previous studies; these have, instead, tended to present re-interpretive theological strategies only in a positive light, focusing on their empowering potential for challenging heteronormative values of Islam and achieving identity consonance. In contradicting this one-sided picture, my research findings help give a wider perspective on, and a more nuanced depiction of the use of these strategies than has been previously given by researchers.

The thesis has also shed light on the views of gay Arab Muslims towards LGBT support organisations, (another area on which not much has been written) which have been said to help LGBT Muslims reconcile conflicting sexual and religious identities. By exemplifying the content of a workshop at one group, the study has confirmed that re-interpretive work involving foundational Islamic scriptural texts goes on in order to open up an alternative hermeneutics on sexuality, as Shah (2016) has empirically documented. Much has been made in the literature of these groups' very positive role in facilitating social capital and in serving an affective function by channelling feelings of belonging and solidarity. Potentially negative views on the groups have been addressed far less. My findings detected several reasons why access to these groups' re-interpretive work may be limited, as far as gay Arab Muslim men are concerned. While Shah (2016) and Yip and Khalid (2010) have argued that social class is one constraining factor (LGBT Muslims from working class backgrounds can lack access to online re-interpretive theological resources and offline organisations), I have documented how some participants have actually been de-incentivised from attending such groups due to a variety of other reasons

relating to the intersection of ethnicity, geography, language and sexuality, thus illuminating further motivations of participants to utilise or not utilise these groups. The study has also illustrated how social capital produced from socialising with other gay men can also be acquired through participation in white-dominant gay spaces such as dating websites and the gay scene and in relationships with white gay men, in addition to, or instead of, through contacts made in LGBT Muslim support groups.

In examining the strategies used by gay Arab Muslim men to manage the dissonance between their religious and sexual identities, the study contributes to the literature on modern religious identities by demonstrating that the trend towards religious individualism and the personalisation and privatisation of faith identified in the Christian religion in the West over the last fifty years (Roof, 1999; Wuthnow, 1998) and identified as a characteristic of LGBT Muslim identities (Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010; Yip, 2010) also very much shapes the religious lives of gay Arab Muslim men of faith. They see moving away from institutional forms of their religion and its practices as a means to open up a liberatory space to construct their own individualised, privatised version of Islam that crucially helps them reconcile the tensions between their sexuality and religion. The findings of my study therefore align with those of Duderija (2015), Peter (2006a, 2006b) and Voas and Fleischmann (2012) who have identified the following processes among Muslims in Europe: individualisation leading to a secularisation of Western Islam, consumerist attitudes in religion, and religious identities perceived to have little or no dependency on practices. Findings presented in Chapter Four of the thesis are also consistent with those in both Berglund's (2012) study of Swedish Muslim young adults which also uncovered a lack of confidence in Islamic officials, low attendance and participation in mosque activities, and a strong connection and empathy with elements of other religions, and those in Smith and Denton's (2005) North American study where Muslims conveyed a religiosity described as actively 'self-directing and authenticating' (p.79). My findings also concur with those of Kugle (2014), Minwalla *et al*. (2005) and Yip and Khalid (2010) who noted a trend to individualism among LGBT Muslims in a range of Western countries, as evidenced by their personalised re-interpretive strategies to counter traditional exegises concerning homosexuality represented in Islamic texts and discourses, strategies which I have shown have also been used by my participants. The results of my study thus do not support Beyer's (2007) claim that Muslims 'seem to challenge the highly privatized and

unobtrusive way that religion has functioned in this region [European countries]' (p. 108), and the structural force of Islam has a public character claiming influence over every area of its followers lives.

7.2.5. The role of cultural hybridity

This study has revealed that, for some gay Arab Muslim men, the reason particular outcomes occur in their lived experiences at the intersection of different identity dimensions, is due to the influence of cultural hybridity, that is, the effect of 'multiple cultural attachments on identity or the process of cultural mixture' (Papastergiadis 2005, p. 40). The findings supplement the work of Yip (2004a, 2004b) on South Asian LGBT identities, in this respect. I have illustrated how the influence of hybridity has affected the salience of my participants' ethnic identities, underlining their sense of both belonging and not belonging to their dual cultural backgrounds, or else producing feelings of a dilution of their Arabness. The study has also clearly brought into focus the dialectic of living out a hybrid identity. As discussed earlier, gay Arab Muslim men may feel that growing up and/or living in the U.K. they have a sense of being able to experience the 'best of both worlds', to benefit from what are seen as values of greater sexual freedoms, openness and tolerance towards alternative sexualities, legal protections for LGBT people, equality legislation and the re-defining of heterosexist institutions such as marriage, so that they may be able to assimilate and enact what are Western social constructions of a gay 'identity'. These freedoms, together with the growing stress on individualised and privatised religious faith in the U.K., may also make it easier for the individual to reconcile any dissonance between their sexual and religious identities, or indeed to be able to renounce their faith altogether. Yet at the same time, these men have been influenced by norms, values and traditions within their Arab Muslim culture, where, while they can enjoy certain aspects such as cuisine, music and traditional customs, they are also greatly aware of the importance of upholding honour and reputation within the extended family, and of a widespread homophobia within their religion and culture, factors which create pressure to suppress any expression or acknowledgement of their sexuality to their families and other Muslims, and which create an urgency to maintain their 'secret' because they fear being attacked and even murdered. Consequently, elaborate measures of passing are often necessitated, relationships with white gay men may

be avoided, and the pressure from the family to perform one's appropriately masculine gender role by marrying heterosexually needs to be managed. Burdsey (2006, p. 22) has said that 'social identities are…the product of numerous different and often seemingly conflicting or contradictory influences', a statement of clear relevance to many of my participants. It seems that the movement between and negotiation of the meanings and representations of homosexuality provided by two very different cultural systems, and the constant everyday contextual demands of deciding the extent to which the expectations of these systems need to be be met is reminiscent of the cultural studies theorist Stuart Hall's apposite description of the term 'translation' applied to hybrid identities. For many of the gay male Arab men in my study they are 'the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, belong at one and the same time to several "homes" (and to no one particular "home")...They must learn to inhabit at least two identities, to speak two cultural languages, to translate and negotiate between them' (Hall, 1992, p. 310). In the case of gay Arab Muslim men, the translation process might be fraught with difficulty since some things appear untranslatable due the large degree of cultural difference.

7.2.6. Giving voice to the experiences of gay Arab Muslim men

This research study has made audible the voices and subjectivities of gay Arab Muslim men through the interview extracts presented in Chapters 4-6. By adopting a feminist-aligned, intersectional epistemological approach, the thesis makes a modest yet important contribution to producing an alternative empowering epistemology which, by means of centring the lived experiences of these men, opens up the possibility for alternative narratives to be told that can help to resist, contest and subvert the hegemonic, heteronormative discourses and truth claims embedded within our social structures (Crenshaw 1989, 1991; Collins and Bilge, 2016; Grzanka, 2014a). In the telling, their sexual stories become 'transgressive, critical and challenging' (Plummer, 1995, p. 176) of dominant cultural narratives that oppress, marginalise or erase experiences that do not serve the purposes and reflect the norms of the most powerful group: white, middle class, heterosexual men. I hope telling their sexual stories may facilitate a sense of self-empowerment, reifying and authenticating their sexual identities to produce a 'queer realness' (Halberstam, 2005), whilst at the same time making known the experiences of the social

inequalities, multiple discriminations, stigma (Barker, Richards and Bowes-Catton, 2012), and symbolic and real violence that they suffer (in fact, two of my interviewees hoped that the study could be published to make the experiences of gay Arab Muslim men more widely known).

Changing cultural, social and economic conditions in the U.K. have allowed fuller and more equal recognition and treatment of hitherto stigmatised identities, and allowed them to become a more normal, visible part of the culture (Richardson, 2000). Richardson (2000) has listed that among the conditions that have facilitated such advances are a reduction in the power of the family and religious institutions, a certain level of tolerance of difference, and the emerging elements of an LGBT community. But as we have clearly seen, the power of the family and of religious institutions and their homophobic discourses still exert a strong hold on Arab Muslim cultures and communities, and there is generally not a similar level of tolerance of sexual difference as that found in the surrounding non-Muslim culture. The task of consciousness-raising, of highlighting issues and problems facing gay Arab Muslim men, has been a main goal of this study and can be viewed as a small contribution to a far larger process. LGBT Muslim activist groups in the U.K. are involved in an exceptionally challenging struggle, aimed at changing attitudes towards homosexuality among Muslim communities, campaigning for social change, social justice and full sexual citizenship (i.e the gaining of various citizen rights based on an individual's sexuality [Richardson, 2000]), and for acceptance of their right to live differently (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). Anecdotal evidence, however, suggests that the membership of these groups is fairly small, and the number of Arab members even smaller. Recruiting a greater number of LGBT Arabs into their ranks would hopefully allow the specific needs and concerns of this ethnic group to be addressed.

With regard to how the study's methodological approach has helped the voices of gay Arab Muslim men to effectively be heard, online recruitment seems a research method that can be used very successfully to recruit participants willing to discuss a range of sensitive topics. In addition, I would argue that qualitative research methods and, in particular, semi-structured, in-depth interviews have been an especially valuable tool for accessing and depicting the complexity of the feelings, thoughts and perceptions of these men in making sense of the intersections of their sexual, religious, racial, ethnic, gender and class identities and uncovering the

outcomes of these intersections. Asynchronous email interviews, whilst helping provide anonymity, did not, however, seem an ideal medium to get participants to open up and talk at length about their lives and identities and, consequently, far less rich data and knowledge was produced. In general, I felt that, by behaving ethically and adopting the principle of 'non-maleficence', by, for example, anonymising names; guaranteeing that only I would have access to and listen to the interview voice recordings, and adopting a non-judemental approach to anything participants said, this seemed to give interviewees the confidence to express themselves and talk about what was important to them. Furthermore, it seemed that the re-telling of difficult stories of childhood sexuaI abuse to a relative stranger could sometimes have a cathartic function and provided an emotional release for long pent up feelings, and this opportunity seemed to have been appreciated. I think my position as an ethnic outsider researching gay Arab Muslim men was also advantageous concerning this topic. Indeed, at least two interviewees explicitly mentioned they felt able to voice their attitudes and opinions and discuss their life experiences much more freely with me than they would with interviewers from the same ethnic background, who they felt might be less discrete. In addition, my gender and sexuality, that is, my being a gay man, seemed to instil confidence in the interviewees to trust me and talk very candidly and explicitly about their sexual experiences as they presumed I would understand and empathise with certain aspects of their own experiences. In building empathetic relationships before and during the interviews, even factors such as differences in age and social class between myself and some interviewees did not appear to inhibit them from voicing their opinions and experiences in detail.

7.2.7. Utilising inter-disciplinary insights

This thesis is theoretically rooted within the discipline of sociology, focusing on concepts such as race, ethnicity, class and sexuality in the construction of social identities, as well as incorporating literature from the sociology of religion to explore notions such as the development of religious individualism, and the sociology of the family with themes such as the 'democratisation of intimacy' in modern families and Morgan's (1996) conceptualisation of the family as the enactment and negotiation of a series of practices. Yet one of the thesis' key strengths is its theoretical

pragmatism in shaping an epistemology which adopts theories and concepts from disciplines beyond sociology, if richer insights into and an appropriate theoretical accounting for various social phenomena may be obtained. For example, I have utilised theoretical concepts from the disciplines of psychology and social psychology with regard to the following: how gay individuals experience 'identity threat', the meaning and causes of 'homophobia', the notions of 'cognitive dissonance', 'stigma' and 'shame' that result from a conflict of managing 'dissonant identities', the use of psychological strategies of 'compartmentalisation' such as 'denial' of one's sexuality to the self and the pressure to 'pass' as heterosexual to others, and a discussion of developmental stage models of 'coming out'. In addition, the thesis has benefited from geography's theoretical work on the 'emotional turn' and 'emotional geographies', regarding the association of positive and negative emotions with particular spaces and how negative emotions are linked with the notion of 'gay migration'. Moreover, the 'geography of sexualities', has also provided valuable insights into the following: how Western constructs of (homo)sexuality have been globalised and engendered a reactionary resistance within non-Western cultures; the idea of sexual (un)desirability in urban gay commercial spaces, and the literature on membership of diasporic and transnational queer Muslim activist groups. Furthermore, literature and theories from information communication technologies (ICT)/new media have been used to account for the usage, behaviours and psychology of online dating, for example, in the discussion of the 7a engine model to explain the popularity of dating websites. These examples illustrate how a cross-disciplinary approach, where appropriate, enhances this study's theoretical strength and breadth, enabling a more regular linking of empirical findings to theory throughout, and ultimately providing a fuller and better understanding and explanation of the real world social phenomena discussed, developing knowledge, and enriching the study's overall academic credibility.

Having now set out claims for what I have argued are the study's significant contributions to the field, in the final section, I put forward some suggestions for further research in this area.

7.3. Avenues for Further Research

While I could make many suggestions for potential research projects in this area, space limitations mean that I limit my recommendations to six relevant areas:

- Due to the fact that the vast majority of the sample was recruited on dating websites, which tend to be skewed towards a younger membership, (only two out of 35 participants were over the age of 40), the findings of my research tend to predominantly reflect the experiences and views of younger gay Arab Muslim men. There remain opportunities, therefore, to research in-depth, the intersectional identities of middle-aged/older gay Arab Muslim men and to focus on age as a specific identity dimension, the experience of ageing, or indeed, to do comparative studies analysing intergenerational similarities and differences.
- While this study looked at the issue of 'coming out' as gay to family and kin, coming out to oneself, that is to say, the period of first realising and understanding that one is homosexual could not be discussed due to space constraints, and this aspect also appears not to been researched in any great depth in previous studies of LGBT Muslims. Thus, future research with gay Arab Muslim men could explore this area, and more specifically, how their experiences relate to the various stage models (e.g. Cass, 1979) of coming out that posit the sequential phases that individuals are said to pass through during the process of becoming self-aware of their sexuality. Very little research indeed has been done to obtain first-hand accounts from family and kin exploring their own thoughts/feelings/beliefs after a gay son's disclosure, or about their suspicions that their child/relative/sibling might be gay (one notable exception is Hammoud-Beckett, 2007). This would also appear a logical area for further research, especially for ethno-religious insider-researchers, who would more easily have contacts and access to Arab Muslim communities.
- Opportunities could also be taken to devote more research to the phenomenon of cultural hybridity as it shapes the identities of both gay Arab Muslims who were born and brought up in the U.K. and those who have

arrived more recently. In particular, a few of the gay Muslim men I interviewed were of mixed ethnic heritage (e.g. Arab-South Asian) and there seems to have been no research to date into exploring the intersectional identities of these men or the influence of hybridity (as they construct 'new ethnicities' [Hall, 1992]) on their lived experiences of being ethnically mixed, gay and Muslim.

- The specific activities and functions of LGBT Muslim support groups and especially their online equivalents in supporting LGBT Muslims reconcile their religion and sexuality remains under-researched (as indeed is the contact LGBT Muslims have with support groups more generally). Particularly valuable would be more ethnographic research involving extended periods of observation/participant observation which could provide greater insight into the work of such groups and the participation and interactions of gay Arab Muslims within them. Again, a researcher who is also an ethno-religious insider (as Shah [2016] was) would, I contend, be in a much better position than I was to gain access to these groups. Similarly, the role friendship networks (both gay and non-gay) play in helping gay Arab Muslims manage their sexual identity, and the notion of friends as 'families we choose' is an area that needs far more empirical research.
- It is quite possible that gay Arab Muslim men's experiences of Islamophobia might have qualitatively changed since the fieldwork was completed four years ago, since, as mentioned in Chapter Six, the interim period has seen the rise of the so-called Islamic State that has claimed responsibility for a series of high profile terrorist attacks perpetrated by its Islamist extremist adherents on European soil, including recently in the U.K. (in Manchester and London between April and September, 2017), attacks often carried out by Muslims born and bred in the countries concerned, and which have produced many civilian fatalities. It may therefore be reasonable to suppose that attitudes towards Islam and Muslims more generally, may have changed for the worse, and that incidents of Islamophobia in the U.K. may have increased (Certainly, the European Islamophobia report [2016, p. 1] claims there are increasing instances of Islamophobia in most European countries – in 'the political environment, media outlets, on streets and in business life.'). Thus,

gay Arab Muslim men's experience of Islamophobia is very much an area that could be revisited and explored in more depth in a future research study.

- Methodologically speaking, if researchers have the funds (which I did not), alternative research tools to the traditional interview method could be used, such as providing video cameras (as Yip and Page, [2011] did), so participants could record video diaries, allowing more fully unmediated and more organic, first person narratives of identity experience to emerge, which may potentially produce qualitatively different results than those obtained in a face-to-face interview guided by a researcher's questions.

The various suggestions proposed here for further research would help fill some of the still existent lacunae in the literature, and considerably expand and deepen our knowledge about the lives and intersectional identities of gay Arab Muslims in the U.K. and provide the spur and encouragement to hopefully make findings as fascinating and significant as those that have been made in my own research study.

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Appendix

Interview Guide:

Part One: Biographical information.

1) What is your name/ age/ place of birth/ relationship status
2) What are your educational qualifications?
3) Can you give some details about your education?
4) Can you give details about any employment/training you've had?
5) Can you give details about your family?
6) Can you tell me about your interests and hobbies?

Part Two: Identities

1) How would you define yourself in terms of your sexual identity or sexual orientation? Why do you define yourself as such?
2) (for those identifying as gay) How important to you in your daily life is being gay?
3) How important is the role of religion in your life? What does it mean to you to be a Muslim? What does it mean to you to be an Arab?
4) (for those who say religion has some importance) How do you manage being religious and being gay/having sex with men at the same time?
5) (for those who have come out as gay) Why did you decide to come out? What were the circumstances of your coming out? How did you find the experience of coming out? What were the reactions of people you knew to your coming out?
6) (for those who have not come out as gay)Why have you decided not to come out?

Part Three: Support Networks

1) Are there any people or places that can provide positive support for you as a gay Muslim?
2) Do you belong to any Muslim LGBT support group?
3) (for those that say yes) Why did you decide to join this group? What do you do as a member of this group? What is your opinion of this group? What are

the advantages of belonging to this group? What are the disadvantages of belonging to this group?

4) (for those that say no) Why did you decide not to join any support groups for LGBT Muslims?
5) Do you belong to any non-Muslim LGBT support groups?
6) Follow same sequence of questions as in 2) and 3) above.
7) Do you make use of any online resources/websites aimed at LGBT Muslims?
8) (for those that do) Why do you use them and can you give details about how you use them? What is your opinion about them?
9) (for those that do not) Why don't you use them?
10) Do you make use of any online support resources/websites aimed at LGBT people generally?
11) Follow same sequence of questions in 8) and 9) above.

Part Four: White Gay Spaces

1) Do you ever visit the gay scene (e.g. gay bars, nightclubs, cafes)?
2) If yes, why? Can you describe where you go and what you do?
3) If no, why not?
4) Can you tell me about any gay relationships/sexual encounters that you have had?
5) What are your views on dating non-Muslim white men?
6) What are you views on the right time to have sex with someone who you are attracted to?
7) What are your views on gay marriage/civil partnerships? Would you consider this yourself, if it is possible?
8) Have you ever encountered racism in your daily life? If so, can you describe what happened? How did you feel and how did you deal with the situation?
9) Have you ever encountered racism on the gay scene? If so, can you describe what happened? How did you feel and how did you deal with the situation?
10) Have you ever encountered discrimination because of your religion (Islamophobia) in your daily life? If so, can you describe what happened? How did you feel and how did you deal with the situation?

11) Have you ever encountered discrimination because of your religion (Islamophobia) on the gay scene? If so, can you describe what happened? How did you feel and how did you deal with the situation?