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“ALLAH MADE ME THIS WAY”: NEGOTIATING IDENTITIES FOR MUSLIM
AMERICANS WITH SAME-SEX ATTRACTION

by

Emily El-Oqlah

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Counseling Psychology

The University of Memphis

August 2021

Abstract

To date, little research has focused on the experiences of U.S. Muslims with same-sex attraction. The purpose of this study is to extend research on the experiences of Muslims in the United States of America who have same-sex or same-gender attraction. This study sought to answer the following research questions: (1) How do LGBTQ+ Muslims negotiate their intersecting identities? (2) What are experiences with discrimination or acceptance in and out of the Muslim community? (3) How do LGBTQ+ Muslims approach the topic of “coming out” to their communities? and (4) What do mental health professionals need to know when working with this population? The current study used a postcolonial queer theoretical framework and indigenous methodology methods to illuminate the lived experiences of this population. A sample of 9 participants engaged with individual conversational interviews over Zoom. Using critical discourse analysis, findings of this study explored the discourses that produce participant experiences, and the knowledge they create through their discursive practices. The findings yielded six overall discourses: (1) critical interpretation of religious texts, (2) levels of outness, (3) financial independence and space from family, (4) experiences within the Muslim community and the LGBTQ+ community, (5) identity negotiation, and (6) LGBTQ+ Muslim identity as source of pride and resistance. Implications for practice and future research are discussed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Although American Muslims go through intense scrutiny and surveillance as they are often deemed to be a threat to national security, very little research exists on their actual experiences and identity development (Selod, 2019; Peek, 2005). American Muslim LGBT people are particularly underrepresented in health and mental health literature and are an even more invisible minority as they face marginalization both within their own culture and inside the LGBT community (Al-Sayyad, 2010; Khan, 2010). Therefore, the current qualitative study explored the general lived experiences of U.S. Muslims with same-sex attraction grounded in Postcolonial Queer theory and Indigenous methodology.

Who are American Muslims?

Muslims in the United States represent diverse backgrounds and share experiences of discrimination due to their religious identities. There are an estimated 3.45 million Muslims in the U.S. who are expected to grow to 2.1% of the population by 2050 (Lipka, 2017). While Muslims share religion, no one racial group constitutes the majority of Muslims. White Muslims, made up of Arabs, Middle Easterners, Iranians, and others, make up 41% of the American Muslim population; Asians make up 28%, Black Americans account for 20%, Hispanics make up 8%, and 3% identify as other or mixed race. Additionally, the majority of U.S. born Muslims identify as Black (Pew Research Center, 2017).

A Pew research study states that 49% of Americans view “at least some” U.S. Muslims as anti-American (Pew Research Center, 2016). Additionally, a survey of 1,001 U.S. Muslims found that 48% of the participants reported at least one incident of discrimination (Pew Research

Center, 2017). Half of all surveyed Muslims reported that it has been harder to be Muslim in the U.S. in recent years (Pew Research Center, 2017).

Being Muslim in the United States

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11) led to an increase in anti-Muslim rhetoric as politicians began to discuss Muslims as a threat to national security. This change in national discourse sparked an increase in hate crimes and discrimination against American Muslims (Abu-Ras, Suárez, & Abu-Bader, 2018). Reports of hate crimes and discrimination due to an irrational fear of Muslims, often referred to as Islamophobia, further increased after the 2016 U.S. election (Abu-Ras, Suárez, & Abu-Bader, 2018). Lajevardi and Abrajano found that within both white and racial/ethnic minority groups, resentment towards Muslims was connected with the support of Donald Trump for president, showcasing the larger mistrust U.S. citizens hold towards American Muslims (Lajevardi & Abrajano, 2019).

Despite the diversity of U.S. Muslims, post 9/11 U.S. Muslims are racialized, meaning cultural signifiers such as having an accent, wearing the hijab, or having a Muslim name are racialized concepts that ascribe a racial meaning separate from other groups (Selod, 2019). Muslims experience racially based surveillance from the state through measures such as the PATRIOT Act and TSA screening databases. After 9/11, the United States developed the USA PATRIOT Act as a way to surveil U.S. citizens who were suspected of terrorism. American Muslims were often targeted by this Act and were identified by racialized cues (i.e. names, clothing styles). Muslim men were construed as terrorists while Muslim women who covered their hair were constructed as anti-feminist and anti-Western (Selod, 2019). Muslims as racialized bodies likens to Edward Said's (1978) critique of Western colonialism viewing the Middle East as backwards and misogynistic. Post-9/11 Muslims also encountered racialized

ways of being viewed at airports, through the implementation of TSA's security watch lists. Muslims were often times subjected to no fly lists or extra security screenings, typically based on visual cues such as their names, ethnicities, and religious clothing. This is especially true for Muslim women who cover their hair and who therefore experienced gendered racism (Selod, 2019). Further, U.S. citizens were also encouraged to surveil their fellow citizens through surveillance measures such as the *If You See Something, Say Something* campaign sponsored by the U.S. government. The campaign began after 9/11 and was led by the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority. It enlisted U.S. citizens as surveillance actors of the state and, because of public perceptions of Muslims as suspicious, they were often reported to authorities. Citizens were asked to observe their surroundings for anything suspicious in an attempt to curtail terrorists (Reeves 2012; Selod, 2019). Due to these measures, Muslims are often weary of outsiders coming into their communities.

The Mental Health Impacts of Being Muslim

These experiences have resulted in increased rates of depression, stress, anxiety, and feelings of being unsafe for the Muslim community (Abu-Ras, Suárez, & Abu-Bader, 2018). The majority of American Muslim college students report that they have experienced one or more traumatic events in their life, as well as lifetime discrimination due to their Muslim American identity (Lowe, Tineo, Bonumwezi, & Bailey, 2019). These lifetime trauma experiences result in higher post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms with Muslim Americans (Lowe, Tineo, Bonumwezi, & Bailey, 2019). Further, American Muslims experience vicarious trauma, the act of being indirectly traumatized, at high rates. Examples of vicarious trauma include hearing of or witnessing hate crimes or discriminations towards others and watching negative events or commentary on media sources. American Muslims experience vicarious trauma through shared

identities and empathizing with those who are the direct victims of trauma (Asraf & Nassar, 2018). This population also struggles with navigation of their multiple identities. Due to misconceptions of Islam, many Muslims feel a sense of personal responsibility to educate others on their faith (Asraf & Nassar, 2018). Navigating being American, Muslim, and advocate is a confusing and emotional process.

Muslims in the U.S. experience increased scrutiny juxtaposed with a lack of research interest in who they are and what they experience. Muslim Americans experience discrimination, hate crimes, and surveillance due to their religious identities, which can result in experiences of trauma. Further, there is a gap in research pertaining to the diverse and growing population of Muslims in the United States, and especially so with minority groups within Muslim communities such as LGBTQ Muslims.

LGBTQ Experiences and Mental Health

Literature with LGBTQ populations has grown in recent years, and discrimination against sexual and gender diversity is well documented. Historically, LGBTQ people have experienced hate crimes, criminalization, and exclusion from housing and employment, among other discriminatory experiences (Casey, Reisner, Findling, Blendon, Benson, Sayde, & Miller, 2019). In 2020, the Center for American Progress produced a survey of 1,528 LGBTQ participants in the U.S. Survey results found that more than one in three LGBTQ individuals and nearly two in three transgender individuals reported experiencing discrimination within the previous year (Center for American Progress, 2020).

Further, LGBTQ+ people have previously been deemed mentally ill due to their sexual or gender identity. The combination of these discriminatory experiences has negatively impacted the mental health of LGBTQ people (Casey et al., 2019). Individuals from multiple minority

backgrounds (i.e. racial and ethnic minorities) are likely to experience even higher rates of discrimination and negative mental health (Velez, Polihronakis, Watson, & Cox, 2019). Additionally, research shows that in general people of same-sex attraction have higher rates of mental health concerns compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Meyer, 2003). Minority stress theory explains this occurrence as due to the stigma, prejudice, and discrimination that sexual and gender minorities experience (Meyer, 2003).

While research attending to the needs of the LGBTQ population is growing, the mental health concerns and general experiences of this community deserve continued focus as the stigma and discrimination this population faces is ongoing. Moreover, individuals who identify as people of color and LGBTQ experience multiple levels of discrimination (Velez et al., 2019; Sutter & Perrin, 2016) and thus need extra attention within the literature in order to best attend to their unique needs.

LGBTQ Muslims

Research with LGBTQ Muslims and identity is scant. The research that does exist on LGBTQ Muslim identity showcases a multitude of experiences and ways of navigating the formation of identities. Traditional Islamic teachings construct same-sex acts as a sin, therefore Muslims with same-sex attraction can face difficulties within the Muslim community and in their own identity (Kugle, 2010). While some Muslims leave the religion and their families entirely, others find ways to unite their seemingly incompatible religious, cultural, and sexual identities.

LGBTQ Muslims have complicated relationships with sources of social support. In addition to facing racialization, homophobia, transphobia, and discrimination for both their LGBTQ and Muslim identities in mainstream U.S. culture, oftentimes, Muslims experience a lack of cultural sensitivity, feelings of exclusion, and instances of racism and discrimination in

Queer spaces and movements (Al-Sayyad, 2010; Khan, 2010). At the same time, LGBTQ Muslims often do not have a home within traditional religious spaces. Nonheteronormative Muslims experience homophobia and strict gender role expectations in their faith communities (Khan, 2010). Further, families are commonly not sources of support for Muslims navigating their sexual identities or during the coming out process. Friends may be the first test run for LGBTQ Muslims to disclose their sexual orientation to before disclosing to family members. Even then, some Muslims may not disclose to their family or extended community (Khan, 2010).

LGBTQ Muslims may not be out to their family, even when they are in a same-sex marriage. Online communities and support networks of LGBTQ people may become a type of secondary family in which LGBTQ Muslims can publicly share their relationships (Shannahan, 2009). There are differences in how non-heterosexual Muslims negotiate their sexual and religious identities. Many seem to leave the religion entirely, believing that the two are incompatible. Others, however, find a way to maintain both identities and orient them together. Within the latter group, some members are attempting to reform the religion and mosques to provide space for LGBTQ Muslims to be included (Shannahan, 2009).

Due to the limited amount of existing research on identity negotiation with LGBTQ Muslims, this dissertation aims to further expand the narrative of ways in which this population formulates their intersecting marginalized identities.

Savin-Baden and Major (2013) describe the ways that individuals experience the world as “wicked problems” due to their messy or circular nature (p. 5). Identity negotiation for LGBTQ Muslims can be complex, intricate, and circular. Thus, I am utilizing qualitative methods in this study to be ethically and critically responsive to the needs of this unique population. For LGBTQ

Muslims, there is no one way of being, and qualitative inquiry welcomes the multitude of experiences that are expressed by those with intersecting identities.

I will be using postcolonial queer theory for this study because it allows room for ways of being outside of the gay-straight and Eastern-Western binaries. Postcolonial Queer theory centers people who are on the margins of identities (i.e. racial and ethnic populations, LGBTQ populations, women) and critiques socially constructed binaries (i.e. gay or straight, Eastern or Western, man or woman). The participants in this study live at the intersection of race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation; therefore postcolonial queer theory is an appropriate choice. Further, I will use Postcolonial Queer Indigenous methodology and conversational methods when collecting data. Utilizing this way of working allows for a culturally aware way of interacting with participants. This methodology is relationally based and places a great emphasis on ethical ways of interacting with “othered” communities who have historically been taken advantage of by researchers. Working with this methodology will uphold me as a researcher to honor the information and knowledge provided by the participants, rather than placing me as an expert “knower” of what constitutes correct data. Further, Postcolonial Queer Indigenous methodology requires me to be responsive and responsible to the community I will be working with.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

This postcolonial queer indigenous interview dissertation study will examine how 8-12 self-identified LGBTQ Muslims from around the United States negotiate and conceptualize their identities as racial, religious, and gender and sexual minorities. The questions of this study include: (1) How do LGBTQ Muslims negotiate their intersecting identities? (2) What are experiences with discrimination or acceptance in and out of the Muslim community? (3) How do

LGBTQ Muslims approach the topic of “coming out” to their communities? and (4) What do mental health professionals need to know when working with this population?

The purpose of this dissertation study is to bring awareness to how identity formation develops for LGBTQ Muslims and what therapists need to know when working with this population. It aims to position marginalized Muslim ways of identity formation at the forefront of academic discussion with attention to how Islamophobia and homophobia shape LGBTQ Muslim identities. This research study includes implications that expand the existing knowledge surrounding how sexual, racial, gender, and religious minorities navigate their intersecting identities, as well as clinical implications for therapists working with this population.

Significance of the Study

This study may present continued understandings of the ways in which people of multiple marginalized identities construct and navigate their identity development. LGBTQ Muslims may provide a new way of thinking in relation to how identities intersect and develop, and how coming out is conceptualized within non-white and non-Christian communities. Muslims as racialized bodies experience prejudice and discrimination, which for LGBTQ Muslims is experienced even in LGBTQ “safe spaces.” Homophobia exists within Muslim communities as well, leaving LGBTQ Muslims limited options in expressing their full identities. Through grounding this study in Postcolonial Queer theory and Indigenous methodology, I am able to invite “other” ways of being and knowing outside of Western norms. Qualitative research relies on using the researcher as an instrument while conducting a study. For that reason, I will contextualize myself within this study through a brief examination of my own background and identities.

Personal and Theoretical Contexts

I was raised in an interfaith household, attending weekly services at both a church and a masjid. Growing up in religious contexts, I was exposed to homophobia from an early age. Any discussion around sexual orientation and gender identity was negative, if it was spoken of at all. As a child, I also learned how larger society viewed Muslims. I was 11 years old when 9/11 happened. I vividly remember being in my sixth grade classroom watching the twin towers billowing smoke on the TV with my classmates and teachers. Students were crying and afraid. Later that afternoon I experienced my first encounter with Islamophobia. Students and classmates of mine were running down the hallways after school yelling “Death to the Arabs! Death to the Muslims!” I walked as closely to the wall as I could, wanting to disappear. In the years following 9/11 I learned that being Muslim meant being a terrorist, being a bad person, and maybe worst of all, not being an American. I turned away from my religious upbringing and community, as an attempt to separate myself from my Muslim-ness. I wanted to white wash myself so that I could fit in to society. Growing into my adulthood, I began the process of unlearning my internalized Islamophobia. I also began to think more critically of sexual orientation and gender identity, learning that they do not exist in binaries. Attending the masjid began to feel like a safe space for my spiritual growth and connection to my Arab, immigrant, and Muslim community. However, it was very clear that sexuality was not to be discussed outside of a heteronormative understanding. Returning to my religious community roots felt empowering, yet there was not a space I could attend that honored all parts of my beliefs and values. I wondered what LGBTQ Muslims did in terms of remaining connected to their family and community while also being true to their sexual orientation. I began researching LGBTQ Muslim spaces and found a few across the United States.

This is what began my journey into researching how LGBTQ Muslims navigate their intersecting marginalized identities and wondering where they turn to for support. I am uniquely positioned to do this work through my own identities as a multiracial, Arab, Muslim woman. I am an insider to the Muslim community, and understand cultural norms and values.

I am uniquely positioned to conduct this study due to my upbringing and membership within the Muslim community, as well as within ethnic minority communities. Muslim communities are sometimes wary of outsiders coming in and asking questions, in large part because of the FBI's placement of informants in the community. While I have many positionalities in common with this population, I also recognize that differences exist within community and that it is necessary to not assume the experiences of others even if we have a shared background. Further, I am in a position of power as the researcher of this study and believe in the importance of understanding there is an inherent power differential within the research relationship. Ultimately, my aim is to bring greater support and awareness to the experiences of same-sex attracted Muslims through this dissertation.

The Second Context

I will be using Postcolonial Queer Theory as my theoretical framework for my dissertation. Postcolonial theory and Queer theory are both critical theories that focus on identity, power, and denormalizing whiteness and heteronormativity (Punt, 2008). Queer theory aims to disrupt heteronormative beliefs and conventional norms, while giving space to other possibilities for gender and sex (Callis, 2009). Postcolonial Theory focuses on challenging European ways of knowing and viewing the world, with an emphasis on legitimizing other (non-European) ways of being (Gandhi, 1998).

I chose this framework because LGBTQ Muslims exist within the intersections of multiple marginalized identities and interact with systems that oppress, colonize, and pathologize their ways of being. Queer theory and Postcolonial theory provide potent methods with which to engage and critique how Muslims are newly emerging into the awareness of research, academia, and psychology. Additionally, LGBTQ Muslim spaces are recently blossoming around the United States. Postcolonial Queer theory developed in the past few decades as an intersection of critical theories, and the addition of one to the other helps strengthen their critiques of how categories came to be constructed (Aydemir, 2011). Historically, Queer theory left out critiques of race and the centering of whiteness as “normal” in global society. Similarly, Postcolonial theory did not attend to critiquing homophobia as an output of colonialism and instead viewed gayness as a symptom of white culture (Desai, 2001). Brought together, Postcolonial Queer Theory is able to critique and challenge both heteronormative and racialized social norms.

Outline

In Chapter 2, I provide a thorough analysis of my theoretical orientation, postcolonial queer theory. This will contain a focus on main theoretical tenets that guide how I conceptualize identity formation and general experiences for LGBTQ Muslims. I also outline the current research with American Muslims and LGBTQ Muslims as it guides my study. I conclude Chapter 2 with a summary of the current research and how it informs the research questions for this dissertation study.

I begin Chapter 3 with an explanation of my methodological approach for the study. I describe how Indigenous methods guide my conceptualization of interview style and questions. I also attend to researcher trustworthiness and ethics. I then discuss a description of my participants, selection methods, and recruitment methods along with an estimated timeline for

my study. Finally, I conclude with an overview of how I conducted research analysis and interpretation.

In chapter 4, I state the findings of the study, which are in six main discourses. These include: (1) critical consumption and interpretation of religious texts, (2) levels of outness, (3) financial independence and space from family, (4) experiences within the Muslim community and the LGBTQ+ community, (5) identity negotiation, and (6) LGBTQ+ Muslim identity as source of pride and resistance. I also incorporate postcolonial queer theoretical frameworks to analyze the data.

Lastly, in chapter 5, I discuss the findings and place them in context of current literature. The findings are organized by the research questions, which are: (1) How do LGBTQ+ Muslims negotiate their intersecting identities? (2) What are experiences with discrimination or acceptance in and out of the Muslim community? (3) How do LGBTQ+ Muslims approach the topic of “coming out” to their communities? and (4) What do mental health professionals need to know when working with this population? Additionally, I discuss future research and clinical considerations, as well as limitations of the study.

Chapter II: Theory and Literature

Research regarding the experiences, identities, and mental health of Muslims is scant. Further, research focused on minorities within the larger Muslim community (i.e. LGBTQ Muslims) is even more limited. What research does exist typically focuses on gay Muslim men (i.e. Felix, 2016; Minwalla, Simon Rosser, Feldman, & Varga, 2005), and has been conducted in countries other than the United States (i.e. Baderoon, 2005; Shannahan, 2009; Shah, 2016). Of the limited studies completed in the United States, many are conducted with or include immigrants rather than attending specifically to American-born or raised Muslims (i.e. Al-Sayaad, 2010; Ikizler & Syzmanski, 2014; Minwalla et al., 2005). Additionally, many studies recruit from mosques/masjids and organizations such as the Muslim Student Association (MSA) on a college campus. Studies that rely solely on these means of recruitment lead to research that focuses more heavily on religious Muslims who pray regularly, abstain from alcohol, sex, or pork, and Muslims who dress according to Islamic practice. Recruiting from these settings excludes Muslims who are not religious or those who identify as culturally Muslim; thus the full scope of Muslim identity is rarely represented.

While there is a larger body of research pertaining to identity integration and development for people who are both sexual minorities and people of faith, there is a gap in the literature focusing on the intersection of race, sexuality, and religion. The bulk of these studies have been conducted within Christian populations, and most commonly within white Christian populations (i.e. Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000; Dehlin, Galliher, Bradshaw, & Crowell, 2015; & Rodriguez, Etengoff, & Vaughan, 2019).

I have structured this chapter into several sections. First, I briefly discuss studies relating to LGBTQ identity development, racial identity development, and Muslim identity development.

Next, I discuss religious and sexual identity integration through a wide variety of studies.

Finally, I conclude with studies pertaining to mental health concerns of people of color (POC) and Muslims. I end this chapter with an overview of my theoretical orientation, postcolonial queer theory.

LGBTQ Identity Development

As researchers began to study the lived experiences of the LGBTQ+ community, several theories and models of LGBTQ+ identity development emerged. In one of the earliest theories, Cass (1979) developed a six-stage model of homosexual identity development for both men and women. These stages are: 1) Identity confusion (questioning what one's identity is after experiences of same-sex attraction); 2) identity comparison (deciding that one is different based on experiences of same-sex attraction); 3) identity tolerance (assuming that experiences of same-sex attraction mean that one is probably gay); 4) identity acceptance (identifying same-sex attraction as an indication that one is gay); 5) identity pride (taking pride in one's gay identity); and 6) identity synthesis (reaching the conclusion that gay identity is a part of who one is).

Similarly to Cass (1979), Troiden (1989) developed a four-stage model of homosexual identity development for lesbians and gay men. The stages are: 1) Sensitization (feeling different from peers, usually before puberty); 2) Identity Confusion (feelings of confusion after experiencing same-sex attraction); 3) Identity assumption (Identifying as homosexual); and 4) Commitment (homosexuality is adopted as a way of life). Though Troiden (1989) incorporates some additional discussion of when in a lesbian or gay person's life the formation of their homosexual identity begins, his theory includes many similar stages to the ones outlined by Cass (1979).

Yarhouse (2001) developed a sexual identity development model with the consideration of religious influences in an individual's life. The model of the influence of valuative frameworks (i.e. religion) on sexual identity synthesis has five stages: 1) identity confusion/crisis; 2) identity attribution, 3) identity foreclosure versus identity expansion; 4) identity reappraisal; and 5) identity synthesis.

As in the theories of Cass (1979) and Troiden (1989), identity confusion occurs when an individual has a same sex attraction. Identity attribution has two paths, one where a person attributes this same sex attraction to an emerging gay identity, and another where a person attributes the same sex attraction to an inclination, and does not make it a self-defining attribute. The second path is more likely for individuals who have a religious worldview. The third stage, identity foreclosure vs. identity expansion also has two paths. Identity foreclosure occurs when an individual adopts a tentative gay identity, and then goes through stages similar to the Cass (1979) model. For those who attribute same-sex attraction to inclinations, they experience identity expansion wherein they examine alternatives to a gay identity and lifestyle. Identity reappraisal has two trajectories, one in which the individual adopts a gay identity, and another in which the individual does not identify with same sex attractions. The final stage, identity synthesis, has two trajectories and occurs when a person follows along with larger models of sexual identity development, including sexual exploration and disclosure. The second trajectory is when an individual follows broader models of personal development rather than sexual development due to their valuative frameworks. This theory takes into consideration the common struggle that many young LGBTQ+ persons face when their sexual identity begins to diverge from the moral or religious valuative systems in which they were raised.

As societal treatment and understanding of LGBTQ+ communities and their lived experiences change and grow, the theoretical models of LGBTQ+ identity development must change and grow too. Klein, Cook, and Travers (2015) discuss the traditional models of identity development for LGBTQ individuals and critique those models through conducting qualitative interviews with LGBTQ youth in Canada. Traditional models follow these steps: (1) Feeling of differentness, (2) Identity formation as developmental process, (3) The need for disclosure, (4) The need for a stage of pride/cultural immersion, and (5) The need for identity integration/synthesis. Participants of the study were made up of 15 LGBTQ youth who were between 16 and 25. Two main ways of challenging this linear path emerged from the participants, one being narratives that did not follow the traditional process of coming out, and the second as a challenge to the notion that being out is more moral or psychologically healthy. The participants discussed their coming out process as dynamic and complex, where a final queer and/or trans identity was not always possible. Further, some participants identified as multiple sexual and gender identities (e.g. both queer and trans or changing identity throughout their lifespan) and therefore had multiple coming out processes. Others described continuously coming out due to not matching a stereotype of what an LGBTQ person looks like, challenging the idea that a person only comes out once. Additionally, the participants in this study challenged the idea that one needs to be out in order to be psychologically healthy and seen as a good role model for the LGBTQ community. This critique of traditional identity models is important when considering the backgrounds of the participants of this study because it provides an alternative theory of development, which may be more applicable to participants living at the intersection of race, gender, culture, religion, and sexuality.

While the studies listed above discuss identity development models for the general LGBTQ community, some models focus specifically on transgender development. For example, Levitt and Ippolito (2014) used grounded theory analysis to understand the experiences of 17 self-identified transgender participants. Participants were majority white, with some black and biracial participants. Further, they represented Christian, Atheist, Buddhist, Wiccan, and Pagan beliefs. All participants identified as transgender and held a variety of sexual and gender identities. They also varied in their approaches to change their sex assigned at birth. Findings include the core experience of being transgender as: 1) Developing constructs to represent one's gender authentically; 2) finding ways to communicate one's gender to others and be seen; 3) balancing these needs with the need to survive under discriminatory political, social, and economic conditions. Much like the previous study, this study seeks to expand and improve the theoretical understanding of homosexual identity by highlighting the impact of presently existing societal expectations placed on queer and transgender people.

In a study focusing on identity development for lesbians, Shapiro, Rios, and Stewart (2010) used an exploratory and inductive research approach informed by grounded theory to examine lesbian identity development through the life narratives of four lesbian scholar-activists from varied backgrounds. The data suggests that a non-linear identity development path is a more accurate description of how lesbians construct their identities compared to linear stage models (i.e. Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989). The participant's sexual development was also contextualized by other identities, national and local contexts, and personal and professional relationships. Two main themes emerged from the life narratives: socializing structures and experiences, and individual decisions and actions. Socializing structures and experiences refers to contextual factors that impact sexual identity development (i.e. friends, family, organizational

structures, and the silencing of sexual expression). Individual decisions and actions refers to the coming out process, which was different for participants based on their national origin, and the work they do (i.e. creative, academic, or activist) related to their sexuality. This study (Shapiro et al., 2010) differs slightly from the previous two in its conclusion by focusing less on identifying the steps of the sexual identity developmental process and more on identifying the external and internal factors that influence the sexual identity development process.

Racial and Ethnic Identity Development

There are many studies addressing racial and ethnic identity development. One such study is Phinney (1989). In Phinney's seminal work on stages of ethnic identity development, high school students across three ethnic groups (African-American, Asian-American, and White) participated in the study. From the data collected, Phinney developed three stages of ethnic identity development. The first, unexamined ethnic identity is when ethnic identity has yet to be explored for an individual. The second stage, ethnic identity search/moratorium, occurs when an event causes an individual to examine their ethnic identity. This event could be a shocking personal or social event that disrupts the individual's world view. The third stage, ethnic identity achievement, is characterized by acceptance, internalization, and understanding of one's ethnic identity. The final stage is the ideal outcome during the identity development process.

In addition, Atkinson, Morten and Sue (1989) discuss the Minority Identity Development Model. The Minority Identity Development Model (MID) has five stages: 1) the Conformity Stage (a preference for the dominant culture over one's ethnic minority culture); 2) the Dissonance Stage (experiences conflict with culturally held beliefs and dominant cultural beliefs); 3) the Resistance and Immersion Stage (rejection of dominant cultural values in favor of

one's culture and ethnicity); 4) the Introspection Stage (evaluation of dominant cultural and ethnic cultural values) ; and 5) the Synergetic Articulation and Awareness Stage (optimal identity with a balance between appreciation for dominant culture and ethnic culture).

Another study looking at ethnic identity is Poston (1990) which proposes a biracial identity model. The Biracial Identity Model has five stages: 1) Personal Identity (sense of self in childhood outside of ethnicity); 2) Choice of Group Categorization (personal and external factors pressure an individual to identify with one race over another); 3) Enmeshment/Denial (confusion and guilt over not being able to fully express or identify with all aspects of one's heritage); 4) Appreciation (appreciation for all identities however some individuals may identify with one race primarily); and 5) Integration (recognition of all racial and ethnic identities that make up an individual).

Similarly, Worrell, Cross and Vandiver's (2001) study uses a racial identity model. This article gives an overview of the development of Cross's Nigrescence Theory. Cross's theory has been a foundational model for African-American racial identity. In the latest model, there are three stages. The first stage, pre-encounter, is defined by assimilation, miseducation, and self-hatred. The second stage, encounter and immersion, is categorized by anti-white feelings and intense Black involvement (i.e. Black nationalism). The final stage, internalization, occurs when an individual takes a multicultural and inclusive stance, which maintains a salient Black identity while recognizing other marginalized groups in society.

Moreover, Johnson and Quaye (2017) looked at a racial identity development model. Johnson and Quaye (2017) proposed a queered Black racial identity developmental model, due to traditional ethnic identity developmental models lack of ability to attend to the complexities of race. Traditional models follow a more linear and structured path of racial and ethnic identity

development. Queering these models allows space to understand colorism, multiracial individuals, and the performance of race, which is fluid and constantly developing over the lifespan. The authors compare Butler's (1999) description of gender as something that an individual does rather than what an individual is to racial performance of doing. Race and gender are both performances, and a queered racial identity model attends to this belief.

In a study focusing on participants of Middle Eastern descent, Najjar, Naser and Clonan-Roy (2019) report that Arab-Americans may reject larger U.S. culture in favor of their ethnic identity due to experiences with ethnic discrimination. Researchers used qualitative focus groups with Arab and Arab-American youth (either born in an Arab country or have at least one parent from an Arab country) to understand Arab identity development in the school setting. Results indicate that three processes impact identity negotiation for Arab students. These three processes included peer and teacher discrimination, school curriculum treatment of history and culture, and broader school structures that allow for student cultural expression. Participants described different ways of coping with discrimination in school settings. Arab-American students reported they either minimized their ethnic identity to blend in, or held on strongly to their Arab culture. Further, participants described taking on an educator role with peers and school staff. The cognitive and emotional labor present in this role lead to feelings of resentment in students. Arab students reported feeling most comfortable in settings that embraced a balance between heritage and U.S. culture. This model is meaningful when conceptualizing the possible development and lived experiences of queer Muslim participants because they are also children of Eastern immigrants living in the West.

An additional study that discusses identity development is Kenji Iwamoto, Junko Negi, Negar Partiali and Creswell (2013). They propose an identity development model for Asian

Indian Americans (AIA) based on 12 interviews with second generation adult AIAs. Researchers found several common themes represented across the lifespan. The themes are: 1) social reference groups (ethnic identity influence from friends and family); 2) core values (development of core values such as respect for elders, loyalty to family and religion); 3) turning points (taking a trip to India, experiences in high school and college); 4) self-concept and conflictual experiences (feeling different as a child, wanting to fit in and be “white”, later developing a sense of ethnic pride); 5) experience with racism and stereotypes (stereotyped as being “smart”, experiencing difficulties after 9/11); and 6) continual development (lifelong ethnic identity development). This model is important to the study because it describes identity development for a group of people who were raised in the U.S. but with Eastern influence due to their immigrant parents. This is a similar positionality to the participants of this study who are raised in the U.S. with cultural, religious, and family influence from their Muslim backgrounds. Further, many themes experienced across the lifespan as noted above are common experiences for Muslims in the West. For example, difficulties after 9/11, loyalty to family, and feeling different from peers are also experienced by Muslims raised in the U.S (Peek, 2005; Wang, Raja, & Azhar, 2019).

Additionally, Daga and Raval’s (2018) study used a mixed methods approach to examine South Asian American ethnic identity. The authors found through quantitative surveys that cultural socialization (i.e. parental influence) was positively associated with ethnic identity, sense of belonging to one’s ethnic group, model minority pride and pressure, and model minority achievement orientation. Parental preparation for bias and promotion of mistrust were positively associated with model minority pressure and adjustment problems, and promotion of mistrust was negatively associated with life satisfaction. During the qualitative phase, the authors found 3

main domains of ethnic identity development: cultural socialization and model minority experience, racism and coping, and effects of parental messages.

Another study looking at racial identity, Spiegler, Wolfer, and Hewstone (2019), recruited 2,145 Muslim adolescents across four Western European countries in order to understand dual identity development in their ethnic and national identities. The participants were children of immigrants and ethnic minorities. The data resulted in four developmental classes: (1) Dual identity, (2) Separation to dual identity, (3) Assimilation to dual identity, and (4) Separation. In the first class, dual identity, adolescents were well adjusted. In the second class, separation to dual identity, participants showed an increase in well-being and health (i.e. life satisfaction) compared to the first class. The third class, assimilation to dual identity, showed a decrease in levels of well-being. The fourth class, separation, had lower levels of socio-cultural adjustment (i.e. problem behaviors at school, lack of intergroup contact). The findings of the study showcase that Muslim adolescents develop a dual identity in Western countries and that the developmental process is important for adjustment.

An additional study by Tikhonov, Espinosa, Huynh and Anglin (2019) focuses on Bicultural Identity Integration. This study recruited 766 ethnic minority (Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Other) first and second-generation college student participants to research Bicultural Identity Integration (BII). BII refers to when ethnic minorities maintain their ethnic identity and also adopt the national identity of their country. Results indicate that an increased American identity is related to an increased sense of harmony between ethnic and American cultures. Participants with a weaker American identity reported a sense of being caught between ethnic and American cultures. The results showcase how bicultural harmony is related to less depression and anxiety in participants.

Overall, models of racial and ethnic identity development showcase a range of possibilities for this study's participant development. It is an important consideration to keep in mind when thinking of the research question related to discrimination or acceptance within the Muslim community and LGBTQ+ community. As the participants of this study come from varied racial and ethnic backgrounds, they will have had different racialized experiences that will have impacted their perspective and development of their racial or ethnic identity. Further, their various stages of identity development will impact the meaning making of their experiences related to racial/ethnic identity in Muslim spaces and in LGBTQ+ spaces.

Ethnic and Sexual Identity Development

Several studies looked at sexual identity in ethnic minorities. One such study is Jamil, Harper and Fernandez (2009). This phenomenological qualitative study looked at the dual identity development process for ethnic and sexual minority adolescents. Participants identified as gay, bisexual, or questioning Latino or African American male youths aged between 16-22. Four major themes emerged from the data: (1) timing and contexts of identity awareness; (2) process of identity development; (3) different experiences of oppression, and (4) connection to the community.

The first theme, timing and contexts of identity awareness, referred to the development of sexual and ethnic identities between elementary and high school. Participants described an awareness of being different from peers ethnically or based on sexual orientation. The contexts in which this awareness developed differed for participants. For ethnic identity, participants described an awareness of their ethnicity through experiences with racism, noticing ethnic differences, and positive ethnic experiences. Sexual identity awareness developed through same sex fantasies and experiences.

The second theme described how ethnic and sexual identity development occurred. Family members and friends typically facilitated ethnic identity development. Sexual identity development was facilitated by community organizations, supportive peers, and the internet. The third theme, different experiences of oppression, discussed how experiences of oppression based on ethnic and sexual identity differed. For ethnicity, participants experienced racism, discrimination, and hate crimes, all of which impacted their development. In regard to sexual identity, participants described experiencing homophobia in both the larger White community and their ethnic community. Lastly, participants described connection to the community as a part of their identity development. With ethnic identity development, physical spaces such as neighborhoods and clubs as positive areas of development. Also, families played a large role in connecting with culture and traditions. In regard to sexual identity development, participants described community organizations, friendships, and gay bars as influential factors impacting their sexual identity growth. Overall, researchers highlighted that even though these identities developed simultaneously, they occurred in different spaces.

Similarly, Ikizler and Szymanski's (2014) study discusses LGBTQ and Middle Eastern descent individual's identity development. Researchers interviewed 12 individuals of Middle Eastern descent who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, (LGBQ) or pansexual to examine the sexual minority identity development of Middle Eastern Americans in the United States. Participants were raised in a range of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish religions, and most reported now identifying as something other than their traditional religion. Analysis of the interviews resulted in 12 themes: connection with ethnic community in United States, blurry racial identity, ethnic oppression, ethnic identity development, influence of Middle Eastern cultural values, rejection of traditional religion, sexual identity development, experiences of heterosexism, gay

stigma in Middle Eastern culture, intersections of sexual and ethnic identities, disclosure of sexual orientation to family of origin, and invisibility of Middle Eastern sexual minority community.

Notably within these studies of ethnic/racial and sexual identity development, connection to community is discussed as a major tenet of development. Seemingly, maintaining connection to one's ethnic community and to LGBTQ+ organizations and community is a valuable component to developing a sense of self for people with intersecting racial, ethnic, and sexual minority identities.

Muslim Identity Development

There are several studies on Muslim religious identity development. One study is Peek (2005) which examined the significance of religion among second-generation Muslim college students and the factors that influence their religious identity development. Data was collected through focus group interviews, individual in-depth interviews, and participant observation in New York City and in Colorado. In total, 106 interviews were conducted for analysis. Through these interviews, a model of Muslim religious identity development emerged. This model details three stages of identity development: religion as ascribed identity; religion as chosen identity; and religion as declared identity. As the participants moved through these stages, they became increasingly more religious and more strongly identified with being Muslim.

In the first stage, religion as ascribed identity, participants discussed being Muslim because they were born into a Muslim family. As children, they did not think much about being Muslim but followed their parents in dressing modestly and attending religious classes at a mosque. Some participants discussed casting aside their religious identity as an attempt to “pass”

in mainstream American culture. This represents a need to fit in during adolescence with the dominant Western culture through attempts at assimilation.

In the second stage, religion as chosen identity, participants describe growing older and becoming more introspective about their religious identity, leading to identify primarily as Muslim. This developmental period typically happened while in college, once participants were able to connect with Muslim peers who shared similar interests through campus organizations such as the Muslim Student Association (MSA). Participants also described being able to study the religion more deeply in order to tease apart what the religion teaches versus what they learned from their parent's native culture. Further, participants discussed feeling like a minority in America with their Muslim identity, which influenced their assertion of religious identity compared to their parents who were born in Muslim-majority countries and who did not need to assert their religious identity.

In the third stage of development, religion as declared identity, Muslims assert their identity in response to crisis, such as the attacks on September 11th, 2001. After September 11th, participants described turning more deeply to their faith for comfort, learning more about their faith in order to answer people's questions about Islam, and identifying more publicly as Muslim in order to dispel myths about who Muslims were. Further, many participants discussed experiencing discrimination and threats, which turned them towards the religion for group solidarity and safety.

Additionally, Wang, Raja, & Azhar (2019) examined how 11 Muslim American young adults understood their Muslim American identities. Participants identified four aspects that make up their identities as Muslim Americans: "having a built in community," "a lot of ethnic diversity," "a religious practice," and "a feeling that we all have to be this very united group."

Participants described a core aspect of their identity that distinguished them from others was the ability to connect to social group anywhere in the country. Muslims can connect on their Muslim identity despite differing racial, socioeconomic, and country of origin demographics, which felt like a built in social support network for the participants. A second core component to being Muslim American was the presence of ethnic diversity within the community. While the community has a wide range of ethnic and racial identities, Muslim Americans also experienced discrimination, racism, and colorism within and outside of the Muslim community. A third core aspect of Muslim American identity was having a religious practice, although participant's descriptions of what those practices were varied. Participants also described receiving judgment from insiders and outsiders based on their varied religious practices. Lastly, Islamophobia influenced how participants negotiated their Muslim identity, with a desire to counter stereotypes of who Muslims are. Participants described both wanting to establish their individuality within the Muslim community, while also appearing as a unified group towards outsiders.

Models of Muslim identity development are helpful when locating the participants of this study. In understanding a general framework of how Muslim Americans develop their identity, participants can also be thought of as experiencing stages within these models. Specifically, developing one's own approach to the religion separate from parental or cultural influence, and developing a sense of independence while maintaining connection to community seem of particular importance for Muslims who also have same-sex attraction.

Religious and Sexual Identity Integration

The earlier discussion of studies primarily focused on one major aspect of a person's identity development, specifically LGBTQ identity and racial and ethnic identity. This section

will explore the intersectionality of identities and discuss the confluence of religious and sexual identity.

Rodriguez & Ouellette (2000) explored identity integration of sexual orientation and religious beliefs for 40 members of the Metropolitan Community Church of New York (MCC/NY), a gay-positive church. Researchers utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods and found that: (1) a majority of participants reported successful integration of their sexual and religious identities, (2) identity integration was connected to increased levels of involvement in the church, (3) lesbians reported less conflict with their identities and higher levels of being fully integrated compared to gay males, and (4) MCC/NY helped facilitate this identity integration. The researchers highlighted that a large influence in participants' identity integration was through their involvement in the gay-positive church, while also experiencing other factors such as reading relevant literature, developing self-acceptance, talking to others, and talking to God.

While the previous study discussed the positive influence of successful religious and sexual identity integration, Dehlin, Galliher, Bradshaw, and Crowell's (2015) study investigated sexual and religious identity conflict with 1,493 same-sex attracted current or former members of the Church of Jesus-Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS). The researchers categorized participants into four groups: (a) rejected a lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity (5.5%); (b) compartmentalized sexual and religious identities (37.2%); (c) rejected religious identity (53%); and (d) integrated religious and sexual identities (4.4%). Overall, the findings suggest that rejecting a religious identity is the most common choice for LDS LGBTQ individuals. This path is associated with higher levels of psychosocial health than rejecting one's LGBTQ identity, or compartmentalizing

one's religious and sexual identities. While rare within the participants of this study, results indicate that integrating one's sexual and religious identities could be the healthiest option.

Similar to the prior study, in this study, researchers Sherry, Adelman, Whilde, and Quick (2010) collected both quantitative surveys and qualitative questions with LGBT participants. There were a total of 373 respondents who took the online quantitative survey and 422 who completed the open-ended survey response portion. From the quantitative results, 29.3% of respondents reported that they converted from a non-affirming or affirming religion, 14.5% reported their beliefs as already affirming, 10.5% reported that they rejected God/religion, and 12.4% said they continued their religious beliefs but felt shame/guilt. Further, 20% of participants stated concepts of God and religion were handled before coming out, 20% reported always being comfortable, and 10% stated they struggled even though they were out. Within the open-ended survey response portion of the study, the researchers agreed upon eight final themes. These include: sexuality issues made me question my religious beliefs, spiritual but not religious, it was never an issue, rejected religion for other reasons besides my sexual identity, still searching or struggling, oppression, trauma and rejection, and themes for further exploration including cultural factors, suicidality, and the transgender experience. Ultimately, this article focused less on the integration of religious and sexual identities and more on the conflicts that may arise between a queer or transgender person's religious and sexual identities.

Unlike in the previous article, Rodriguez, Etengoff, and Vaughan (2019) take a narrower look at converging sexual and religious identities. Researchers in this study utilized a large data set, n=750, to examine identity integration of gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) people of faith. The participants were predominately white and Christian. Cluster analysis revealed five theoretically distinct integration clusters: 1) integrated; 2) gay identity struggle; 3) anti-

religious/spiritual; 4) secular; and 5) low gay salience. Findings include identity integration as more common (23%) than identity struggles and conflicts (13%) for GLB people of faith. Findings also include that while within a normal range, the gay identity struggle cluster scored significantly worse on mental health measures compared to other clusters. The secular cluster and the integrated cluster scored highest on mental health outcomes, indicating two potential pathways for GLBs to resolve conflicts between sexuality and religion. One being identity integration and another is creating distance between self and organized religion. The integrated cluster was more likely to report having a partner, while the gay identity struggle cluster was the least likely to report having a partner. This finding indicates that having a partner could help on the pathway to integration.

In a study focusing on Black experiences, Pitt (2009) interviewed 34 Black gay men who attended conservative Christian churches. The majority identified as gay (93%), while the rest identified as bisexual. However, while most identified as being very comfortable with their gay identity, not all were “out” with their extended family or church community. Within the participants, four paths emerged as ways to negotiate their identities. One approach is to reject the homosexual identity. This is done through prayer to God to take away same sex attraction, and it can sometimes include “outing” oneself to friends and family through asking for prayer requests to change their sexual orientation. This can also happen through conversion therapy, which attempts to convert a non-religious (i.e. gay) identity to a religious one. Another approach is to reject the religious identity while maintaining the sexual identity as salient. This can occur in several ways: through religious affiliation that does not condemn homosexuality, no longer attending faith services, or becoming an atheist. However, the Black participants did not consider a complete rejection of their Christian faith because that would lead to a distancing from the

Black community, which was not desired. Further, by attempting to find more accepting churches, the participants struggled to find majority Black faith spaces or spaces that matched their more conservative values.

A third way participants attempted to negotiate their sexual and religious identities was through compartmentalization of the two identities. Participants of the study discussed not expressing their homosexuality while at church, and passing as straight with help from the general “don’t ask don’t tell” mentality found in Black church. This path also assumes that the men would keep their religious identity separate from homosexual contexts. However, this was difficult for some participants to accomplish due to their desire to have a partner who matches their religious values. A fourth approach to identity negotiation was to integrate the two identities. This approach allowed for both components to be accepted in a person’s self-concept. For the gay Black male participants, an integration of their identities lead them to critique their sexual practices and follow a more conservative approach to sexual encounters and relationships. Participants explained that once they accepted their identity as they way God made them, they more fully embraced Christian values such as monogamy and having sex only in committed relationships. This article explores complex identity integration and discusses the navigation of religious, sexual, and racial/cultural identity. Unlike many of the earlier articles, which were comprised of predominately white participants, this study examined the added fear of cultural and community alienation as a result of conflicting sexual and religious identities.

Like the previous study, this study pulls from a more attenuated participant group: LGBT Muslims. Shannahan (2009) found that British LGBT Muslims navigated their sexual and spiritual identities through online communities and conversations with other LGBT Muslims. They viewed their sexuality as from Allah and as a part of Allah’s plan for their life, whether

they viewed homosexuality as sinful or not. Because of struggles navigating these intersecting identities, many LGBT Muslims leave the faith. This is in part due to traditional interpretations of Islam that may support the idea that sexuality is an intrinsic desire, but acting on homosexual desires is sinful and can be controlled. For those who stay in the faith, navigating these identities has been supported through progressive organizations and online communities such as *Imaan*, *Safra*, and *Al-Fatiha*. Through these online spaces, LGBT Muslims are able to connect with one another and engage in discourse surrounding religious texts and sexuality. While many LGBT Muslims may not feel welcome in masjids (mosques) and the larger Muslim community, they are able to create and join a welcoming religious community online. Participants reported that meeting others like them for the first time gave hope of synthesizing their various identities (Shannahan, 2009).

Shannahan (2009) also found that within the British LGBT Muslim community there is a range of conservative and non-traditional views on relationship styles. Many LGBT Muslims responded that while they may be in a same-sex relationship, they are waiting until marriage before having sex. Further, participants reported aiming for marriage and long-term relationships, in contrast with other LGBT Muslims who engage in casual sex and one night stands (Shannahan, 2009). This study introduces a new theme of sexual and religious integration in which a new community forms around the integration of two specific identities, queer and Muslim.

Additionally, Siraj (2016) explored gay Muslim identity through a case study on one gay Muslim man in London who uses queer interpretations of the Quran to navigate his gay and religious identities. The author describes how traditional readings of the Quran marginalize non-heterosexual Muslims, and that a queer revisioning of the Quran opens space for a more

inclusive religion. The participant grew up in a Muslim majority country in Asia and discussed the guilt he experienced due to his same sex attraction. He believed that being gay and Muslim were incompatible and that he would burn in hell. He began to seek out other faiths such as Christianity and Buddhism but never felt satisfied in those faith communities. The participant experienced tension with his family when he came out, and it took 20 years for everyone to be accepting of him. During that time, the participant turned to religion for comfort. He began looking online for queer Muslim spaces.

Further, Baderoon (2015) analyzed six autobiographical narratives by lesbian Muslims in South Africa. South African Queer Muslims discuss the “coming out” process as painful for themselves as well as their family members. The costs of “coming out” differ when comparing Muslims to dominant Western coming out stories. Muslims face a loss of community and family ties if they come out, which can go against their collectivistic values. The women also describe their ability to interpret Islamic texts for themselves, leading to a belief that their experiences are a part of God’s divine plan, therefore allowing them to reclaim their spirituality. The women all hold religion as central to their sense of self, and testify to their devout relationship with God. One quote exemplifies this idea, “I found it hard to believe that this God whom I serve, and Someone who loves me very much, was going to completely disregard everything I’ve ever done in my life, based on who I love.” The women countered the rejection from their Muslim communities by claiming their religion, and did so in a way that authentic to their true identities. This study holds many similarities to the Pitt (2009) study, specifically as it pertains to the participants’ fear of losing or actual loss of culture and community ties as a result of conflicting sexual and religious identities. In this study, the six women were able to reconcile their religious and sexual identities through individual religious devotion and study.

Moreover, in a study by Felix (2016), qualitative interviews were conducted to examine how Muslim men with same-sex attraction construct their sexual identities despite their conflicting religious beliefs. Respondents discussed being careful with who they disclose their sexual identity to. They also are careful to not enter situations where they will have to compromise either their faith or their sexual identities. While they recognize that Islam largely condemns homosexuality, they did not allow this to change their sexual identity but rather became more aware of who disclose their identity to and still maintain self-acceptance. Participants became very adept at navigating who was affirming of their sexual identity and who to socialize with. This process resulted in a non-linear path of identity formation due to their disclosure of their sexual identities with some but not others. Unlike the women in Baderoon (2015), these men tended toward compartmentalization of their religious and sexual identities in order to maintain both their religious community ties and self-acceptance of their sexual identities.

Another study by Minwalla, Rosser, Feldman, & Varga (2005) focuses on gay Muslim men. This study interviewed six Muslim men who are members of Al-Fatiha, an internet-based organization, also discussed in Shannahan (2009), that validates the experience of LGBTQ Muslims. All participants were living in North America and had attended one of two annual Al-Fatiha conferences. The researchers found three main themes based off the intersection of gay and Muslim identities: (1) religion, specifically one's relationship to Allah, and different ways of coping with traditional interpretations of the Quran's condemnation of homosexuality; (2) East-West ethno-cultural comparisons, such as homo-sociality and construction of a gay identity, marriage expectations and impact on sisters marriage potential; and (3) color dynamics, such as internalized racism, validation theory and the impact on dating and sexuality.

In the first theme, religion, participants discussed their relationship to God in several ways. Some experienced God as a partner, turning to him for guidance. Some turned to God and developed a religious identity as a way to deflect from their family's pressure to marry. Others discussed feeling betrayed by God because of their sexual identity, and chose their sexuality over God or developing a religious identity. Some discussed becoming more spiritual rather than adhering to religious texts. Further, other participants reinterpreted Islamic verses to create a more inclusive understanding of the Quran.

In the second theme, East-West cultural comparisons, the coming out as gay process is compounded by cultural factors. Participants described difficulty with the Western process of coming out and constructing a gay identity. Others discussed still experiencing family pressure to marry and have children despite their gay identity. Some participants described the impact of coming out on their sisters' marriage potential and the shame it would bring to their family. Finally, some participants described the dangers of coming out as gay to their physical safety.

The third theme, color dynamics, discussed topics of social dynamics within the gay Western subculture, internalized racism and colorism, and dating and sex behaviors. Participants described gay spaces as predominately white, which therefore did not attend to their ethnic identities. These men described feeling as though their sexual and gender identities were separate from their racial and ethnic identities. Participants of color also described their dating experiences, in which they either exclusively dated white men resulting in a type of social currency, or conversely, were stigmatized for dating white men. Dating white men allowed them a type of power due to being adjacent to white culture. On the other hand, some participants experienced criticism of assimilating into gay white culture when dating white men. Some participants experienced internalized racism, and wished they were white due to their

predominately white surroundings. For Muslim men who date other men of color, the act may be intentional as a way to oppose internalized racism. This awareness is also seen when choosing sexual partners and positions. Participants of color discussed not wanting to be in the “bottom” position when having sex with a white man, because of awareness of power differentials. However, when with other men of color, there may be more versatility and openness when it comes to sexual positions. This article looks beyond religious and sexual identity integration to the racial and cultural influences on the sexual identities of queer Muslim men who are juggling influence from both Eastern and Western societies.

Further, Khan (2010) conducted 55 in-depth interviews with both heterosexual and queer Muslims who have lived in the United States. These interviews examined queer Muslims’ interactions with their families, friends, and religious communities. Queer Muslims utilize three broad categories as ways to reconcile their religious and sexual identities: (1) “God is Merciful;” (2) “This Is Just Who I Am;” and (3) “It’s Not Just Islam.” Khan (2010) also describes the coming out process for queer Muslims. Muslims who come out risk losing family ties, and sometimes choose to do so over the phone even if they live in the same city. Some do it in person, and other do not discuss their sexuality with family out of an assumption that the family already knows. When Muslims come out to their friends, they typically choose to come out first to their heterosexual and queer non-Muslim friends. Participants described coming out in person and over e-mail. Khan (2010) described the queer Muslims in the study as claiming both identities, and not rejecting organized religion in favor of a secular or non-religious identity.

Another study focusing on LGBT Muslims, Shah (2016), discussed how LGBT Muslims negotiate their religious and sexual identities through finding alternative interpretations of Islamic texts. This article is based off of the author’s ethnographic qualitative study and

connections he made while collecting data. Through these connections with LGBT Muslim community resources, he was asked to provide “Demystifying Sharia” workshops through a British LGBTQ Muslim community organization, Imaan. The workshop was structured into several sessions: discussing the concepts of “gender” and “sexuality”; contextualizing specific Quranic verses that have been used to deny freedom of sexuality; analyzing hadith (Islamic teachings) that have been used to support homophobia; investigating historical Islamic laws regarding gender and sexuality; gaining a general overview of historic Islamic politics and law; and having a final discussion on ways to advance more inclusive interpretations of Islam. Members of Imaan who attended the workshops then began to lead the workshops as well, both in Imaan and in other spaces. These workshops suggest that LGBT Muslims seek out alternative pedagogies as ways to reconcile their multiple identities.

Finally, Yip’s (2008) study focuses on lesbian and bisexual Muslim women in Britain, who were interviewed in another study including both men and women. Twenty women were interviewed individually and participated in a focus group. The participants were highly educated, financially secure, young, non-white (primarily South Asian), and urban-based. Participants in the study discussed themes of struggles with sense of belonging in both the Muslim community and in larger British society, engaging with ‘queering’ religious texts, establishing support networks, and gendering Islam (i.e. women-led spaces). Participants found a greater sense of belonging in secular society in regards to their sexual identity. The participants aim to maintain a lesbian and bisexual identity alongside Muslim identity, have freedom from discrimination based on their sexuality, practice their faith in harmony with sexuality, and participate in religious and community life without fear of rejection.

Of particular importance within this section are the studies focusing on spirituality and

sexuality integration for Muslims. The studies showcase the range of processes same-sex attracted Muslims take part in when discussing the convergence of their religious and sexual identities. Research indicates that same-sex attracted Muslims engage differently with religious texts, experience racism or colorism within the LGBTQ+ community, and have unique considerations when “coming out” to others. While the majority of these studies were conducted with men participants outside of the U.S., they nevertheless provide a helpful framework for thinking about the experiences and processes of the participants of this study.

Mental Health

There are several studies regarding mental health in the LGBTQ+ people of color population, as well as the Muslim community. In Velez, Polihronakis, Watson, & Cox, (2019), the authors examined the associations of heterosexist discrimination, racist discrimination, internalized heterosexism, and internalized racism with psychological distress and well-being in a sample of 318 sexual minority People of Color. Findings include experiences of heterosexist discrimination and internalized racism were positively associated with distress. Internalized heterosexism and internalized racism were negatively associated with well-being. Internalized racism was associated with significantly poorer mental health, until high levels of heterosexist discrimination were reached. High levels of heterosexist discrimination nullified the associations of internalized racism with psychological distress and psychological well-being.

Additionally, Sutter and Perrin (2016) found that People of color (POC) face higher levels of mental health needs due to the detrimental effects of discrimination, racism, and prejudice, among other negative experiences (Sutter and Perrin, 2016). POC who further identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ), face even more levels of discrimination which impact mental health (Sutter and Perrin, 2016). When compared to racism,

Sutter and Perrin (2016) found that LGBTQ based discrimination within a sample of people of color had a significant effect on suicidal ideation. LGBTQ based discrimination may have had a larger impact than racism on suicidal ideation due to experiencing homophobia within their respective racial/ethnic communities, and racism within the LGBTQ community (Sutter and Perrin, 2016).

Likewise, Lefevor, Franklin, and Stone, (2019) examined rates of depression and anxiety in a sample of 41,691 clients from the Center for Collegiate Mental Health 2012-2016 dataset. Results indicate that transgender and gender nonconforming (TGNC) clients have greater symptom severity and a slower remission of symptoms of depression and anxiety. TGNC Clients of Color reported experiencing more distress than white TGNC clients or cisgender Clients of Color. TGNC clients, compared to cisgender clients, used an additional 2.5 sessions of therapy.

Another study that discusses mental health in LGBTQ people of color is Szymanski and Gupta (2009). This study examined the relationship between internalized oppressions and African American sexual minority persons' self-esteem and psychological distress. Participants were African-American men and women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and questioning. Results indicate that together, internalized racism and internalized heterosexism, also known as internalized homophobia, were both significant negative predictors of self-esteem. Internalized heterosexism was a positive predictor of psychological distress. The authors discuss that internalized heterosexism may be more distressing than racism because of the potential to lose one's racial/ethnic support system as a result of being LGBQ. Further, having that support system is a buffer against racism on one's mental health.

Similarly Abu-Ras, Suarez and Abu-Bader's (2018) study looked at Muslim American's mental health and wellbeing during the 2016 presidential campaign because of the increased

rhetoric against Muslims (Abu-Ras, Suárez, & Abu-Bader, 2018). Out of a sample of 1,130 American Muslims, 86.4% reported experiencing stress due to Islamophobia during the 2016 presidential campaign, 66.2% experienced perceived religious discrimination in the past 12 months, and 25.9% in the past 30 days. Out of the sample, 35.9% did not feel safe at all. Women reported increased experiences of discrimination and Islamophobia compared to men, most likely due to their enhanced visibility while wearing the hijab (head scarf). Participants who reported feeling unsafe had higher levels of stress and a lower quality of life. Over half of the Muslims polled reported experiencing heightened anxiety during the time of the election, in part due to the increased levels of media attention to terrorism and negative stereotypes of Islam and Muslims. These findings support the idea that misconceptions of Islam have an emotional impact on the wellbeing of American Muslims. Because of the rise of Islamophobia, Muslims may isolate themselves in order to avoid potential risks posed by society. Additionally, the media's increasingly negative viewpoint of Muslims may lead to internalized oppression and Islamophobia, particularly within Muslim youth. This is exceedingly important as vulnerable Muslim subgroups, such as LGBTQ Muslims, can face a "double jeopardy" due to their multiple marginalized identities (Abu-Ras, Suárez, & Abu-Bader, 2018; Karban & Sirriyeh, 2015).

Finally, in another study, Hodge, Zidan & Husain (2016) examined the effect of discrimination and spirituality on depression with Muslims (n=269). The typical participant was 38.3 years old (SD=11.73), female (69.1%), of non-Middle Eastern descent (63.2%), born outside of the United States (51.7%), was married (57.6%), and was college educated (78.1%). A majority (62.8%) reported that others had acted suspiciously towards them in the last year. Others (37.2%) reported being called offensive names. More than not (55.8%) reported being singled out by airport security, while only 17.1% had been singled out by law enforcement. The

mean value for the prayer variable, 3.22 (SD=1.22), showed that participants in the study generally prayed five times daily. Further, rates of clinical depression were high in the sample (27.9%). These results indicate that experiencing certain types of discrimination correlate with higher levels of depression. Participants who reported being called offensive names and being singled out by law enforcement had higher levels of depressive symptoms. The results also indicate that performing daily prayers served as a protective factor against depressive symptoms.

In summary, Muslims who are ethnic and sexual or gender minorities may experience a significant amount of mental health distress due to identity-based discrimination. As evidenced by the above research studies, Muslims experience discrimination due to their religious identity, people of color report increased levels of mental health concerns due to racism and prejudice, and those who hold LGBTQ+ identities within communities of color may experience discrimination both inside and out of their cultural group. This is an important consideration for participants of this study who exist at the intersection of marginalized racial, religious, and sexual identities. Further, the included research findings are noteworthy in light of this study's research question regarding what mental health professionals need to know when working clinically with LGBTQ+ Muslims.

Chapter III: Methodology and Methods

Introduction

In chapter 2, I provided a theoretical framework as well as an overview of literature exploring the experiences of LGBTQ Muslims. In this chapter, I will describe the proposed study, including the methodology, methods, participants, ethics, analysis, and representation of the data.

Methodology

Koro-Ljungberg (2016) defines qualitative methodology as an onto-epistemological and theoretical choice that cannot be separated from the values and beliefs of the researcher or the research context. Methodology is political, in that it has the ability to empower, disempower, validate, or invalidate experiences and data (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016). Historically, research, including qualitative research, has been constructed and used in ways that further colonize oppressed groups (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Traditional research methodologies (i.e. positivist frameworks or what St. Pierre (2011) calls conventional qualitative research) can fall into the trap of reductionism, linear thinking, or causal logic (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016). These methodologies can act as colonizing forces in the name of science and research through delineating the exotic other in a structured format to the euro-centric, heteronormative world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Through post-positivist and new interpretive perspectives, the qualitative researcher has been described as a bricoleur, or someone who pieces together different representations, methods, and techniques to fit the “specifics of a complex situation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.5). The qualitative researcher as bricoleur is able to piece together or invent new tools as needed. This idea is also described as a methodology without a methodology, or when “lines between a methodology and other methodologies blur, and stable

methodological identities are no longer desirable” (Koro-Ljunberg, 2016, p. 6). The methodology I employed for this study is a Queer Postcolonial Indigenous methodology. By combining Postcolonial, Queer, and Indigenous methodologies, I am becoming a bricoleur in order to best meet the needs of this research study. In the following sections, I tease each of these methodologies apart and then combine them.

Postcolonial Methodology

Historically, research has been conducted via modernist thought, which utilized a Eurocentric and colonial framework. Eurocentric research methodologies construct the researcher as having the ability and the right to interpret and represent for others, the research participants (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008). Thus, traditional research methodologies may work toward perpetuating the “othering” of societal “others” (i.e. Muslims, People of Color, LGBTQ individuals, etc.). Postcolonial methodologists and theorists, such as Linda Tuhwai-Smith (2012) have called for critical research methodologies, which require the involvement of the people involved in research to interpret, conduct, and judge research about themselves. Further, critical theorists have emphasized the importance of recognizing there is no singular voice that represents those on the margins of identities and society (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008).

Postcolonial methodology inherently includes activism within its work. Rau, a Māori educator, insisted that decolonization be referred to as anticolonial, to reflect the long history of American Indian anticolonialist struggle, and to disrupt the notion that the act of decolonizing can eradicate the impacts of oppression (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008). Thinking of decolonizing research methodologies as anticolonial emphasizes that this stance requires an active role, one that does not limit knowledge produced through research to remain only in academic spaces (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008). Anticolonial research, therefore, cannot exist without the constant

questioning of power. Additionally, it calls for the disruption of underlying assumptions that create binaries (i.e. gay-straight, Eastern-Western), as well as the Eurocentric and American notion of whose voice is heard and whose perspective is privileged (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008).

Therefore, postcolonial methodology requires me to deconstruct binaries, prioritize non-Western ways of knowledge and expression, and engage with activism through my research in order to reach non-academic spaces. In this study, this will look like accepting participants who may not fit within Western labels of sexuality and utilizing Muslim ways of knowing through the language used and research questions.

Queer Methodology

Queer methodology does not have a single definition or set of methods, rather, the main focus of queering methodology lies within disrupting binaries and borders that traditional research methods enforce (Browne & Nash, 2010). Heckert (2010) describes queer methodology as a continual sense of becoming, an acceptance and process of letting go of borders. Queer methodology disrupts the idea that there is a line between “theory and data, researcher and researched, hetero and homo, right and wrong” (p. 43). Queer theory was influenced by poststructuralists such as Butler, Sedgwick, Foucault, and Derrida, who questioned sex, gender, and sexuality from a place of possibilities rather than limiting these identities and experiences to scientific categories (Ferguson, 2013). Therefore, queer methodologies seek to honor individual queer expressions, definitions, and experiences, rather than enforcing binaries and labels onto research participants. This study is queer in nature because of the identities of the participants, as well as the non-traditional make up of the study.

Further, there are ethical and political challenges to conducting queer research. Boyd and Ramírez (2012) discuss the history of queer research, and pose the question of whose queer voices are being recorded? It can be difficult to recruit queer individuals for research participation in general, and especially so when those voices are coming from smaller communities with higher stakes for being “out”. Queer methodology also poses the important point of not assuming all versions of queerness will be represented in research, and to have an awareness that a fractured story of queer identities will emerge. Further, queer methodology requires me to recognize that even though I as a researcher may have some identities and experiences in common with participants, there will still be different facets of identity to be aware of and navigate (i.e. socioeconomic status, languages spoken, sex differences, or gender differences).

Within this study, queer methodology looks like disrupting labels and binaries surrounding sexual orientation and recognizing that the data collected will only reflect a portion of sexual orientation experiences and identities.

Indigenous Methodology

Indigenous methodologies call for researchers, and especially for researchers and scholars of color, to adopt critical methods for the advancement and liberation of marginalized peoples. This idea is captured in Audre Lorde’s (1984) quote, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (p.112). Additionally, Indigenous research is purposeful in changing conditions for marginalized groups. Researchers utilizing an Indigenous framework aim to challenge the Eurocentric view of Indigenous peoples (Dunbar Jr., 2008). Employing an Indigenous worldview centers Indigenous customs, culture, beliefs, and practices (Dunbar Jr., 2008). This is a central and important feature of decolonized and Indigenous methodology.

Indigenous knowledge has been viewed as primitive and inferior compared to Eurocentric knowledge (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008). Indigenous peoples across the Americas and globally have developed their own knowledge and ways of being in relation to their physical environments. This is seen in ways of understanding animal and plant life and historical and cultural insights. These ways of knowing have been excluded from the academy and research, especially in the way relationships are prioritized in Indigenous knowledge (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008).

While indigenous methodologies do not have a set structure or definition and vary with each indigenous group, there are several main themes that are found within indigenous research methodologies and methods. The centerpiece elements that inform indigenous research are the “motives, concerns, and knowledge brought to the research process” (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008, p. 33). This is seen in the way researchers construct their research questions, engage with participants, report their results, and are in constant questioning of power structures, including their positionality within those structures. Further, indigenous research has been described as performative for its basis in activism (Blue Swadener & Mutua, 2008). A core belief is that non-Western ways of knowing have been excluded or marginalized in traditional research methodologies, and that participants have lacked agency in how research is produced and reported (Blue Swadener & Mutua, 2008).

Indigenous methodologies serve as a healing and restorative justice way of conducting research with historically marginalized populations. It holds a primary focus of collectivistic and relationship-based cultures. It also prioritizes mutually beneficial relationships; one that serves the community that is participating in the research (Wilson, 2001). Wilson (2001) explains an indigenous methodology as follows.

[It] means talking about relational accountability. As a researcher you are answering to all your relations when you are doing research. You are not answering the questions of validity or reliability or making judgments of better or worse. Instead you should be fulfilling your relationships with the world around you. (p.177)

Indigenous methodologies center attentive relationships as a core component of the methodology rather than post-positivist practices of validity or reliability. Knowledge is not gained as an abstract ideal; it is gained in order to complete a relational duty with other humans and all that exists in the world (Wilson, 2001).

Therefore, within this study, indigenous methodology takes form in utilizing a community consultant and offering my services to the community in order to make this research study a mutually beneficial relationship. To ensure a mutually beneficial relationship developed in this study, I received a grant to pay the community consultant for their time. I can also offer potential authorship on research articles, and will offer my skills to the community to decide what they might need most from me.

Postcolonial Queer Indigenous Methodology

Postcolonial, Queer, and Indigenous methodologies combined together have several main components that will be present in this study. 1. A disruption of binaries and labels (Queer methodology), 2. A primary focus on honoring non-western ways of being and meaning making (Postcolonial methodology), 3. An ethical and moral commitment to upholding relational duties (Indigenous methodology).

This combination looks like utilizing a community consultant (Indigenous methodology), allowing participants to identify with any term that is appropriate for them rather than limiting them to Western sexual orientation categories (Postcolonial methodology; Queer methodology),

and allowing space for Muslim ways of knowing (i.e. collectivism, family norms, Islamic language) (Postcolonial methodology) throughout the interview and participation process. Specifically, queer methodology eschews categories in favor of queer possibilities, for example those who may exist outside of sexual orientation labels (Ferguson, 2013). Therefore, in this study, participants may identify as LGBTQ, or they may not, and either of those would be acceptable not only from a queer lens, but also through postcolonial and indigenous frameworks, which prioritize non-Western ways of knowing and being.

Another important feature of postcolonial queer indigenous research practices is seen in the concept of essentialism. Essentialism occurs when a distinct set of fixed characteristics define a person or group (i.e. African Americans, Muslims, LGBTQ identified people). Reducing identities of an entire group to one shared expression connects to the Eurocentric notion of researcher as able to interpret data that best represents others. This has potential for harm because it allows for those who do not fit into an essentialist idea of identity to be considered as fake or unworthy of representation (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008). Further, essentialism views identity as fixed across time and space, rather than socially constructed, always in process, and placed in historical context. Postcolonial queer indigenous methodology allows room for understanding that cultural experiences are not the same for everyone, nor are the ways in which knowledge is produced (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008).

Anti-essentialism, therefore, argues against the essentialist belief that identities are fixed, unchanging structures that exist across space and time. Anti-essentialism posits that identities lack an essence that would cause all human beings with the same trait (i.e. Muslim identity, sexual orientation) to have the same interests or experiences. Anti-essentialists would emphasize that the experience of being a Muslim, or of being gay, would vary depending upon location,

context, and social conditions (Goldberg, 2002). Postcolonial Queer Indigenous Methodology is anti-essentialist in that it honors all ways of being for colonized subjects. This methodology allows room for all expressions of queerness, Muslim-ness, and ethnicity, and does not value one type of experience over another. To assume that one experience is more worthy, valid, or acceptable over another, would be a continuation of colonial ideation, which Postcolonial Queer Indigenous methodology aims to disrupt.

I used a Postcolonial Queer Indigenous Methodology because of the historical and social contexts from which Muslim populations have traditionally been viewed through, especially in Western research. Further, utilizing this methodology allows space for Muslim's collectivistic and relationally based cultures to be at the center of the research process (Ajrouch, 2017; Hickey, 2013).

The need for Postcolonial Queer Indigenous methodology is illuminated through the ways in which Islamophobia has imbedded itself within Western culture and dogma (Stonebanks, 2008). Islamophobic, orientalist ways of understanding what Edward Said calls the "other" (Said, 1978) have influenced Western researchers in the past when conducting research with Muslim populations. Stonebanks (2008) discusses how Muslims in the West are relegated to viewing themselves through a Western lens due to media and news portrayals of Muslims and people from the East. He argues that there has been "a silencing of Muslim knowledge or...ways of knowing and the humanizing voices that derive from them" (Stonebanks, 2008, p. 293). In addition, Western teachings and media have framed Muslim ways of knowing as backwards, monolithic, antimodern, and irrational (p. 295). Stonebanks connects Muslim ways of knowing with Indigenous ways of knowing "through the shared relationship with the ongoing experiences

of colonialism and imperialism” (p.295). To demonstrate this relationship, Stonebanks illustrates the connection between Muslims and colonialism:

Muslim ways of knowing are both deeply connected and guided by Islam, within the divergences of Muslim voices, they cannot be understood apart from historical analysis, contextual perspectives, and, notwithstanding its diversity, a continually changing and emergent collective consciousness, much of which has stemmed from the experience of colonialism and imperialism. (p.295)

Therefore, prioritizing Muslim ways of knowing in this study looked like using Islamic terms in conversations/research questions framed by an awareness of historical and contextual location, emphasizing collaborative and relational dialogue, and attending to the impact of colonialism on queer and Muslim identities.

In order to connect this methodology with Muslim participants, I grounded my research questions within a Muslim way of knowing. For example, understanding that Muslims value community and family (Ajrouch, 2017; Hickey, 2013), and that LGBTQ Muslims may compartmentalize their queer identity separate from their religious or cultural identity (Felix, 2016), my research questions needed to reflect these elements of LGBTQ Muslim experiences so that participants may feel welcome to discuss both their familial culture as well as their sexual identity. This is where I used my lived experience as a Muslim born and raised in the West in order to best frame the questions so that other Western Muslims can share their experiences that match our collective consciousness. This is also where I utilized postcolonial queer theory, as I centered Queer Muslim voices and ways of knowing rather than Western ways of understanding Muslim-ness.

Community Consultant

As a researcher drawing on indigenous, postcolonial, and queer theories and methodologies, I reached out to potential community consultants to discuss ways to connect with the community. The need for community consultants is emphasized in decolonized practices through the “involvement of people in creating, conducting, owning, and judging research about themselves” (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008, p. 49). By bringing community consultants into the research process, this ensures a sense of ownership and influence the community can have with this project. Further, this step emphasizes postcolonial queer theory’s essence of disrupting normative practices and giving agency to those who have been historically “othered” (Punt, 2008).

I sought out community consultants primarily on Instagram, where community leaders have social media pages with resources for this population. From there, I connected with Gina Ali via Instagram after seeing a flyer for an event she co-hosted about Queer Muslim experiences. Gina Ali is a U.S. Queer Muslim of an Egyptian background, and practices therapy from a decolonial and liberatory stance. She agreed to talk with me about this dissertation and agreed to be the community consultant for the project. I reviewed my theories, methods, and plan with her and collaboratively discussed the relational component of “giving back” to the community. Through her connections to community resources, she offered to introduce me to other people I could connect with to fulfill the reciprocal component of this project. These resources included two LGBTQ+ affirming mosques in the U.S. who organize events and provide services for this population. Gina’s insight into community resources was helpful in allowing me to better conceptualize how I can provide services back to the community, and I

anticipate that our work together will further develop as I seek her guidance with incorporating participant knowledge into services I will provide after I defend the dissertation.

My goal is to co-organize an online support group or create psychoeducational resources for this community with guidance from Gina and informed by participant data. Specifically, I would like to connect with organizations who already provide services with the guidance of Gina so that I do not perpetuate colonial actions by disrupting a community that already has resources available. My hope is to bolster or provide support to these organizations rather than assume I need to lead or create services. Further, I was awarded a research grant in order to compensate Gina for her time and knowledge. This was an important part of the process for me as I value financial compensation as a way to buffer against taking knowledge without acknowledgement.

Methods

I used conversational research methods to collect data. These methods are similar to an unstructured interview, however there are several key factors that differentiate the two. The conversational method requires engaging in conversation with the participants, which allowed for me to best understand the unique experiences of LGBTQ Muslims. What differentiates this method from a standard unstructured interview is what Dawson, Toombs, & Mushquash (2017) describe in three components:

- A.) “Contextual reflection, in that the researchers must situate themselves and the Indigenous Peoples with whom they are collaborating in the research process.
- B.) Inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in the research process in a way that is respectful and reciprocal as well as decolonizing and preserves self-determination.
- C.) Prioritizing of Indigenous ways of knowing.” (P. 15)

This quote exemplifies the ways that the conversational method aligns itself within a postcolonial queer and Indigenous framework. It highlights the constant process of contextualizing myself and the participants, to ensure that I do not perpetuate colonial actions, it includes the participants as equals and as the owners of the knowledge that will be shared, and it centers the ways of knowing held by the participants.

Conversational methods are based in relational ways of knowing and sharing knowledge, which allows for the sharing of knowledge in a culturally appropriate way (Kovach, 2010). Kovach states that “The conversational method aligns with an Indigenous worldview that honours orality as means of transmitting knowledge and upholds the relational which is necessary to maintain a collectivist tradition” (p.42). The way in which Kovach (2010) discusses oral tradition fits well within a Muslim framework of knowledge. Muslim prayer is conducted collectivistically; with people standing shoulder to shoulder while the imam (prayer leader) orally leads the prayers. Speight (1989) describes the oral traditions of Islamic teachings, noting that the structure of verses of Islamic literature connote a structure based in oral story telling.

Thus, Muslim ways of knowing fit with what Kovach (2010) describes as an Indigenous worldview. Further, Kovach (2010) emphasizes the relational aspect of the conversational method. While Muslims are a racially diverse group, there is an overarching commonality of social connectedness tied to Muslim experiences (Azrouh, 2017). Muslims born abroad compared to those born in the United States have different attitudes towards social connection; however, there remains a mutually dependent relationship between individual well-being and community involvement (Azrouh, 2017).

Kovach further describes the conversational method below:

The conversational method is found within western qualitative research. However when used in an Indigenous framework, a conversational method invokes several distinctive characteristics: a) it is linked to a particular tribal epistemology (or knowledge) and situated within an Indigenous paradigm; b) it is relational; c) it is purposeful (most often involving a decolonizing aim); d) it involves particular protocol as determined by the epistemology and/or place; e) it involves an informality and flexibility; f) it is collaborative and dialogic; and g) it is reflexive. (Kovach, 2010, p.43).

Here, Kovach (2010) details what differentiates the conversational method from an unstructured interview seen in Western research. It prioritizes the Indigenous way of knowing, relationships, collaboration, and involves an intentional focus of decolonized protocols and language. This method fits naturally with postcolonial queer theory's aim of disrupting traditional methods that further marginalize "others" and value Eurocentric knowledge over Indigenous knowledge. In accordance with queer theory, conversational methods open up spaces to discuss experiences that disrupt the binary between heterosexual and homosexual and eastern and western. This is decolonized because it allows room for other (i.e. non-Western) ways of understanding experiences, identities, and expressions. In this study, the conversational method looked like using Islamic language and knowledge, leaving space for queer possibilities to emerge, maintaining a collaborative and dialogic nature while valuing the relationship, and engaging intentionally with postcolonial queer aims in order to prioritize non-Western ways of being in research. While this method is appropriate for a postcolonial queer study, I am still in the privileged role of "researcher" and understand that I am thus in a position of power, which I was mindful of throughout the research process.

To employ postcolonial queer indigenous methods, I engaged in conversational interviews with participants. As Kovach (2010) describes, this is intentional through using a decolonizing aim. These interviews were conducted one on one rather than in a group. I met with participants individually due to the potential sensitive nature of the research topic. Participants may have experienced trauma due to their sexual or gender identity, and I wanted to provide safety in the participant's ability to share confidentially. This further connects with Kovach's (2010) descriptions of methods encompassing informality and flexibility. Further, using individual conversational interviews allowed room for the co-creation of knowledge that Kovach (2010) describes as a collaborative and reflexive process.

Topics that were discussed in the interview related to gender, sexuality, being "out", family, religion, and culture. These general topics provided insight into how LGBTQ Muslims navigate their gender and sexuality within the context of their culture, religion, and familial expectations. These broad topics allowed for participant freedom in sharing what they would like to share and what is important to them. Employing a conversational method allowed for me to build questions based on what the participant shared, which provided space for the participant to move the conversation in the direction that best allowed them to share the knowledge they prioritize. Further, I engaged in collaborative dialogue by asking if there was anything that I should have asked, or anything they would like to share that we had not covered in the interview.

I conducted participant interviews over Zoom, an encrypted video call service. Interviews were audio recorded and videos were turned off once the recording began to ensure an added layer of confidentiality. Prior to the interview, participants signed digital consent forms and emailed them to me. I then saved the consent forms in a password-protected drive. I also saved copies of the recorded interview in the same password-protected drive.

As part of my writing process, I kept detailed field notes to track my process from start to finish through the project. These writings were in the form of observation notes, methodological notes, theoretical notes, and personal notes. My field notes assisted in my understanding of the data, and in the process of collecting data (Richardson, 1994).

Trustworthiness and Ethics

LGBTQ Muslims face the potential of multiple types of discrimination and violence due to their race, ethnicity, religion or spiritual beliefs, gender identity and sexual orientation (Rahman, 2010). Due to this, I took measures to ensure their safety and confidentiality as participants of the study. All participants completed a consent form and I thoroughly reviewed the purpose of the consent form and any limits to confidentiality. Further, participant data was assigned a pseudonym to ensure their identities remained anonymous and confidential.

Indigenous methodologies emphasize the importance of transparency in research and time spent understanding the historical context of the research population, and how Western research has traditionally further marginalized oppressed groups (Kovach, 2010). As a researcher utilizing Indigenous methods, it is my ethical duty to spend time understanding the ways research has been harmful in the past, and ensure that I do not perpetuate harm through my research. It is also be my ethical duty to ensure that the research I conduct is also benefiting the participants. Datta (2008) describes her experiences while working with Indigenous groups and the concerns that were posed to her while conducting her study:

We are fearful when we hear the word research. It takes our time, knowledge, and practice for other people's business and we do not get anything from it; we do not even know what knowledge has been taken or how it has been used. All we get is a couple of drinks [tea/coffee]. We do not want this kind of research in our community. We are so

disappointed in any kind of research nowadays. We have not seen any findings from many of the researchers. Researchers take our knowledge that we shared as friends; they use our knowledge for their discoveries, funding, and academic degrees. We helped many researchers in many ways so that they could get the proper information that they were looking for; however, the researchers did not give us anything. (Datta, 2018, p.10-11).

As pointed out by the participants of Datta's (2018) work, it is an ethical consideration to understand how Western research may have negatively impacted a group in the past, as well as an ethical question of ensuring how the current research project will benefit the community. This is my duty as a researcher, and a large consideration to undertake before engaging in research with LGBTQ Muslims. For example, this ethical duty highlights the necessity of connecting with community consultants to ensure that the relationship will be beneficial and not perpetuate colonial actions of taking resources. Further, implementing Indigenous methods could look like listing community resources and consultants as co-authors on papers that result from the data collection, which establishes a more mutually beneficial relationship.

An example of this research strategy is exemplified in Lavallée's (2009) discussion of Indigenous research methods. In her process of completing her dissertation through Indigenous methods, she first approached community elders and leaders in the community she wished to work with in Toronto. She met with an elder and the leaders in accordance with cultural norms that prioritize elders as the holders of knowledge. She first asked them if they had an interest in her proposed project, rather than assuming or forcing her topic of interest onto the community. After they expressed interest and support, Lavallée worked closely with a leader and elder throughout the project, including the research design. She emphasized that while she would manage the data, this was a community owned project. Lavallée worked so closely with the elder

that she included him on her dissertation committee so that he could be a voting member (Lavallée, 2009). Her process of working from an Indigenous framework illustrates an example of how I conceptualize this dissertation study.

Thus, I conceptualize this study as ours, rather than mine, as together we are sharing and co-creating knowledge. I do not have ownership over participants' lived experiences or stories. My cultural background is collectivistic, and I fit naturally into the idea of collaboration and shared knowledge and growth. This study is ours because it will be mutually beneficial. I will use this study to complete my dissertation and obtain a PhD. The study will benefit others through collective ownership, long-term community relationships, and using research as social justice action (Datta, 2018).

Participants and Site Selection

Participants of the study were 18 years or older, and self-identified as an ethnic minority, raised as Muslim, raised in the United States, and LGBTQ. Recruitment occurred online via social media sites such as Instagram, Facebook, and Reddit. Notably, no participants included in this study identified as transgender or non-binary. Therefore, when referring to participants I will use the "LGBQ" acronym rather than "LGBTQ." A total of 9 participants were included in this study. Overall, I interviewed 13 people for this study, and decided against including 4 of those interviews. Out of the 4 participants, 2 of them converted to Islam in adulthood, and their narratives were centered more upon their Christian families' disapproval in their conversion. These 2 participants experienced more conflict with their family and friends due to their religious identity compared to their sexual or gender identities. This was a stark contrast from other participants who were raised in Muslim families and communities, and while convert perspectives are valued and should be included, I believe it is best for another study to focus on

their unique experiences. From the other two participants who were ultimately not included for data analysis, one was raised by her Catholic family and did not have contact with her Muslim family until adulthood, which mirrored the narratives of those who converted to Islam. The final participant who was not included identified as transgender, and their story stood out from the rest of the participants due to their emphasis on gender identity, presentation, and norms. I felt it would be unethical to include a sole transgender participant in this study when their perspective is unique and differed from the other participants. I believe it would be best for a study to focus entirely on transgender Muslims to highlight their unique experiences and needs.

Typically, research would list a graph or chart with participant demographics or characteristics (i.e. age, race, level of education, etc.). However, for this study I have chosen not to list participant characteristics in an attempt to work against essentializing participants' complex and multifaceted positionalities. To reduce participant subjectivities into a graph would encourage the reader to enter into participant narratives with assumed understandings of who these participants are and what their demographics mean. Identities are constantly in movement, unfolding, enacting, producing, and negotiating (Fairclough, 2010, p. 427-428). Therefore, participants are listed in a numerical order throughout the findings chapter with the hopes that their discourses can be read through expansion rather than limitation.

As discussed in chapter two, the majority of the existing research with LGBTQ Muslims is conducted outside of the U.S. (i.e. Shannahan, 2009; Siraj, 2016; Baderoon, 2015), and with immigrants or focused on Middle Easterners (i.e. Khan, 2010; Minwalla et al., 2005; Ikizler & Syzmanski, 2014). Therefore, this study's participant criteria is purposeful in filling a gap in the literature exploring the experiences of U.S. born Muslims who represent the range of marginalized ethnic identities within the Muslim community.

I wanted the participants to be born in the West as I am hoped to attend to the clash of cultural values that can exist within a person. “Eastern” understandings of sexual orientation tell Muslims that being gay is a sin. However, growing up in the West can expose one to other values that are more affirming of LGBTQ status.

Participants did not have to be “out” in order to be included in the study. This ties in with a postcolonial queer understanding of “outness” as well as knowing that due to safety concerns and personal preference, not everyone is “out” or is fully “out.” Inclusion criteria was to be an ethnic minority, as I am aiming to access the construction of identities that develop at the intersection of race/ethnicity, religion/spirituality, and LGBTQ orientation. This demographic criteria is reflected in the research that shows Muslims are a racially diverse group, and that the majority of Muslim in the U.S. are African American, immigrants from non-Western countries, and the children of these immigrants (Pew Research Study, 2017).

Analysis

I used critical discourse analysis (CDA) grounded in postcolonial queer theory to analyze the data. CDA observes systems of power, historical and cultural contexts, and views human subjectivities as upheld by and created through discourse (Locke, 2004). Fairclough (2010) describes the difficulty in defining discourse, as it is not a thing or object, but rather a relationship between people and social relations, other people, and objects. He describes discourse as “not simply an entity we can define independently: we can only arrive at an understanding of it by analyzing sets of relations” (2010, p. 3). In saying this, Fairclough is describing CDA through its focus on dialectical relations, or conversations, between objects, people, and social systems. Further, Fairclough states “discourse brings into the complex relations which constitute social life: meaning, and meaning making” (2010, p. 3). CDA

contends that meaning is made through language, and therefore meaning can be understood by examining language.

Foucault describes discourse as a means of defining and producing knowledge, and as a method of constructing a topic and giving it meaning (Short & Le, 2009). Therefore, using CDA is a way to analyze the relationship between power, meaning, and language. A main feature of CDA is to analyze the underlying values and attitudes embedded through discourse, and to connect these with an understanding of larger social contexts (Short & Le, 2009). In order to achieve this component of CDA, I utilized postcolonial and queer theorists to identify the meanings embedded within discourses. For example, I relied upon Edward Said and Homi Bhabha's postcolonial theories to position the participants through their discourses and to help think about larger social systems, specifically how colonialism impacted participant's positionalities as ethnic or racial minority Muslims living in the West. Further, I brought in Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's queer theories to assess for queer meanings within participant discourses, especially in thinking outside of the hetero/homosexual binary and the performance of being out. This combination was particularly helpful in deconstructing "outness" and being "in the closet" as a limiting ideology for queerness, particularly for individuals coming from non-Western backgrounds.

What makes critical discourse analysis "critical" is its stance on power and oppression. CDA assumes that traditional research practices inadvertently uphold systems of oppression based on race, class, gender, and other classifying identities (Locke, 2004). Further, CDA includes resistance to normative discourses and is political in nature (van Dijk, 1995). By understanding how participants socially construct their identities through discourse, I can critically examine how LGBTQ Muslim identities are negotiated and developed. For this study,

the “critical” in my critical discourse analysis is postcolonial queer theory, which I used to read and analyze participant data. To summarize, through CDA, I am analyzing the dialectical relationships between participants and social systems (i.e. Islamophobia, racism, colonialism, homophobia, etc.), while also contextualizing the participants in their sociopolitical contexts, addressing systems of power and oppression, and listening for participant’s meaning making process. I wondered how social systems produce participants (i.e. as backwards, less than, “other”), how participants talk back to these systems and to others, and then looking at the discourses between them.

In order to assess for the dialectical relationships between participants and social systems, I used Mullet’s (2018) framework for conducting CDA combined with analyzing data through postcolonial queer theory. In addition, I utilized questions and tasks from Gee (2005, 2011) and Fairclough (2010) while following the general analytic outline organized by Mullet (2018). I will first review the analytic outline and then discuss the guiding questions and tasks I used for analysis. Mullet (2018) defines an analytic CDA framework through seven steps. These include: 1. Select the discourse, 2. Locate and prepare data sources, 3. Explore the background of each text, 4. Code texts and identify overarching discourses, 5. Analyze the external relations in the texts, 6. Analyze the internal relations in the texts, and 7. Interpret the data. Before describing my engagement with these steps, I will note that my analytic process was not linear and consisted of many re-readings and re-listenings of participant data while flowing in and out of the steps in a looped process of fluctuations. For example, as I read through participant transcripts, I read for main discourses and participant discursive processes while simultaneously keeping postcolonial queer discourses in mind. Specifically, I kept an intentional eye out for

colonial and sexual binaries while reading through participant texts to hear how binaries and participants spoke to one another.

In following Mullet's (2018) steps, I began with selecting the discourse, meaning situating the topic of this study, which is asking about the experiences of U.S. Muslims with same-sex attraction. The second step is to locate and prepare data discourses, meaning to conduct participant interviews, take methodological notes, and transcribe the interviews. I completed this stage over the course of seven months, first conducting the interviews and then transcribing them, while taking notes throughout. The third step is to explore the background of each text, meaning to examine the historical and sociopolitical context of the participant's lives. Within this stage, Mullet (2018) asks for an "examination of the social and historical context and producers of the texts" (p. 123). I did this by contextualizing participant's positionalities as a marginalized group within a marginalized group (i.e. being queer and Muslim and an ethnic or racial minority). I was able to attend to the historical and sociopolitical context of participants' narratives through the stories they shared in the interviews. They discussed their relationship histories, family histories, hopes and dreams of their futures, and ways of creation and resilience in light of heavy circumstances such as experiencing racism or queerphobia. Contextualizing each participant's narrative was particularly helpful when bringing in postcolonial queer theory, as theory was able to explain the contexts in which these participants were positioned. Specifically, postcolonial queer theory spoke of the discourses that produced these participants into Eastern vs. Western, Closeted vs. Out binaries.

The fourth stage is identifying overarching themes, meaning the use of coding procedures to identify discourses within the data. While Mullet (2018) uses the term "themes," when I was in this stage I thought of it instead as smaller discourses. For this process, I read participant

interviews and completed line-by-line coding. I coded for general experiences that I read in the transcripts, and then re-read transcripts in order to combine codes into smaller discourses. This is a part of the process where I heavily pulled in Gee's (2005, 2011) influence. Gee (2005, 2011) proposed several questions to ask when analyzing data. For example, he puts forth questions such as: "What is the situation? How is this piece of language being used to make things significant or not, and in what ways? What practice or practices is this piece of language being used to enact? What identity or identities is this piece of language being used to enact? What identity is this language attributing to others and how does this help the speaker or writer enact his or her own identity? And what type of relationship is this piece of language seeking to enact with others?" These are questions I used to read through the data when coding. Examples of what questions looked like for this population are: how is participant's language discussing Muslim identities, and how are participants enacting sexuality or gender through language?

The fifth and sixth stages I combined into a reflexive process of examining internal and external relations of the text. The purpose of these stages is to "examine social relations that control the production of text" and to "examine the language for aims of the text" (Mullet, 2018, p.122). Here, I examined how larger social discourses and relations affected the narratives, and in turn how participants were speaking back to societal discourses. Further, I analyzed how internal relations were speaking in the participant's texts. This is where I heavily pulled in Fairclough's (2010) influence. Fairclough describes the process of CDA as "an analysis of dialectical relations between discourse and other objects, elements, or moments, as well as analysis of the 'internal relations' of discourse" (2010, p. 4). This is a process of reading the dialogues between participants and societal discourses, and reading the internal discourses between participant positionalities and subjectivities. Further, this is a place in analysis where I

imagined participants in communication with one another. While I would read one participant's transcript, their discursive practices would remind me of another participant's narrative, and I would position the two together, thereby creating dialogue amongst the participants. This was a helpful aid in creating the organization of larger discourses. Additionally, when thinking of participants in dialogue with one another and with larger social systems, I also thought of how theorists would dialogue in return. For example, while reading transcripts, I would think about how Said, Butler, and Anzaldúa (amongst other postcolonial and queer theorists) would describe participant narratives. Bringing in theorists' perspectives allowed me to build a deeper dialectical relationship between participants, their contexts, and social systems.

In the final seventh stage, interpreting the data, I began to combine the entanglement of smaller discourses from stages five to six into the main discourses discussed in the findings chapter. I used writing as a method of inquiry through notes and memos. While writing about participant discourses, I was able to see the six main larger discourses that participants described in their experiences and meaning making of being a Muslim with same-sex attraction in the U.S. The resulting six main discourses are described in depth in the next chapter. The discourses include: (1) critical consumption and interpretation of religious texts, (2) levels of outness, (3) financial independence and space from family, (4) experiences within the Muslim community and the LGBTQ+ community, (5) identity negotiation, and (6) LGBTQ+ Muslim identity as source of pride and resistance. The results are presented below through subheadings of the six discourses.

Representation

“How will these research findings be represented” is a critical question for a researcher engaging with Postcolonial Queer Indigenous methods. I have an ethical duty to report accurate

and honest findings that prioritize the participant's way of knowing. I also have a duty to represent participants in ways that ensure their stories will be honored and valued. I recognize the risk I take in essentializing a diverse and varied group into a limited representation by detailing six larger discourses I identified within participant data. However, I approach the data from a humble and respectful stance with the intention of honoring Muslim knowledges (Stonebanks, 2008) and in honoring my duty in my relationships with participants of this study and the larger LGBTQ Muslim community (Wilson, 2001).

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

I enter this chapter guided by Indigenous methodology ethics and by Gayatri Spivak's (1988) call to consider how colonial or subaltern subjects are represented within academia and research. Colonial subjects are those who are historically spoken for, and who have had agency taken away from them (Spivak, 1988). Colonialism has many meanings depending on the context, but for the sake of this chapter I will use Edward Said's (1978) descriptions of colonization and colonized subjects from his seminal postcolonial text, *Orientalism*. In *Orientalism*, Said (1978) states:

So far as the West was concerned during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, an assumption had been made that the Orient and everything in it was, if not patently inferior to, then in need of corrective study by the West (p. 40-41).

Although the participants of this study live in the West, through orientalism and colonial thought, they are deemed as "others" because of their Muslim backgrounds, an Eastern religion and culture. Said (1978) further states:

If the essence of Orientalism is the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority, then we must be prepared to note how in its development and subsequent history Orientalism deepened and even hardened the distinction (p. 42).

In this statement, Said (1978) is referencing a binary of East vs. West, one in which the East is deemed as inferior and the West is seen as the corrective force to rescue the East from itself.

Throughout this chapter, I conceptualize the participants of the study as existing within and moving against the Eastern vs. Western dichotomy.

In light of Said (1978) and Spivak's (1988) discussion of colonialism's impact on subaltern subjects, I recognize the challenge in representing a group of historically marginalized

people in a way that does not perpetuate colonial ideals or representations, and that does not essentialize a varied group into a monolith. While my own positionalities align in some ways with those of the participants, I am still in the role of “researcher” and thus have an ethical duty to be in a constant state of critique and reflection. Indigenous methodology reminds me that I am not in a “researcher/researched” binary, but am in relationship and connection with participants and their narratives (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008; Wilson, 2001). They made meaning of their experiences, and decided to share them with me, and presumably decided which experiences to share with me. I brought my understanding of their narratives and myself to the analysis process, and together we co-created this knowledge of findings.

I have organized the findings into six discourses, which constitute the entanglement of the many participant discourses found within their individual interviews. I arrived to the six discourses through critical discourse analysis methods, which I described in chapter 3. When reading participant interviews, I could hear their voices in conversation with one another, and I could hear queer and postcolonial theorists speaking in return (i.e. Spivak, Bhabha, Butler, Said, Sedgwick, Anzaldúa). By hearing them in conversation together, I was able to organize their multitude of discursive practices into the six larger discourses.

I recognize my desire to categorize discourses comes from my position as a woman trained in academic spaces which traditionally enjoy concise themes and codes. I wonder what might be lost or missing by writing the data in this way, and I take the risk of essentializing or playing it safe with the data. As you begin reading this chapter, I urge you to also enter a place of critique and reflection in an attempt to sit with the multitude of discourses, entanglements, and positionalities that produce these participant quotes. These quotes represent participants at the time and place of when interviews were conducted. Importantly, identities are always unfolding,

growing, changing, and producing, as evidenced by models of identity development. Klein et al., (2015) discusses an LGBTQ+ identity development model wherein identity development for queer individuals does not follow a linear path, but instead is a dynamic and complex process. Likewise, these participants' narratives and constructions will evolve over time, and possibly already have since the time of interview. Through the critical discourse analysis of participant interviews, the discourses that informed and shaped the participants' positionalities can be found in the following categories. Six larger discourses were found in the data in response to the research questions. These include: (1) critical consumption and interpretation of religious texts, (2) levels of outness, (3) financial independence and space from family, (4) experiences within the Muslim community and the LGBTQ+ community, (5) identity negotiation, and (6) LGBTQ+ Muslim identity as source of pride and resistance. The results are presented below through subheadings of the six discourses.

Key Terms in this Chapter:

- Hadith: additional religious texts based upon the teachings and practices of Prophet Muhammed (pbuh)
- Haram: meaning “forbidden” in Arabic
- Hijab: a head covering sometimes worn by Muslim women
- Hijabi: a term describing a Muslim woman who covers her hair using the hijab
- Masjid: the Arabic word for mosque, the communal place of worship for Muslims
- Muslima: the feminine version of Muslim
- PBUH: an acronym for “peace be upon him,” an Islamic phrase used after a prophet’s name as a sign of respect
- Quran: the major religious text of Islam

Critical Consumption of Religious Texts/Creating own Interpretation:

This discourse refers to the ways that participants engage with Islamic texts from a re-interpretive and queer framework. All participants discussed critiquing or reinterpreting religious texts. They discussed their process of critiquing texts through questioning the traditional and conservative teachings of the Quran. Participants examined Islamic texts in varied ways, including naming the story of Prophet Lut (pbuh) as a core reinterpretation. Further, the women-identified participants referenced critiquing patriarchal interpretations of religious texts. Additionally, participants referenced reading specific queer Islamic literature (i.e. books written by Dr. Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle) and examining cultural influences on the Quran and Hadith. This discourse is organized into three subsections: the story of Prophet Lut (pbuh), women-identified readings of religious texts, and reading queer interpretations.

The Story of Prophet Lut (pbuh)

Many participants referenced the story of Prophet Lut (pbuh), wherein the Islamic argument against homosexuality originates. The story of Prophet Lut (pbuh) is the same as the biblical story of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. In this story, the people living in Sodom and Gomorrah are deemed to be living in sin, resulting in the destruction of their cities and land. Within traditional Islamic interpretations of this text, the major act that resulted in the destruction of the cities was homosexuality amongst men. This verse from the Quran is referenced as a verse condemning homosexuality:

We also (sent) Lut, he said to his people: ‘Do ye commit lewdness such as no people in creation (ever) committed before you? For ye practice your lusts on men in preference to women, ye are indeed a people transgressing beyond bounds. (The Quran 7:80-81; A. Yusef Ali Version)

The verse is written to the men of Lut, condemning their same-sex actions. To expand, the following quote from the Islamic scholar Yusef Al-Qaradawi illustrates a traditional interpretation and overarching Islamic view of the story of Prophet Lut (pbuh) and homosexuality:

The story of the prophet Lut (Lot) as narrated in the Qur'an should be sufficient for us.

Lut's people were addicted to this shameless depravity, abandoning natural, pure, lawful relations with women in the pursuit of this unnatural, foul and illicit practice. (p. 169)

This quote exemplifies a common traditional interpretation of the Quran, specifically the story of Prophet Lut (pbuh). It describes homosexuality as unnatural and sinful. Further, it halts discussion of the topic by dictating the story of what happened to the people of Lut as sufficient evidence for God's ruling against homosexuality. Notably, this interpretation is specific to male same-sex actions, and does not reference same-sex acts between women or other gendered people. Interpretations by scholars such as Yusef Al-Qaradawi are discursive practices enacting the belief of homosexuality as sinful. Thus, a dichotomy exists between the static discourse narrating same-sex attracted Muslims as sinful, and the participants of this study who push back to create their own interpretation of the story. Participants are in relationship with these discourses by creating their own interpretations, knowledge, and discursive practices.

For instance, one participant discussed his process of "coming to terms" with Islam after his reading of the story of the Prophet Lut (pbuh), and how through this reading he now believes that Islam is not against homosexuality. This participant discussed his reading of the Quran and of Prophet Lut (pbuh) in context to distancing himself from the Muslim community and Islam as a religion. However, through reading the Quran for himself, he was able to feel a semblance of peace with Islam and his Muslim background, while still being unsure if he considers himself to

be a Muslim. This participant's critique of the story of Lut (pbuh) includes a queer reinterpretation as illustrated in his quote below. For example, he shared:

When it does come to Islam, I have come a long way. And I guess coming to terms of all of it. And I, actually, funny enough, like in reading the Quran for myself and especially the areas where it talks about like the story of Lut. Which is where everyone kind of derives their beliefs from and in reading about marriage in the Quran and the purpose of marriage and all these things. I actually truly believe that the Quran is not against gay marriage. And I actually do not believe that the Quran is just against gay- like I actually feel like it embraces and supports it. And so I've kind of come to terms with Islam and I actually see it much differently than I think a lot of people do. (Participant 3)

This participant's experience showcases how same-sex attracted Muslims may use their own readings of religious texts to negotiate their intersection of identities, and to address past painful experiences dictated from traditional interpretations of the Quran. Reading the text for himself was a conduit to integrating his queer positionality with religious writings. Judith Butler is a main founder of queer theory, and in her 1990 book *Gender Trouble* she describes identity as "tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (p. 140). A core tenet of queer theory is the resistance to normativity, specifically within gender or sex binaries (i.e. heterosexual/homosexual) (Butler, 1990). Thus, through the critique of religious texts to include a queer affirming interpretation, participants produce their identities by repeating the act of reimagining how a queer Muslim can engage with Islamic texts.

Several other participants described their understanding through a critique of the Quranic story. One participant discussed her perspective of what she deemed incorrect with the traditional interpretation of the story. "Their main argument is the people of Lut. And I'm not a scholar, but

they were not punished for their sexual orientation it was for sexual aggression.” (Participant 8)

Within this quote, the participant positions herself in contrast to religious scholars. Religious scholars are who uphold traditional interpretations of the Quran, and this participant places herself in opposition to these traditional viewpoints by stating that not only is she “not a scholar,” but she also believes the story has been interpreted incorrectly and believes the sin within the Quranic story is sexual aggression, not same-sex acts.

Another participant emphasizes this point. She discussed her belief that amongst all of the components within the story, same sex actions are not considered to be more immoral than the other acts.

And it's funny because every time I say this to my mother there's always this huge argument like we never have civil conversations about the queer community, it's always an argument and she always tells me about Prophet Lut and how his city was destroyed because of all these people and I'm like, but at the same time there was there was other things going on in this story. So how can you say just one thing is haram? (Participant 9)

Similar to the previous participant, this quote showcases how a reinterpretation of the story of Prophet Lut (pbuh) includes the possibility of conceptualizing other aspects of the story as a sin, or “haram,” and decentering same-sex actions as the basis for what is condemned by God within the story. Through reinterpretations of the story, queer Muslims describe a multitude of opinions on what is considered to be a sin. Alternative interpretations include sexual aggression or mistreating travellers to be the sin, rather than homosexuality. Participants are producing their identities as queer people through their “stylized repetition of acts” by reading and repeating new interpretations of the Quran (Butler, 1990).

Through this discursive practice, participants create their own narratives of the story of Prophet Lut (pbuh). Participants discuss their critical construction of a story relating to homosexuality in the Quran, as well as critiquing how homosexuality is constructed within larger Islamic discourse. Participants reference the dominant Islamic discourse of homosexuality deemed a sin due to the story of Prophet Lut (pbuh) in the Quran. This discourse is maintained within their families, religious communities, and larger Islamic communities. Within these quotes, U.S. Muslims with same sex attraction construct their own discourse of questioning traditional Islamic understandings of Quranic text.

Within postcolonial queer theory, participants are seen as agents disrupting larger discourses and binaries (Western/Eastern; Heterosexual/Homosexual) (Said, 1978; Butler, 1990). Here, participants are rethinking the conventional through an anti-colonial and queer framework. They are challenging the presumed heteronormativity within religious texts, as well as enacting agency by creating new queer interpretations. They are agents of resistance in the heterosexual/colonial binaries and create new space and new knowledge through their positionalities.

Women-identified Readings of Religious Texts

For the women-identified participants, there was a critique of patriarchal religious understandings and teachings. Participants described a tension with traditional Islamic teachings and separate prayer spaces in masjids through their positionalities as women with same-sex attraction.

One participant noted the majority of religious leaders and scholars are men. In order to integrate her spirituality with her gender and sexual orientation identities, she feels the need to

read the Quran on her own and to question teachings that come from a male perspective. For example, she shared:

I think it's when I read the Quran on my own. If I had a question, I would stop relying on other people who have certain opinions due to their background. I also do not like that all Imams, pretty much are men. And what about the scholars looking at things from a female perspective? (Participant 4)

Her critique is centered on male perspectives of religious interpretations and teachings. This participant asserts her agency in reading and understanding the Quran for herself, importantly from a woman's perspective. This position is mirrored in Amina Wadud's Islamic teachings. Amina Wadud is a progressive Islamic scholar who focuses on the role of women in Islam and wrote the influential book *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. Wadud (1992) focuses her writings on deconstructing patriarchal interpretations of women in the Quran. Similarly to the women-identified participants in this study, Wadud prioritizes reading texts for their original purpose, stripped away from cultural overlays tacked onto interpretations from men.

This point is emphasized by another participant's need to reinterpret "oppressive" or traditional religious interpretations and teachings. She described finding comfort in Islam, referring to it as a "security blanket" and a source of guidance for when she feels lost. However, that feeling of comfort is complicated by how she perceives religious texts and their interpretations to be misogynistic and at times, oppressive. In order to connect with the religion in a way that feels authentic to who she is, she reads texts for herself and constantly questions what she was taught to believe from a traditional standpoint. While this participant finds comfort

in Islam, she also finds this process of questioning religious teachings to be exhausting and understands why people might leave the religion. She shared:

I have so much respect for Islam itself. But so much of it is shrouded and tainted by privileged men using it as a tool for oppression. But it's like, I can't take anything at face value, like everything I learned at masjid growing up I have to think about so critically and there's so many things that I just have to question on a day to day basis. (Participant 1)

She describes “privileged” men using the Quran in contrast to her “oppressed” identity as a woman. By critiquing, challenging, and reinterpreting texts for herself, she deploys power and agency, and also creates knowledge in her discursive practice. If traditional Islamic teachings are not only homophobic but also patriarchal, then women-identified participants are engaging with a queering of texts through disrupting the sexual and gendered binaries within typical interpretations (Butler, 1990).

The above quotes showcase how gendered differences influence variance within discourses. For the women-identified participants, not only are they constructing a critical reading of Islamic texts, they are also grappling with a larger patriarchal societal discourse that limits religious leaders and scholars to work from a patriarchal framework.

Reading Queer Interpretations

Further, several participants referenced specific texts as ways they navigated developing their own religious perspective. The book, *Homosexuality in Islam: Critical reflection on Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims* by Dr. Scott Siraj Al-Haqq Kugle is a seminal text on reinterpreting the Quran from a queer framework. Kugle (2010) offers alternative interpretations of sexuality and gender in the Quran. Specifically, he problematizes verses in the Quran and

Hadith that condemn homosexuality such as the story of Prophet Lut (pbuh). He argues that nowhere in the Quran is sodomy or homosexuality explicitly mentioned, and that same-sex acts are only refuted within the context of violence (Kugle, 2010). Further, he asserts that not only is same-sex attraction a natural, biological determination, but is also divinely guided. Kugle's work symbolizes the process of queering religious texts. To queer texts means to disrupt, challenge, and complicate discourses (Browne & Nash, 2010). Additionally, it refers to "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning" when discussing sexuality and gender (Sedgwick, 1994, p.10). Within this space, Kugle's work disrupts and creates discourses, which participants engage with through their own readings.

Participants reference reading Kugle's work as a helpful pathway towards creating their own religious approach. This idea is exemplified in the quote below:

So there's like this one book called *Homosexuality in Islam* by Doctor Scott Kugle, I think. And his book talks a lot about like queerness in Islam and why, you know, just because you're queer and you're Muslim doesn't mean you, like doesn't mean you necessarily have to view your queerness as a sin, and he gives like a lot of like Quranic arguments and historical arguments and things like that as to why queerness isn't a sin.
(Participant 2)

One participant stated her need to read this critical, queer-informed book due to her inability to read the Quran in its original Arabic form. This is note worthy because since she is unable to read the Quran in its true form, she must rely upon interpretations of the Quran translated into English, which would include traditional or conservative understandings of the text. This book gives her a choice and option to understand religious texts from a queer interpretation, one that is more suited to her ways of engaging with the religion.

I started reading this book. I'm only a few pages in, it's called *Homosexuality in Islam*.

But I'm excited to see what that has to say about it, because like I can read Arabic, but I,

I'm not fluent enough to like read the whole Quran and know what it's saying.

(Participant 1)

This specific text, *Homosexuality in Islam*, was referenced as a helpful tool participants use to construct their own understanding and discourse of Islamic teachings relating to same sex attraction. This participant mentions her inability to understand the Quran written in its original form in Arabic. Consequently, relying on critical texts allows for participants to develop meaningful understandings of religious teachings in ways that otherwise would be inaccessible. In turn, this moves power forward for participants by enacting their agency and creating new knowledge and understandings of religious texts and of themselves.

As described by Butler (1990), participants create their own identities and knowledges through repeated actions of queer interpretations of texts. Butler (1990) notes that identity is not stable, thus a Muslim identity and a queer identity are in flux and in creation or performance. Colonial frameworks deem Muslim identity as static (i.e. oppressed, backwards) (Said, 1978). Therefore, by pushing against colonial or homophobic systems, participants destabilize Muslim and queer positionalities by reading texts from their own framework of being. By disrupting static identities within the Eastern vs. Western and heterosexual vs. homosexual binaries, participants destabilize identities that are discursively upheld by colonial, homophobic, and patriarchal systems. To expand, Said (1978) describes how colonial subjects are deemed to be inferior and in need of help from the West. However, participants describe finding their own interpretations of the Quran without help from Western sources. Thereby asserting their power and agency in defining what a queer Muslim interpretation is for themselves.

Levels of Outness

The discourse *Levels of Outness* describes the varied ways in which same-sex attracted U.S. Muslims discuss being “out” with their same-sex attraction or relationships. This section is organized into three subsections: general levels of outness, comparison to non-Muslims, and women-identified experiences of outness. Importantly, this discussion of “outness” is framed within the consideration of “outness” as a colonial construct, and one that exists in friction with queer theory. Being “out” with sexual orientation identity derives from Western ideals of what constitutes queer authenticity (i.e. publicly embracing labels of sexuality) (Boe et al., 2018). Further, queer theory eschews identity categories in favor of expansiveness. Meaning, dichotomous and categorical thinking creates labels and binaries, which is ultimately in friction with queer theory’s goal of disrupting social norms (Sedgwick, 1990).

General Levels of Outness

The subsection *General Levels of Outness* refers to the overall ways participants described their considerations of “being out.” Participants within the study endorsed variance within levels of outness, ranging from only being out in online spaces, to being out within some groups and not others, to being completely out to everyone in their life. Notably, participants described being comfortable with their levels of outness regarding family, friends, and community in terms of their internal acceptance of their same-sex attraction.

One participant described his confidence in experiencing his full sexual orientation without acknowledging it with his family. He states:

I feel like I’m very openly queer in all domains of my life, aside from, you know, having explicit conversations with um my family. I don't have any plans to ever let my family know to be honest and um because of my close relationship with my mom, I feel like she,

to me, is the most important person in my life. And so I think I can experience all of my queerness, you know, without letting her know, without harming her. And I would be fine with that. (Participant 7)

Notably, this participant described his belief that he can feel his full “queerness” despite not being “out” with his mother, someone he feels very close to. This participant also engages in a discursive practice of establishing love and care for his family, specifically stating he does not want to “harm” his mother. This creates knowledge of when, how, and who U.S. Muslims may come out to, and if they consider the act of “coming out” to be necessary for their relationships and self-expression. Eve Sedgwick (1990) theorizes about the performance of “coming out of the closet.” She posits that the out/closeted binary is itself a discursive performance, one that is limited in fully attending to the richness of sexualities and genders. Meaning that placing “outness” in a binary of out or not out keeps many people with same-sex attraction who do not fit in these categories out of the conversation. Additionally, the out/closeted binary is connected to another dichotomous idea of pride/shame or “disclosure/secretcy” (Sedgwick, 1990). To be “in the closet” and not verbalize or label one’s same-sex attraction is considered to be living in silence, and not fully living as a same-sex attracted person. Thus, the performance of coming out is a discursive act to produce a same-sex identity.

Further, the concept of “coming out of the closet” is a Western ideal and product of Western culture (Sedgwick, 1990). To that end, “coming out of the closet” can be thought of as not just a performance of identity, but namely a Western performance of identity. Participants who described their levels of outness beyond the out/closeted binary trouble the “coming out” narrative. Moreover, the people who refuse to perform outness in the Westernized “coming out” discursive framework disrupt the out/closeted binary. Same-sex attracted Muslims create

knowledge of what outness looks like for them, and it includes layers to their outness rather than dichotomous ways of being or thinking.

Furthermore, participants are also produced by the colonial binary of Eastern/Western (Said, 1978). Said (1978) states the West views the Eastern subject as backwards and in need of rescue. The possibility here is that by not adhering to the performance of outness, participants are considered as less than by Western society. Participants powerfully claim agency in reporting their comfortability with their layered outness (i.e. not being “out” in all aspects of their lives) and push back against Western ideas of what is considered backwards. Collectivistic values are also asserted within participant’s considerations of “coming out.” In the above participant quote, he notes he does not want to harm his family by coming out to them, specifically his mother. This enacts Eastern values of family unity over the premise of individuality, which is a Western cultural construct (Boe, Maxey, & Bermudez, 2018).

Existing outside of or in between this out/closeted and Eastern/Western binary, participants are discursively produced into a place of “hybridity” (Bhabha, 1994). In other words, participants exist in a liminal, in between space wherein they create and produce their own discourses of resistance and possibilities. By subverting expectations of what it means to be “out” and what it means to be “other,” participants theorize their own culture, knowledge, and identities. Participants are ultimately queer postcolonial subjects through exerting their agency in disrupting the out/closeted and Eastern/Western dichotomous discourses.

Comparison to Non-Muslims

Several participants discussed the differences between their coming out process as Muslims compared to non-Muslims. One participant shared his disdain for feeling misunderstood by larger Western coming out narratives:

The coming out narrative is like this *Love Simon* right, I always think of that movie. It's like the worst example of like White coming out narratives, because it's so simple. All it has to do with is do you feel like you can accept yourself? And as soon as you reach that point, you can tell the world and the world will embrace you. And I always felt almost resentful towards those narratives, because growing up for kids like myself, that meant physical harm, that meant emotional trauma, that means internalized homophobia, that means panic attacks until you're in your 20s and 30s. It's a lot, and I think it's really reductive to tell kind of the simple coming out narratives, where it's all about, it's just a matter of self love you know? Um and so breaking the mold through meeting other people of color of what coming out means. And I can be out. And I do consider myself out. To my mentors to my colleagues to my friends um but not be out to family out of you know, respecting either their cultural tradition or not wanting to um as an immigrant, you know, child of immigrants to impose a lot of you know what they perceive to be like Western cultural expectations on our otherwise, you know, very traditional, conservative families. (Participant 7)

This participant describes a tension between “coming out” narratives in Western versus Eastern cultures. Within the quote, it’s as if he feels the need to prove his same-sex identity despite not adhering to the Western ideal of being out. He considers himself to be out and pushes against the out/closeted binary (Sedgwick, 1990). Further, he enacts his Eastern positionality by placing himself in contrast to his Western counterparts who may more easily fit into the out vs. closeted construct. There is resentment in feeling pushed into the Western ideal of “coming out of the closet,” and yet he enacts agency and power by connecting with communities of color to define their own knowledge of outness. He describes a colonial discourse of coming out as acceptable

within a Western setting, but as unacceptable within an Eastern setting. This highlights a discourse of West and East as “others” who are incompatible, harkening back to a colonial description of cultural groups (Said, 1978). He further elaborates with a discursive practice of “people of color” having shared knowledge with deciding who to come to compared to not, and creating power in considering oneself out despite not being out to everyone he knows.

Another participant showcased a similar tension with her coming out process compared to her Western and White counterparts:

It’s so strange that like in in this world that I live in me being gay affects my parents more than it affects me. (laughter) It's not their life it's my life but like it's... none of my American friends ever had to think about that, like, when I see how they live their lives even if their parents are disappointed, which is, you know, messed up if their parents are disappointed. They just are like, ‘I just won't talk to my parents,’ and I just can't imagine that even being an option for me.” (Participant 1)

This participant describes the friction between her relationship with her parents and her non-Muslim friends perceived familial relationships. Her quote touches upon a larger Islamic discourse wherein parents are responsible for the upbringing of good and acceptable children. Children’s status and positionalities are a reflection upon the parents, the family, and the parenting style within the family. To deviate from what an acceptable Muslim child is would be perceived as a failure of the parents by the extended family and community.

Additionally, this participant positions herself in contrast to her “American” friends by stating she cannot imagine having distance from her parents. This highlights the discursive practice of family connectedness within considerations of coming out. Further, this statement highlights the collectivistic values and discourses that U.S. Muslims are entangled with. For

Muslims, the family is seen as a source of “threat, esteem, and joy” (Dwairy, 2006, p. 62).

Families may cast judgment when a family member goes against their wishes, and can experience joy when an individual accomplishes a family-approved task that adds to the family reputation (Dwairy, 2006, p. 63).

Women-Identified Experiences of “Outness”

The final subsection with the discourse of “levels of outness” relates to women’s experiences. While in general Muslim families value family cohesion and loyalty, within this study it was specifically the women identified participants who discussed their level of outness in relation to family reputation and honor.

To illustrate, one participant framed her levels of outness with various family members in relation to reputation within their community. The participant noted she is out to her immediate family, but not to her grandparents who are respected within the community, and whom she cares for as well.

My mom asks me every time she sees me. But, um, I guess when I say that I'm mainly talking about my grandparents, her parents who are immigrants, and basically she really feels strongly that they should know now, because everyone else knows and like they would be more hurt, knowing that everyone knows, except them. But I kind of feel like it would only do them, like it's not fair to them because no matter what they say to me, if they tell me..to go to the mosque, try to pray the gay away or whatever. And that's not hurtful to me because A: I am expecting it and B: I'm secure in my faith. So the only one that's sort of stressing out is them. And so at this point I'm sort of operating at like a ‘we'll cross that bridge when we get to it.’ If I actually have someone in my life who I want to marry, then I can, it can be a conversation then, but at this point I don't feel like I want to

put them through that because even though like I know they would react poorly, I still love them. They're still my family. So I don't want to stress them out if I don't have to. Especially because they sort of have like a very good reputation among their community and I don't want it to be an issue for them in that way, it's in that sort of like honor shame society, kind of thing. Then again, my mom's like but if they find out from someone else that's gonna be bad, but that's kind of why I'm like, not, not out. (Participant 5)

This participant positions herself as someone who is secure in her faith and in her sexuality. Further, she describes her considerations of outness in connection to respect for her family members. She is accepting of her sexuality and is also careful to discuss this part of her identity with certain members of her family. Her level of outness is seemingly not because of internalized homophobia, but rather due to her collectivistic values. This discursive practice is in contrast to Western discourses that value autonomy and independence. She describes herself as “not, not out” due to her positionality as someone who accepts her sexuality, and is open with specific community and family members, but also considers family reputation in relation to her sexuality.

Thinking of Sedgwick's (1990) binaries related to sexuality and gender, this participant brings forth another binary of shame/honor related to her sexuality. Her positionality as a same-sex attracted woman places her within the location of bringing shame to the family. To be honorable would mean to be heterosexual, or at least to perform heterosexuality. Colonial discourses would produce her position as “oppressed” and in need of saving from her family (Said, 1978). However, the participant is secure with herself as a same-sex attracted Muslim woman. This discursive position asserts agency against colonial discourses through emphasizing her love of family and comfort with her identity. Eastern collectivist values of protecting family

harmony supersede Western notions of individuality. Thus, leading to her position as “not, not out,” which resists the dichotomy of out/closeted and “disclosure/secretcy” (Sedgwick, 1990).

Additionally, this point of family reputation is emphasized by another participant who questioned coming out publicly due to the impact that would have on her parent’s reputation.

My parents have given up like a lot of pretty much their entire life and happiness because of their reputation and even though I don't have the best relationship with them and in the past I used to feel more like, you know, I don't care about my parents. I don't care what they say. I don't care what they think. As I've gotten older, I've started to kind of understand a lot of like the pain that they went through, so there's a part of me that doesn't even want to publicly come out as far as like my Masjid community and extended family goes. Even if they were to pass away. Just because it would kind of feel like they've given up like their entire life for their reputation and I would feel kind of guilty just like ruining it with one sentence, you know and that's, I know that that's not the fairest thing to me myself, but at the same time, I would feel kind of sad towards my parents or feel kind of guilty towards my parents if I did come out to my entire mosque community, to like you know, my extended family and stuff because it's like they worked so hard to protect their reputation and what people think of them. (Participant 2)

Within this quote, there is a discursive practice of blending collectivistic values and family expectations with considerations of outness. Further, this participant does not discuss her sexuality in terms of feeling insecure, shameful, or from lack of acceptance, but rather out of concern for her family. This challenges a Western ideal of individualism and sense of self over family. She disrupts the idea that being “in the closet” is a position of shame (Sedgwick, 1990),

by accepting her same-sex attraction alongside collectivistic values and consideration of her family.

Additionally, Bhabha's (1994) notion of "hybridity" is invoked by the participant's position in a liminal space amongst binaries and discourses (i.e. out/closeted, shame/honor, individual/family). Hybridity is a "third space" wherein new positions, cultures, and knowledges emerge (Bhabha, 1990). The "third space" is where cultures collide and create, a space that "gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation and meaning and representation" (Bhabha, 1990). Participants exist in this third space, where new cultural identities are produced and created.

To conclude, the intersection of coming out with perceived family honor centers around the gendered discourse and positionalities of girls and women holding responsibility for their families' reputation. Women-identified participants reported experiences of additional pressure and expectations to consider their parents and familial reputation. There was also discussion of concern and care for family unity, a feature of collectivist cultures. Arguably, this discourse reflects participants' desire to maintain family ties and their considerations for their families. Lastly, this discourse touches upon colonial narratives of Muslim women. Through a colonial discourse, Muslim women are deemed to be "oppressed" and in need of saving (Said, 1978). Yet within the context of Muslim women in this study, they engage with their own discourse and "third space" (Bhabha, 1990) of creating power for themselves in deciding whom to come out to and why, while maintaining respect and care for their families.

Financial Independence and Space From Family

This discourse reflects participant's stated need for financial independence or moving away from family as a way to feel safe in exploring their sexuality and gender expression. Many

participants described this process as occurring when they moved away from home for college. Further, this discourse can be situated in relationship with larger discourses of homophobia and the physical safety concerns of same-sex attracted people. Homophobia shapes Muslim familial and community expectations of who and what a person should be (i.e. heterosexual and gender-conforming). Kugle (2013) states same-sex attracted Muslims learn Islamic guidance from their families, which can create inner conflict when families use traditional interpretations of the Quran. In order for same-sex attracted Muslims to navigate their queer identity in conjunction with their personal understanding of Islam, creating independence from family is a crucial step (Kugle, 2013, p.79). Thus, when a person creates tension with their family or community discourse by expressing same-sex attraction or gender variance, there is a valid concern of physical, financial, and emotional safety. Participants create a discursive practice of enacting agency, power and freedom in response to homophobia by taking space to more safely explore their sexuality. To illustrate, one participant described her ability to more fully express herself by being on her own.

And it helps that I'm like on my own. It helps that you know my family like right now we're in two different cities, so I feel like every day, more and more. I'm learning to express like my gender identity I'm learning to express my sexuality, whereas like at home I had to like to suppress that at home. I couldn't be this or that I had to be Muslim.

(Participant 9)

Being at home meant one had to be “Muslim,” existing within the larger societal discourse that one cannot be both Muslim and have same-sex attraction. Moving away from home allowed for this participant to explore her intersecting identities of being both Muslim and wanting to explore

her gender identity and sexuality. Further, once this participant distanced herself from her family's discursive practice, she was able to more fully express her gender identity and sexuality.

Colonial and orientalist discourses dictate a Muslim identity as diametrically opposed to Western or queer identity. Additionally, homophobia within her household led to her desire to move away from family in order to express herself more publicly. By existing in the "third space" (Bhabha, 1994) as a queer Muslim, she is ultimately queering what being a Muslim means, and further, queering what being queer means through her positionality as a Muslim. By not adhering to limiting discourses by either remaining at home as a Muslim performing heteronormativity or disavowing her Muslim identity outside of the home, she pushes back and creates new meanings. She is queering the Eastern/Western binary (Said, 1978) and enacting queerness by disrupting taken for granted truths and pushing against social norms (Sedgwick, 1990). This is the "third space" (Bhabha, 1994) in that she is produced by a multitude of discourses and creates her own hybridity of Muslim and queer positionalities. Ultimately, her production of new knowledge and way of being is a threat to colonial and gendered binaries.

For other participants, they believed their current dependence upon family limited their ability to be out, and believed this might change once they achieved independence. One participant stated:

Right now I don't think it's the right time to come out to them or any of them. Maybe my mom but, um like the worry. That's something that I worry about, probably would be that my parents would blame it on themselves that they shouldn't have moved to America in the first place and like, I've been brainwashed or something. So, and that they would blame themselves would also make me feel guilty. That yeah it's kind of, I shouldn't have

to come out to them in first place but right now I see it coming. Like, I'm not gonna come out unless I'm independent. (Participant 8)

This participant described her worry of her parents' reaction to her coming out and the larger discourse of being born and raised in the U.S. can mean a same-sex attracted Muslim has been negatively influenced by Western culture. Within this quote, there is discussion of potential generational differences between immigrant parents and U.S. raised children, as well as the idea that same-sex attraction is a Western "problem" rather than a positionality that is present globally. The discourse of generational differences between immigrant parents and their Western raised children is an additional consideration that influences participants' gender identity expression. Their gender or sexuality is contextualized within the idea that Western and Eastern values clash with one another, and that by choosing "Western" values they are thereby choosing to distance themselves from family and community. This is a reflection of Said's (1978) discussion of how colonialism produces the West and East as incompatible and inherently different. Participant's families are also entangled with this discourse and believe that their children may be embracing Western ideals, ones that stand in opposition to their religion and collectivistic values.

Importantly, participants discussed the need for financial independence and safety before coming out to family members. Participants framed this discourse within the context of physical and emotional safety, with worry of experiencing harm if they were to come out to family members while living at home.

Experiences within the Muslim community and the LGBTQ+ community

This discourse pertains to U.S. Muslims' experiences both within the Muslim community and in LGBTQ+ spaces. Participants' narratives showcase a range of experiences, including

various experiences of exclusion and acceptance. This discourse is organized into four sub-sections: experiences within the Muslim community, experiences within the LGBTQ+ community, too Muslim for the Gays, too Gay for the Muslims, and Hijabi women-identified experiences within LGBTQ+ spaces.

Experiences Within the Muslim Community

Overall, participants largely discussed their lack of experiences disclosing their sexuality to other Muslims. Many participants were nervous, uncertain, or afraid to disclose their sexuality to Muslim peers. Some wondered how or if they would be accepted, which resulted in avoiding the topic or distancing themselves from Muslim friends and community. Throughout the book *Homosexuality in Islam: Critical Reflection on Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims*, Kugle (2010) discusses homophobia within the Muslim community and the prevalence of homophobic interpretations of Islamic texts. Because it is normative for Muslim communities to learn these traditional interpretations, participants expressed concern for their inability to be authentic with friends and community.

For example, one participant described her uncertainty as to whether she would be accepted by her Muslim peers:

I didn't know how to interact with the Muslim girls. And then once I started to come into my queerness it was like, I don't know if I can be their friend because I don't know if they would accept me kind of thing. So I've always sort of had non-Muslim friends.

(Participant 5)

Because mainstream Islamic discourses constrain sexual orientation to heterosexuality, (Kugle, 2010) this participant was unsure if her Muslim counterparts would be accepting of her queer identity. This also pulls in a discursive practice of labeling Muslims as non-accepting of varying

sexual orientations. While a valid consideration of who to come out to and who would be accepting, it reflects larger discourses of placing Muslims within a colonial binary of Eastern/Western; unaccepting/accepting (Said, 1978).

Said (1978) argues that an output of orientalism is for Easterners to view themselves through the lens of colonialism. Colonialism produced Muslims to be “backwards,” while at the same time importing homophobia into Muslim discourses. Kugle (2010) notes that the Quran does not explicitly discuss sexual minorities as acting against God’s will. In fact, he states that Quranic verses allude to same-sex attraction, as evidenced by the phrase “men who are not in need of women.” Kugle (2010) argues this phrase is used descriptively rather than using condemnation of men who are not interested in women. Colonial knowledges were imparted onto Muslim religion and culture over time, eventually producing the heterosexual/homosexual binary and homophobic interpretations of Islamic texts (Ahmadi, 2012). Queer Muslims are caught in this entanglement of discourses and history, which influence why participants feel uneasy in disclosing their sexuality to Muslim community members.

Experiences within the LGBTQ+ Community

Additionally, participants described their mixed experiences within the larger LGBTQ+ community. Some participants discussed feeling comfortable within LGBTQ+ spaces, noting that queer affirming spaces felt more accepting than Muslim spaces. For example, one participant shared:

Overall, it's been very affirming. And it's been nice to have a space where I know that I'm accepted, because honestly, I feel like queer spaces are pretty much always accepting of Muslims and you know, not always, but at least thankfully the spaces that I've been in are very accepting of like Muslims or religious people or you know ethnic and racial

minorities like they're very accepting, but the same does not apply to the Muslim communities, at least the Muslim communities that I've been in. You know they're not very accepting of like you know, individual differences or things like that. (Participant 2)

Within this quote, she describes her overall positive experiences in LGBTQ+ spaces compared to Muslim settings. Overall, queer settings are more affirming of differences than Muslim settings, a sentiment shared by several participants. Kugle (2010) states that conservative interpretations of Islamic texts include homophobic positionalities, therefore the Muslim community at large is influenced by these teachings, which impacts queer Muslims experiences within Muslim settings.

While some participants described a sense of comfort within LGBTQ+ spaces, other participants experienced a lack of understanding or acceptance at times within LGBTQ+ spaces or friends. For example, one participant noted he feels like an outsider within the gay community.

Within the gay community that's kind of felt a bit of an outsider... I think there was a high value on being white and I never, I'm obviously not white. And so I never felt like I was as valued or as attractive or you know as sought out as somebody who is white. And so I never really felt like I belonged in (city name) like within the gay community over there.

(Participant 3)

The colonial discourse of “us vs. them” is practiced within his quote, as well as the colonial discourse of valuing whiteness. The participant is produced by these discourses as an outsider, and seemingly becomes one by never “belonging.” This discursive practice constructs him as a devalued member within the gay community. Said (1978) connotes this outsider status through

his discussion of the orientalist “Eastern vs. Western” dichotomy. This participant is caught in this binary by feeling as an outsider in Western gay spaces.

Within these spaces, participants described facing misconceptions that one can be both Muslim and have same sex attraction. This misconception highlights the larger discourse that contains Muslims as separate from having same-sex attraction, and one that states Muslims are not accepting of heterosexuality. This also indicates a Western discourse of limiting Muslims to stereotypes of what a Muslim looks like and behaves like, in other words, that a Muslim cannot hold an LGB+ identity.

Too Muslim for the Gays, Too Gay for the Muslims

A general experience shared amongst some participants was feeling torn between the two communities. Participants shared feeling as though they were “too Muslim for the gays and too gay for the Muslims.” To illustrate, one participant described feeling as though she has to pick one identity over the other:

I don't feel 100% accepted in the Muslim community for being gay, and I don't feel 100% accepted in the gay community or in the queer community for being Muslim like when I'm around my queer friends like religion is never brought up. Me being Muslim is like never brought up because I feel like both sides want me to pick an identity. Like I feel like I can't be both like one side is telling me you need to be this. The other side is telling me you need to be this, but at the same time, I feel like my queer friends, my queer and trans friends they're, really... They accept the fact that I'm Muslim but they're kind of confused. I remember one time one of my friends, she identified as a lesbian. She asked me how does that work? Like how are you Muslim and gay? I'm like I, I don't know, I just am, and she just kept on like questioning me. She kept on asking if my parents accept

me. If my mosque is accepting and it's just, I feel like I'm torn between both communities. (Participant 9)

Overall, participants reflect feeling stuck between queer binaries such as heterosexual vs. homosexual (Sedgwick, 1990) and colonial binaries of Eastern vs. Western (Said, 1978). The above participant quote showcases this experience through feeling “torn” between communities. The messaging participants receive is that they cannot be both Muslim and Queer from the separate communities, their existence in inhabiting their intersecting positionalities is consistently questioned.

The quote exemplifies a discursive practice of disrupting larger discourses that otherwise tell her she cannot be both gay and Muslim. She engages in creating power and knowledge by stating “I don’t know, I just am” as a response to creating tension with the assertion that her way of being is confusing. Again, she describes her discursive power struggle to create her way of being in friction with the discourse “one cannot be both gay and Muslim.” This quote showcases the power struggle same-sex attracted U.S. Muslims engage with, the idea that they cannot function within both communities. Larger discourses constrict same-sex attracted Muslims to an “insider-outsider” placement; they are expected to be unable to function fully within either community, thus producing them to exist in a marginal, in-between “third space” (Bhabha, 1994). By then engaging with both communities, U.S. Muslims engage in power relations by disrupting the discourses that try to contain them to the margin.

Hijabi-Women Experiences in LGBTQ+ Spaces

An important distinction within participant experiences is that of Muslim women who wear the hijab, or headdress. By wearing the hijab, they occupy a visible Muslim identity. Some hijabi participants discussed their experiences within queer spaces as frustrating, or stated they

avoided queer spaces because of their discomfort with the assumptions made about them due to their Muslim appearance. For example, when discussing her experience in queer spaces, one hijabi participant stated:

It was frustrating because I would want to scream like ‘hey I’m one of you,’ but...if you look at someone with a hijab on you would never assume that... So if I’m in those spaces. I tried to wear like a rainbow pin or something like that, that’s like a symbol to someone that kind of negates the symbol that’s on my head, telling them one thing about me.

(Participant 5)

The colonial discourse of “us vs. them/Eastern vs. Western” (Said, 1978) is noted within this participant’s quote. She is constructed as an other, one who cannot possibly have same-sex attraction, and potentially one who is actively placed in opposition to queerness by the “symbol” on her head. This participant engages with discursive power relations by wearing a rainbow pin, emphasizing that a person can be both Muslim and at the very least affirming of LGBTQ+ identity if not holding one herself. Further, this quote emphasizes the essentialism embedded within colonial discourses. When this participant wore a hijab in queer spaces, she was essentialized to holding one identity, that of a Muslim woman who covered her hair, rather than being seen as a multidimensional being. Sedgwick (1990) discusses the performance of queerness as limiting, and remaining in a box (i.e. the hetero/homosexual binary). The hetero/homosexual binary is performed even in queer spaces, as discussed by queer Muslim hijabi women who attempt to enter these spaces as “others.” Hijabi participants enact their queerness by disrupting queer spaces that otherwise limit a queer performance to one that is not visibly Muslim. These participants engage in creating power and knowledge through the discursive practice of expressing both their Muslim and queer identities.

Within this discourse, “Experiences in the Muslim community and the LGBTQ+ community,” participants describe the ways they navigate and push up against larger societal discourses. Namely, that a person cannot be both Muslim and have same-sex attraction, that one has to choose sides, and that one might not be fully either identity by claiming both. This is an enactment of power and identity creation by participants to subvert larger narratives that others have created for them.

This study’s participants assert their agency in occupying a discursive space in being both Muslim and LGBTQ+, which is ultimately queer in that they are subverting and disrupting the discourse that one cannot hold both identities. The participants are queering what it means to be Muslim, and what it means to be queer. The assertion here is that U.S. Muslims can also have same-sex attraction and create their own narrative, one that is explained further in the following section.

Identity Negotiation

All participants discussed their processes of negotiating their identities. This process was framed in three ways: the process of identity reconciliation, sense of belonging, and finding community.

Process of Identity Reconciliation

The negotiation of intersecting identities was described as an ongoing process by participants, oftentimes filled with uncertainty, tension, and isolation. Participants discussed the ways in which they navigated the process of reconciling and integrating their cultural, religious, racial, sexual, and gender identities. This included a discussion of the ongoing process of self-acceptance, uncertainty if one identifies as Muslim, an understanding that it is possible to create an individual approach to Islam, and believing that even if being gay is a sin, that they were still

a good person while on Earth. A quote that encapsulates this identity reconciliation process is below:

Once I started, you know, dealing with my own sexuality that my perspective like suddenly changed and for the longest time I couldn't reconcile the two and I resented Islam and religion so much like I hated the fact that I was born Muslim. I hated the family that I was born into like I was so like, disenchanted by the religion where I just felt like all it did was like, bring me more hardship in life because, one, because of my sexuality, but two because my parents were always very controlling and things like that, and they used religion to justify a lot of things that they did. And so I resented religion for the longest time. And then I left Islam completely and was just like I'm not Muslim anymore. Like I don't want to deal with that and then eventually in the past, like year or so I started to feel like why can't it be both? Because I started to see queer Muslims who embrace both parts of their identity and didn't feel like they clash with each other. And so for a while I just had a very simplistic view of it, where I just viewed it as like Allah created me this way. There's nothing that I can do to control it and I doubt that God would have created me just to be lonely and sad and miserable for my entire life. Like I kind of had that struggle where I was like did God create me just to be lonely and celibate in this life? But then, if I act on it, I can be happy in this life. But then I'll suffer in hell for eternity. I had a lot of dissonance there. I was like I just don't understand what I'm supposed to do. I just had a lot of trouble reconciling the two and then eventually I had this...view where I was just like, well, Allah created me this way, I wouldn't create me this way just for me to be a sin. (Participant 2)

An impactful moment of this participant's journey of identity reconciliation includes seeing other queer Muslims. Recognizing that queer Muslims exist and that one can be both queer and Muslim disrupted her discursive practice and knowledge of what it means to be a Muslim with same-sex attraction. Thus creating new knowledge that she, like the other queer Muslims, can also hold both identities together. Further, her discursive practice expanded to include the idea that "Allah created me this way," thereby creating power in her identity rather than thinking of herself as sinful.

Through their identity reconciliation, participants are subverting and questioning taken-for-granted universal truths/discourses that limit identity construction into hetero vs. homosexual and Eastern vs. Western binaries. This process of identity negotiation pulls in Said's (1978) critique of colonialism labeling the East as in opposition to Western beliefs and identities. As noted in the above participant's quote, she believed her positionalities as queer and as Muslim were incompatible. This belief is what Said (1978) would state is a colonial and Western attempt to limit or control the East. Further, in asserting her agency in claiming both identities in unison and allowing them to inform one another, this participant challenges binaries that work to dominate her way of being. Sedgwick (1990) describes the performativity of the closet, meaning that sexuality is not limited to being in or out of the metaphorical closet. Participants are queer throughout their identity negotiation process, and do not need to perform coming out in order to claim both identities as valid.

Sense of Belonging

Several participants described their sense of lack of belonging, in large part due to their various intersecting identities. These feelings of lack of belonging seem to be countered by

finding community, which is covered in the next section. For example, one participant shared her difficulty with figuring out her identity due to the multifaceted nature of who she is:

I don't have a sense of belonging...I am still figuring out my identity... I'm still figuring out what my identity is. You know this intersectionality of Blackness Africanist queerness Muslimness, like all of that... So what happens when you're in so many boxes in so many different crazy Venn diagrams, five circles put together and I'm this one baby triangle right in the middle. And it's just like what is that even called? I haven't been able to do that. Because I don't have a label for it but do I even need to be labeled? So I don't really know how to answer that question because this is what I'm working through right now as an adult, like I'm almost 30 and I'm figuring out my identity. (Participant 4)

Sense of belonging is difficult to achieve as participants feel the push and pull of gendered, racial, and oriental binaries. This quote portrays her responses to and struggles with relations of power that construct her multiple subjectivities. She is creating the liminal in between/within “third space” amongst power relations and discursive fields by wondering if her positionality requires a label, or if there is even a label in current existence to define her (Bhabha, 1994). She describes herself as being “in the middle” of the various discourses surrounding her, feeling the tension of what it means to create knowledge and power as she negotiates her identity. The “third space” blurs binaries and categorical distinctions as she questions the colonial “East vs. West” and “homosexual vs. heterosexual” discourse that try to compartmentalize her identities. Her centrality within the margins acts as a creative space to produce new positionalities, knowledges, expressions, and understandings. While it is a confusing place to question “who am I,” it is also a productive place of creation. She is discursively creating herself as a queer Muslim.

This sense of belonging tension is expressed further by another participant who noted her inability to feel fully like herself in any of the spaces she occupies. To illustrate, she states:

I think that's kind of tricky because I belong in different spaces differently, but I don't feel like I have a space that I completely belong to if that makes sense. So like I'm super comfortable in my identity as an American, and as a queer person with my non-Muslim friends and then I'm comfortable with my identity as an Iraqi and as a Muslim in Muslim spaces and with my family, but I don't really have a space where I can like be completely both of those things. So that's kind of frustrating and I feel like I don't really know where to look for that. (Participant 5)

Again, the feeling of a lack of sense of belonging informs this participant's subjectivity as a queer Muslima. Her discursive practice of negotiating and developing her identity includes her sense of lack of belongingness as she navigates different spaces. This discussion highlights Bhabha's (1994) emphasis on postcolonial creation of the liminal, marginal third space; a space in which participants create their own culture and sense of self as influenced by the colonial, racial, and gendered discourses around them. This is a metaphorical space where the participant's discourses and positionalities interact to build new or hybrid ways of being.

Finding Community

Typically, participants experienced being the "only one" like them in their general social groups. Finding community either in person or online was described as affirming and validating, and a positive force when working towards identity integration. Typically, participants connected with community via online spaces such as Instagram or Reddit. However, some participants discussed finding in-person community either formally through organized events or informally

through their friend group. To elucidate this experience, one participant discussed her first time finding an online community:

When I went on the LGBT Muslim subreddit. This was like one of my first experiences being a part of an LGBT Muslim community...I straight up cried because I was like oh my God...this is crazy...there's only what 1,500 people. It's such a small group. But it still just made me so happy to know that there are other people like me out there.

(Participant 1)

By finding a community of fellow LGBTQ+ Muslims, participants create a shared “third space” together (Bhabha, 1994). In this communal “third space” of LGBTQ+ Muslims, participants are able to expand power and knowledge by co-constructing community in relation to discourses that otherwise deny this community’s existence. In other words, by creating community, participants challenge the Eastern vs. Western (Said, 1978) and heterosexual vs. homosexual (Sedgwick, 1990) binaries that act to limit their shared positionalities.

LGBQ+ Muslim Identity as Source of Pride and Resistance

A discourse of pride and resistance was shared when participants described their intersecting identities. Some participants stated they were not “haram” or forbidden for being Muslim and having same sex attraction and noted a desired public acknowledgment that LGBTQ+ Muslims exist. In the face of Islamophobia, homophobia, and racism, it can be argued that maintaining pride within one’s LGBTQ+ Muslim identity is a discursive practice of subversive resistance. For example, one participant discussed her pride in her identity:

(I have been) doing my own research and now I'm totally fine with it. I'm proud to be a bisexual Muslim woman and I don't have any problems (with it)...I don't think God makes mistakes. So, I was born this way. (Participant 8)

This participant states her resiliency, resistance, and pride in affirming she was “born this way.” The idea of agency is crucial in postcolonial queer theory when discussing “subaltern” subjects (Spivak, 1988). For participants to assert their existence is to push against colonial and homophobic powers. Queer Muslims are produced by colonial and homophobic discourses, which state they are non-existent, or that they are living in opposition to what is expected of them. Thus, by stating they are proud of their positionalities, they assert their agency in creating their own discourse of power and acceptance. Further, when asserting their resistance to colonial and homophobic discourses, participants engage in disrupting social norms, which reinforces their queer positionalities (Sedgwick, 1990).

Another participant stated that despite struggles of acceptance from her family, she still accepts herself as a same-sex attracted Muslim. She states:

I just feel strong when I'm around people that accept me and even though I've had like really bad experiences with my family. I still feel that like nonetheless like I can't be changed. There's a reason I'm this way and I feel strong in that belief... I'm sorry but I see nothing wrong with how I am... I don't think being gay is haram, I don't think being trans is haram. (Participant 9)

Similarly to the aforementioned quote, this participant asserts her agency through resistance to colonial and homophobic discourses and social norms. Within the discursive practice of stating pride in their intersecting identities, participants engage in the deployment of power by constructing their identities as valid and by asserting their positionalities. The participants discursively produce themselves through their statements of agency and pride in their existence. This can be seen as a power relation with an “us vs. them/East vs. West” discourse. By asserting their existence in light of colonial discourses, participants create new ways of being and create

power in the liminal, in between/within space (Bhabha, 1994). Ultimately, this discourse takes a postcolonial queer stance through its power, agency, and queering, or challenging, the narrative.

Summary of Findings

The current study located six main discourses, each constituted by participants' discursive practices and subjectivities. These discourses include: (1) critical interpretation of religious texts, (2) levels of outness, (3) financial independence and space from family, (4) experiences within the Muslim community and the LGBTQ+ community, (5) identity negotiation, and (6) LGBTQ+ Muslim identity as source of pride and resistance. Within these discourses, participants showcase both the disruption and creation of power, and the movement forward of their own knowledges. They create/disrupt/produce/and deploy power and knowledge of their intersecting identities within the liminal space, the threshold of navigating and practicing their identities. Additionally, this liminal space is an in between/within space, wherein participants are caught in entanglements of a multitude of discourses, and in a creative space to produce themselves through their own discursive practices. In the next chapter I will discuss my interpretation of the discourses and relate them to theory and previous research. I will then highlight implications and future directions to the findings.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

In this study, I explored how Muslims in the United States with same-sex or same-gender attraction negotiate their intersecting identities within the sociopolitical context of racism, Islamophobia, and queerphobia. Further, this study is located within postcolonial queer theory, which allowed me to witness participant's narratives in relation to colonial discourses which "other" Muslims and deny queer Muslim existence. Through participant interviews, I was able to hear the discourses through which they produce, deploy, and construct their identities. Further, I was able to contextualize larger power structures which exist in relationship with the discourses participants produced, such as colonialism, sexism, and queerphobia. Lastly, I examined participant interviews through six overarching discourses: (1) critical interpretation of religious texts, (2) levels of outness, (3) financial independence and space from family, (4) experiences within the Muslim community and the LGBTQ+ community, (5) identity negotiation, and (6) LGBTQ+ Muslim identity as source of pride and resistance.

The previous chapter described the findings of the experiences of U.S. Muslims with same sex attraction. In this chapter, I will discuss: (a) the findings as they relate to the research questions, previous literature, and theory. Following that, I will share the limitations of this study. Lastly, I will discuss the implications for practice and future research.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of the present study was to elucidate the experiences of U.S. Muslims with same sex attraction in order to add to the current literature of Muslims, LGBTQ+ experiences, and the intersections of race, culture, spirituality, and sexuality. Additionally, an aim of the study was to create tension within dominant discourses surrounding the intersection of these identities and provide an increased understanding of this population for mental health professionals.

The guiding questions of this study include: (1) How do LGBTQ+ Muslims negotiate their intersecting identities? (2) What are experiences with discrimination or acceptance in and out of the Muslim community? (3) How do LGBTQ+ Muslims approach the topic of “coming out” to their communities? and (4) What do mental health professionals need to know when working with this population? I will present my findings in the form of the four outlined research questions.

How do LGBTQ+ Muslims negotiate their intersecting identities?

Participants in the study identified several ways they negotiate their intersecting identities. Main discourses captured within this question are (1) critical consumption of religious texts, (2) identity negotiation and its sub-discourses, and (3) LGBTQ+ Muslim identity as source of pride and resistance.

One way same-sex attracted U.S. Muslims understand their intersecting identities is through a critical interpretation of religious texts. Participants described this process through reading the Quran for themselves, distancing culture from the text, using a feminist and or queer framework when reading religious text, and through creating an inclusive and affirming understanding of God.

This finding mirrors existing research with LGBTQ+ Muslims who engaged in a process of reinterpreting religious texts to be inclusive and affirming of their sexual orientations (Baderoon, 2015; Minwalla, 2005; Shah, 2016). Importantly, while there are several supporting studies of this finding, the majority of them are located outside of the United States. Thus, this finding helps illuminate the process of identity exploration and negotiation specific to U.S. Muslims with same-sex attraction.

Further, participants of this study discussed identity negotiation through feelings of

confusion, isolation, and self-doubt. They also described creating their own approach to the religion, navigating a sense of belonging, and finding community. Similar findings are seen in other literature, for example, Khan (2010) notes the process of same-sex attracted U.S. Muslims in finding an online community and finding a sense of belonging within those communities or with supportive friends and family. Yip (2008) also discusses British LGBTQ+ Muslims processes of creating their own approach to religion and in finding and creating online community.

Regarding gender identity, Muslim culture and spaces are typically segregated by gender as women are usually in community together in their own space, and men share a separate space together (Chowdhury, 1993). The experience of transgressing this gender boundary for transgender or gender non-conforming Muslims was not present within the participants of this study. However, several participants reflected upon wanting to explore their gender identity. One participant in particular discussed her hesitancy in moving towards a transgender or gender non-conforming identity, as that would mean losing access to spaces solely for women. No longer identifying as a woman would preclude her from spaces and events she enjoyed with the women-identified members of her family.

Additionally, participants described their identity from a location of resistance and pride. Notably, in the face of homophobia, racism, sexism, and marginalization, participants found strength and pride in their identities. This stance was found amongst participants with various levels of outness, which seemingly stands in contradiction to Western notions of viewing marginalized Muslims as oppressed and in need of saving (Said, 1978). In a study of British LGBTQ+ Muslims, Shannahan (2009) found that same-sex attracted Muslims believed their sexuality was a part of Allah's plan for their lives, and that they were made as they were by

Allah. This finding matches the narratives of participants in this study, as they stated they believed Allah made them this way and did not view their sexuality as haram.

Gloria Anzaldúa (1987/2012) wrote of existence in the Borderlands. Participants can be seen through a postcolonial queer framework of occupying the in-between/marginal/borderland space. Anzaldúa writes:

Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an 'alien' element. There is an exhilaration in being a participant in the further evolution of humankind, in being 'worked' on...And yes, the 'alien' element has become familiar-never comfortable, not with society's clamor to uphold the old, to rejoin the flock, to go with the herd. No, not comfortable but home (Anzaldúa, 1987/2012, p.19).

I think of the participants of this study when reading this quote, and when imagining existence in the Borderlands. Queer Muslims exist in the Borderlands, or what Bhabha (1994) similarly calls the "third space." This is a space of creation and production. Here, participants are able to bend and push the discourses that produce them (i.e. colonialism, queerphobia) and produce new meanings and new culture. What Anzaldúa says about existing in the Borderlands and those who "swim in a new element" and participate in the "further evolution of mankind" can be extended to queer Muslims. Within the Borderland, participants produce new ways of being and partake in the evolution of theory and of mankind. The new creation of culture and knowledge is reminiscent of Gayatri Spivak's (1990) notion of marginality, of the colonial binary of center/margin, and the reconceptualization of the margin as the center. The participants of this study exist in this space, and are in discursive practices to create and construct their identities from the Borderlands, and from the margins, thus making the margin the center.

What are experiences with discrimination or acceptance in and out of the Muslim community?

I answered this research question through a main discourse of experiences within the Muslim and LGBTQ+ community. Participants described experiencing a fear of judgment and lack of acceptance from the Muslim community. This was further explained by participants feeling as though they could not be their full authentic self with other Muslims, ranging from friends, to family, to the larger community. This fear of lack of acceptance can be placed in context of receiving messages through family and the Masjid that being gay is a sin.

When discussing experiences in LGBTQ+ spaces, some participants described the LGBTQ+ community as accepting, even at times more accepting than the Muslim community. However, other participants discussed a feeling of disconnection in the queer community. Within the LGBTQ+ community, participants described a sense of “otherness” and encountering misconceptions. A common misconception includes the confusion surrounding a Muslim’s presence in a queer-identified space. The question of “how can you be both?” was brought up to multiple participants when engaging with others in queer spaces. Several participants discussed the experience of feeling torn between the two communities, encompassed in the quote “I don’t feel 100% accepted in the Muslim community for being gay, and I don’t feel 100% accepted in the gay community for being Muslim.”

This misconception is further expressed through gendered experiences of Muslim women who cover their hair. Women identified participants who wore the hijab and were thus positioned in a visibly Muslim appearance discussed their discomfort in queer spaces and the lack of understanding or acceptance they experienced. Women-identified participants named the experience of assumptions made about their social or political beliefs (i.e. being homophobic)

when in queer spaces, or generally feeling as somewhat of an outcast in these spaces by lack of engagement of non-Muslims.

Minwalla et al. (2005) found that gay Muslim men discussed the role of color dynamics within the predominately white gay spaces and in their dating experiences. This is similar to participants in this study who discussed a sense of “otherness” at times within queer spaces and discussed the importance of finding community they can feel fully connected to, such as queer Muslim spaces. Yip (2008) describes lesbian and bisexual Muslim women’s experiences with a lack of sense of belonging in Muslim spaces due to homophobia and the assertion that same-sex attraction or actions are immoral. This is a difficult paradox for Muslims who seek community in the face of Islamophobia and racism, and is an experience that is mirrored in this study.

Identity for same-sex attracted Muslims is contained within larger societal discourses of colonialism, sexism, racism, and queerphobia. Participants are caught in an entanglement of discourses which produce them as either a bad Muslim or an unacceptable LGBTQ+ person. Spivak (1988, 1996) critiques the colonial notion that the “subaltern,” or the globally disenfranchised, must speak, must speak in a certain way, or must speak in relation to those who can interpret their conditions. She describes the subaltern to be thought of “not as victims below but agents above” (Spivak, 1996, p.252) when they are in resistance to globalization, colonization, homophobia, and sexism. Participants of this study can be thought of as “agents above” by their creation of new knowledge in the margins/borderlands. Further, through Edward Said’s (1978) concept of “Orientalism,” participants are produced by discourses framing what it means to be an “Oriental.” Of Orientalism, Said states “an assumption had been made that the Orient and everything in it was, if not patently inferior to, then in need of corrective study by the West.” (p. 40-41). Participants are caught in discursive practice within the multitude of

entanglements dictated by how colonialism impacted the East's view of themselves and the impression of homophobia within their cultural discourse, and by how the Western notion of Oriental positionalities are in need of corrective study. Ultimately, participants resist this discursive position by asserting their agency in both Muslim and queer spaces.

How do LGBTQ+ Muslims approach the topic of “coming out” to their communities?

Participants described several ways of negotiating their levels of outness. This research question was answered through the (1) levels of outness and (2) financial independence from family discourses. Findings showed variance in coming out stories and levels of outness; however, participants shared that they are comfortable having a different coming out process compared to normative Western coming out expectations. This is an important distinction as traditional psychological frameworks might view an individual as needing to be out in all aspects of their life in order to be deemed healthy and fully integrated (Boe et al., 2018; McLean, 2007). However, what we learn from LGBTQ+ Muslim participants is that having a different narrative does not equate to being unhealthy or to a lack of personal acceptance of sexual orientation. This can be further framed within the “coming in versus coming out” model. For example, LGBTQ+ Muslims allow people into their sexual orientation and gender identity, especially as it pertains to family and community members, rather than coming out to everyone in their lives. This option invokes choice, which is a trauma-informed, and arguably culturally informed choice when deciding who is allowed knowledge of someone's identities and is important to use when conceptualizing LGBTQ+ Muslims.

Additionally, participants can be thought of as in a discursive act of resistance to the larger Western colonial discourse narrating that an individual must be “out” and must hold their sexuality as a core identity. In the book *Queer Theory, Gender Theory*, Riki Wilchins posits:

It is impossible not to cheer the success of this movement in establishing new rights for gay people in the workplace, marriage, and adoption. At the same time, it's impossible not to question the elevation of private sexuality as the basis for social identity. Is it at all strange to think of oneself *as a Homosexual?* (p. 56).

Wilchins (2004) reflects on the purpose of proclaiming a personal aspect of oneself to a public social identity. This question evokes Sedgwick's (1990) idea of the performance of the closet. In which Sedgwick (1990) describes the limitations of subjecting sexuality to an out vs. closeted binary. By locating sexuality into a public proclamation, those who are not out are deemed to be living in shame, something that the participants of this study dispute through their levels of outness.

It can be thought of as a byproduct of colonialism to dictate who counts as legitimate in their sexuality or gender expression. Historically, sexuality and gender were constructed differently compared to contemporary times. Homosexual acts were common, but the identity of "homosexual" was not a socially constructed positionality (Wilchins, 2004). It was not until the 18th century when the social identity "homosexual" was constructed as offensive and shameful. The gay rights movement worked to counter that narrative and take prideful ownership of the "homosexual" identity. Yet, in doing so, this created an expectation of centering one's sexuality as a core social identity and the belief that one must be "out" or otherwise experience shame in hiding their identity. Participants of this study create tension with this expectation and narrative by their assertion of and comfortability with their varying levels of outness. By not adhering to this standard, participants enact power in their agency to disrupt what is considered normal, healthy, or expected. Participants were clear in their assertion that they can feel comfortable with their sexuality while also not centralizing it or discussing it with friends or family or community.

To illustrate, participants ranged in levels of outness. Some were more “out” than others. Participants ranged from no one knowing about their sexuality, to only discussing their sexuality in online spaces, to only friends and coworkers knowing, to most everyone knowing aside from specific family members, to being completely open with everyone in their lives. This is an important variance for researchers and clinicians to note, as it tells us that U.S. same-sex attracted Muslims are not a monolith and need not be conceptualized as such.

Khan (2010) found that U.S. Muslims are intentional in choosing who to come out to and how they come out (i.e. in person, over the phone), with some Muslims deciding not to come out to family at all. This is a similar finding as in this study, with participants invoking choice in their discussions surrounding sexuality. Minwalla et al. (2005) found that gay Muslim men experienced difficulties with the Western coming out narrative and the Western process of constructing a gay identity. Similarly to participants of this study, there were differences between Eastern and Western conceptualizations of gay identity and a consideration for how coming out would impact the family. Interestingly, Minwalla et al. (2005) found that some of the participants discussed their coming out as impacting their sister’s marriage potential. While this was not mirrored by the male-identified participants in this study, the women-identified participants in a U.S. context might hold more responsibility for family honor than men.

Participants also connected their “coming out” stories to their financial independence from family and creating physical space from family. Attending college or moving out of the family home were noted as pathways to create space to explore and express their sexuality or gender. While participants described varying levels of outness even in living separately from family, it was in this act of creating space from family that allowed them to explore their sense of self more deeply. So, while a U.S. Muslim with same sex attraction might not feel the need to

discuss their sexuality with everyone in their family, they also could benefit from living independently from family in order to express themselves more freely.

Alvi and Zaidi (2019) found that LBGTQ Muslims in Canada experienced difficulties in navigating telling family members of their sexual orientation. Participants of that study included immigrants and native-born people, a difference from this study. They stated their fear of physical harm, or lack of acceptance from family members. They also discussed their difficulties with exploring or expressing their sexuality while living at home. Notably, their 2019 study does not address levels of outness and finding comfortability with varying levels of disclosing sexuality, which stands in contrast to the participants of this study.

What do mental health professionals need to know when working with this population?

Participants described experiencing a multitude of mental health concerns (i.e. anxiety, depression) throughout their lifetimes. While mental health concerns were common amongst participants, it is imperative when working from a postcolonial queer framework to not assume that therapy is needed or always helpful to this population. Several participants described feelings of being misunderstood in their encounters with mental health professionals and discussed their stigma against receiving mental health services, indicating a significant barrier to accessing counseling services. Further, U.S. psychology typically works from an individualistic worldview, which is in contrast to what participants described as meaningful in their levels of outness narratives (Boe et al., 2018). For U.S. Muslims with same-sex attraction, it would potentially be harmful to locate them in a position of individualism or suggesting breaking ties with family members or community.

In order to best address the needs of same-sex attracted U.S. Muslims, it is crucial for clinicians to conduct “self-of-the-therapist” work and be aware of their own biases and

misconceptions regarding this population's positionalities (Boe et al., 2018). Importantly, Clinicians should understand that individuals from this population are not experiencing distress simply because of their subjectivities, but because of the way they are discursively positioned socially and politically. Clinicians should consider the cultural and sociopolitical background of these clients and address larger societal structures within therapy to best understand how they impact the client (Boe et al., 2018). Further, clinicians would benefit from using culturally informed and decolonial interventions and theories when working with this population. While decolonial psychology interventions are still developing, examples of culturally informed approaches are Relational Cultural Theory and Liberation Psychology. Relational Cultural Theory attends to the primacy of relationships in peoples' lives, a core tenet of collectivism, and Liberation Psychology acknowledges systems of oppression and critiques Western individualism (Singh & Moss, 2016; Comas-Diaz & Torres Rivera, 2020). Further, several participants indicated they would feel more comfortable seeing a therapist who was also a Muslim and affirming of same-sex attraction so their experiences could be better understood. Because of the limited amount of mental health professionals who hold these positionalities, this finding highlights the importance of cultural competency for all therapists when working with this population. Specifically, to be a culturally informed therapist when working with this population, one must recognize that pathologizing a queer Muslim's viewpoint on not being out to their family would be harmful. In this study participants clearly articulated they do not need to be out with family or community in order to experience their full queerness. Further, it is crucial to believe a queer Muslim's stance on their comfort level with their sexuality or gender expression, as they may find it healthy to express themselves differently amongst different social settings.

Additionally, clinicians should keep in mind the strength and resiliency of this population. U.S. Muslims with same-sex attraction noted many ways they subvert dominant discourses that negate their existence. Notably, they are creative in finding a shared community, they reclaim religious texts by reinterpreting them from an affirming stance, and they develop ways of being that are congruent with their sexual orientation, culture, and values. It would be a clinical misstep to conceptualize this population as lacking or to view their differences as deficiencies. In fact, research shows the importance of attending to cultural differences from a strengths-based framework and an anti-racist and decolonizing position (Boe et al., 2018). An example of operating from a strengths-based framework would be to emphasize the importance of community for this population. Participants discussed the importance of finding other LGBTQ+ identified Muslims either online or in person. Therefore, highlighting communal connection as a strength would be beneficial for this population. As a clinician, questioning the idea of “coming out of the closet” as a goal for same-sex attracted people is crucial when decolonizing therapeutic interventions with this population.

Mental health clinicians should also note that U.S. Muslims come from collectivistic backgrounds, which influence their desire to maintain family connection and harmony. Therefore, it is important to not impose Western ways of being onto Muslim clients. Moreover, participants might turn to their religion or prayer as coping mechanisms. Mental health professionals should not assume that because a Muslim has same-sex attraction that they might also want to distance themselves from the religion or religious practices. Religion and spirituality could be conceptualized as an individual strength for members of this population in times of psychological or emotional distress.

An important consideration when developing services for same-sex attracted Muslims is to reflect upon the varied needs and positionalities within this community. For example, when asked about creating services for this population, one participant noted the need for clarification of who the services are for, and also the need for multiples types of mental health services. This participant stated he attended a support group for LGBTQ+ Muslims, but was one of few group members who were raised in the United States. Many members of the group were immigrants, who had different experiences and needs. It would be valuable to create a multitude of services to attend to the in-group differences of this population. This would look like creating multiple groups for queer Muslims, groups for immigrants and groups for U.S. raised Muslims. Also, specifying the goal of the group would be helpful. For example, noting if the group is a support group, a process group, or a religiously infused group with discussion of queer interpretations of the Quran. Additionally, thinking of gendered differences would be helpful when creating services as the women-identified participants of this study discussed experiences specific to wearing the hijab or detangling patriarchal Islamic teachings.

This study's findings suggest several considerations for mental health practitioners when working with same-sex attracted U.S. Muslims. First, mental health professionals should consider the role of sense of belonging, or lack thereof, when working with this population. Participants described an inability to feel fully connected to the Muslim community and to the LGBTQ+ community. Further, there are limited in person LGBTQ+ Muslim spaces, which constrains participants access to finding community. Participants also described finding online spaces that were helpful in forming their sense of belonging and easing feelings of isolation.

Secondly, mental health professionals should consider relationships with family and the potential for collectivistic values of family unity when working with this population. It is

imperative to include Eastern frameworks that value family connection and harmony as it might be harmful or culturally uninformed to assume that this population would want to cut ties with family members who are unaccepting of their sexuality.

Thirdly, participants described the importance of intersectionality as a theoretical framework when working with them in clinical settings. Participants noted they are a mixture of positionalities and identities, and would like for mental health professionals to attend to all facets of their identity and to consider how they influence or impact one another.

Fourthly, it is crucial to consider that the “coming out” framework is a Western and colonial framework to locate sexuality and gender expression. Some participants discussed a discomfort with the general notion of “coming out” while others felt it was important for them to be out with everyone. There was variance in the way participants described their “outness” and it is important for mental health professionals to attend to the in group differences that make up this population as well as understanding that members of this population do not have to be “out” to be accepting of themselves.

Finally, it is a consideration for mental health professionals to recognize the potential for cultural stigma against seeking services and that this population might find services to be unhelpful if they are in the “educator” role with their therapist.

Limitations

This study’s findings should be interpreted in the context of its limitations. The findings are restricted to the sample that responded to requests for participation. While the sample is diverse in terms of racial and ethnic background, there are still considerations to be made when thinking of how applicable the implications are to same-sex attracted Muslims. The study did not include converts, who may have different experiences than the sample population. Further, no

participants identified as transgender or gender non-binary, meaning these results may not apply to the experiences of these equally as important groups. This study captures participants' discourses in the moment in time we met. It is important to recognize that identity, discourses, and discursive practices are ever evolving and transforming. Specifically, several participants discussed questioning their gender identity, and this study captures them at a time wherein they might identify one way, and it is important to leave room for a shifting discourse over time.

Additionally, it is important to note that data collection occurred during the context of COVID-19, a time when many people relocated and moved in with family members. This is a consideration when discussing the data of this study, as it may have limited the availability of those who otherwise might have participated. Many participants conducted their interviews from their homes, which is note worthy in light of the finding regarding the need for physical distance from family in order to more fully express their sexuality. Most participants were not around their family during time of interviews, and therefore data can be contextualized as centered around the perspectives of those who felt comfortable in their physical location to conduct interviews.

While I have attempted to conduct, analyze, and report this research in a postcolonial queer and indigenous manner, I am still positioned within colonial discourses myself, which influence the way I engage with the data. For example, even though the term and idea of "coming out" is a colonial and Western ideal, it is still the language that I have to discuss expressing one's sexuality to others. I think of this as a limitation due to the ongoing process of decolonizing my own thinking and understanding of the world and thus, this study.

Implications for Future Research

Research about U.S. Muslims with same-sex attraction in general is lacking. This is noteworthy in context of the American Psychological Association (APA) 2019 strategic plan calling for greater diversity and inclusion with the field of psychology. It is important for researchers to place this population in relationship with discourses that produce their positionalities and experiences. As framed through critical discourse analysis, the lives of same-sex attracted U.S. Muslims are not inherently difficult simply because of the identities they hold, but are impacted by the larger political and societal systems that shape them. Also, it is imperative to consider using postcolonial, non-essentialist, or poststructuralist approaches when conducting research with this population as they may best address non-Western ways of being.

Future research could explore the attitudes and beliefs of mental health professionals when working with same-sex attracted Muslims. To my knowledge, there is no research specific to the assumptions or beliefs of the mental health field when working with this unique population. Further, future research could focus more specifically on what this population finds helpful when seeking therapy services. For example, are there certain theories, techniques, or interventions that best attend to their positionalities while engaging with mental health services. Future research could also look into Muslim family experiences and beliefs of sexuality and gender to potentially highlight helpful understandings for family therapy.

In order to avoid pathologizing this population, future research could focus more extensively on the strengths and resiliency of same-sex attracted Muslims in the U.S. Additionally, this research could inform therapeutic considerations with working clinically with this population. In contrast, and from a postcolonial queer framework, research could explore the ways in which this population experiences health and healing outside of seeking mental health

treatment. This would open up possibilities of understanding decolonial approaches to mental health care. Finally, transgender and gender non-conforming Muslims should be included in future research as this population has even further unique needs and experiences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this dissertation brings attention to the experiences of U.S. Muslims with same-sex or gender attraction, a population who have seldom been discussed within research. Previous chapters described the central questions, methodology, and procedures that took place. The fourth chapter discussed the findings of the current study, and the final chapter discussed implications for practice and future research. The aim of this dissertation is to shed light on the experiences of U.S. same-sex or gender attracted Muslims in order to critique and alter the dominant discourses about this population. By bringing attention to the experiences, entanglements, and complexities of this population, I hope to disrupt larger power structures that produce this population as backwards, others, in need of saving, or simply not existing at all.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval



Institutional Review Board
Division of Research and Innovation
Office of Research Compliance
University of Memphis
315 Admin Bldg
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

May 20, 2020

PI Name: Emily El-Oqlah

Co-Investigators:

Advisor and/or Co-PI: Susan Nordstrom

Submission Type: Initial

Title: Negotiating Identities for Muslim Americans: Gender Identity and Non-Straight Attraction

IRB ID : #PRO-FY2020-382

Expedited Approval: May 19, 2020

The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board, FWA00006815, has reviewed your submission in accordance with all applicable statuses and regulations as well as ethical principles.

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:

1. When the project is finished a completion submission is required
2. Any changes to the approved protocol requires board approval prior to implementation
3. When necessary submit an incident/adverse events for board review
4. Human subjects training is required every 2 years and is to be kept current at citiprogram.org.

For additional questions or concerns please contact us at irb@memphis.edu or 901.6783.2705

Thank you,
James P. Whelan, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair
The University of Memphis.

Appendix B: Informed Consent



Institutional Review Board
315 Administration Bldg.
Memphis, TN 38152-3370
Office: 901.678.2705
Fax: 901.678.2219

Consent for Research Participation

Title	Negotiating Identities for Muslim Americans: Gender Identity and Non-Straight Attraction
Researcher(s)	Emily El-Oqlah, M.A., University of Memphis Susan Nordstrom, Ph.D., University of Memphis Sara K. Bridges, Ph.D., University of Memphis
Researchers Contact Information	aeloglah@memphis.edu

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The box below highlights key information for you to consider when deciding if you want to participate. More detailed information is provided below the box. Please ask the researcher(s) any questions about the study before you make your decision. If you volunteer, you will be one of about 20 people to do so.

Key Information for You to Consider

Voluntary Consent: You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. It is up to you whether you choose to participate or not. There will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate or discontinue participation.

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to explore the experiences of Muslim Americans who identify as LGBTQ+ or have same gender attraction. Through this study, we hope to better understand the experiences and needs of this population in how they navigate their identities. Authors will utilize results to add to the current literature base.

Duration: It is expected that your participation will last 45 minutes to an hour.

Procedures and Activities: You will be asked to complete an interview reflecting on your experiences as an LGBTQ+ Muslim American.

Risk: The risks of the survey and interview are minimal and should cause no more discomfort than you would experience in your everyday life. However, some of the foreseeable risk or discomforts of your participation include recalling previous potentially uncomfortable events based on your identities.

Benefits: Although participation may not benefit you directly, we believe that the information obtained from this study will help us gain a better understanding of this population and their needs. In addition, this knowledge may provide a foundation and support for future studies or interventions related to LGBTQ+ Muslims. Further, a potential benefit to participating may include increased self-awareness of one's experiences, story, and identity.

Alternatives: Participation is voluntary, and the only alternative is not to participate.

Who is conducting this research?

Emily El-Oqlah, a doctoral student in Counseling Psychology at the University of Memphis, Department of Counseling, Educational Psychology and Research is in charge of the study. Her faculty advisors are Dr. Sara K. Bridges and Dr. Susan Nordstrom. There may be other research team members assisting during the study. No research team members have any significant financial interest or conflict related to the research.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose is to add to the literature regarding the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ Muslim Americans. You are being invited to take part in this research study if you are at least 18 years old, identify as Muslim, were raised in the United States, identify as a racial or ethnic minority, and identify as LGBTQ+ or have same gender attraction.

What happens if I agree to participate in this Research?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer questions regarding experiences you have had in relation to your identities as an LGBTQ+ Muslim. This may be completed on any device that has access to internet or over the phone. You may skip any questions that make you feel uncomfortable and can stop at any time. The interviews will be audio recorded for transcription purposes and you also will have the option to review the transcript of your interview for accuracy.

What happens to the information collected for this research?

Information collected for this research will be used to publish/present the results. However, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential. Your name will not be used in any publication or presentation.

How will my privacy and data confidentiality be protected?

We promise to protect your privacy and security of your personal information as best we can.

Data will be collected via a secure online platform (Zoom) or via a phone call, you will decide which format you prefer. No identifying information will be collected. Data will be stored on a password-protected computer and will be kept for up to seven years, after which it will be destroyed. I, or a third party, will transcribe the interview. Both myself and third parties are bound by confidentiality agreements to protect your privacy.

Individuals and the organization that monitor this research may be permitted access to inspect the research records. The individual and organization includes the Institutional Review Board at the University of Memphis.

What other choices do I have beside participating in this research?

Participation is voluntary. If you do not want to be in the study, then you do not have to participate.

What if I want to stop participating in this research?

It is up to you to decide whether you want to volunteer for this study. You may also end your participation at any time simply by discontinuing your completion of the interview. There is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you decided to withdraw your participation. Your decision about participating will not affect your relationship with the researcher(s) or the University of Memphis.

Will it cost me money to take part in this research?

There are no costs associated with participation in this research study

Will I receive any compensation or reward for participating in this research?

You will not be compensated for taking part in this research

Who can answer my question about this research?

You may direct questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study to the investigator, Emily El-Oqlah at aeloglah@memphis.edu or Dr. Susan Nordstrom at snnrdstr@memphis.edu or Dr. Sara K. Bridges at sbridges@memphis.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the Institutional Review Board staff at the University of Memphis at 901-678-2705 or email irb@memphis.edu. We will give you a signed copy of this consent to take with you.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have had the opportunity to consider the information in this document. I have asked any questions needed for me to decide about my participation. I understand that I can ask additional questions through the study.

By signing below, I volunteer to participate in this research. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights. I have been given a copy of this consent document. I understand that if my ability to consent for myself changes, my legal representative or I may be asked to consent again prior to my continued participation.

As described above, you will be audio recorded while performing the activities described above. Audio recording will be used for transcription purposes. Initial the space below if you consent to the use of audio recording as described:

____ I agree to the use of audio recording

Name of Adult Participant

Signature of Adult Participant

Date

Researcher Signature (To be completed at the time of Informed Consent)

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this consent and freely consent to participate.

Name of Research Team

Signature of Research Team Member

Date

Member

Appendix C: Guiding Interview Questions

Potential Interview Questions:

1. What have been your experiences in the LGBTQ community?
2. What have been your experiences in the Muslim community?
3. How did you broach coming out to your family or community?
4. How would you describe your relationship with faith or spirituality?
5. How do you integrate your religion and sexual orientation/gender identity?
6. Where do you feel a sense of belonging?
7. Have you found LGBTQ Muslim spaces? If so, what has that been like?