A Minority within A Minority: British Non-heterosexual Muslims  
(Award Ref. No. R000223530)

Report of Research Activities and Results

Background

This project is an exploratory study of the life circumstances and lived experiences of female and male non-heterosexual Muslims of Asian descent, as a sexual minority within an ethnic minority. Its primary aim is to examine how these individuals, as social actors in late modern society, incorporate gender, sexuality, ethnicity and religion into the construction and management of identity and social relations, against a backdrop of social opprobrium. Through this, it aims to generate a qualitative dataset to fill the gaps in current British research on the Muslim community (which ignores the dimension of sexuality), and the non-heterosexual community (which underplays the religious, particularly non-Christian, dimension).

In sum, the project aims to demonstrate that, in contemporary Britain, personal identities are multi-faceted and fluid; and social relations, such as familial ones, are complex and multi-layered. Attempts to study them should therefore take into serious consideration the specificity of context (social, cultural, religious, sexual, and others).

Objectives

The objectives of the project are to address the management and negotiation of identities and social relations on three levels: the individual, the interpersonal, and the intergroup, as follows:

1. The individual level: to elucidate significant meanings, moments, and processes involved in non-heterosexual Muslims’ self-reflexivity and personal negotiation of identity dissonance, generated by the contradiction between their sexuality and religion, as well as cultural background.

2. The interpersonal level: to examine the strategies non-heterosexual Muslims employ to negotiate and manage boundaries with their families, kin, as well as the broader ethnic and religious community (e.g. the mosque).

3. The intergroup level: to illuminate the strategies non-heterosexual Muslims employ to access support resources and manage boundaries with the predominantly 'white' non-heterosexual community.
**Methods**

*Research Design*

As mentioned, this qualitative study focuses on significant meanings, moments, processes, and life-planning strategies in non-heterosexual Muslims’ lives. It is designed to generate cross-sectional, retrospective, and prospective data about their lived experiences on the above-mentioned levels.

*Sampling Methods*

It is recognised at the outset that a representative sample of such a hidden population is unobtainable (Heaphy et al. 1998). Therefore, a variety of sampling methods that have been successfully employed in my previous research on non-heterosexual Christians (e.g. Yip 2002), among others, were used to recruit the target of 20 men and 20 women. Using the participant’s self-identification in terms of sexual and religious identities, the project used the following primary methods to construct a convenience sample.

(a) Support group networks: Various support groups (almost all based in London), such as *Al-Fatiha UK*, *NAZ Project* and *KISS* were contacted, and expectedly, they responded with cautious enthusiasm. The eventual successful negotiation with the ‘gate-keepers’ led to the distribution of publicity leaflets to their members. These leaflets contain details about the project and the research team, as well as explicit assurance of confidentiality. In the case of *Al-Fatiha UK*, the leaflet was also disseminated through their e-mail distribution list. Potential participants were requested to sign up for the project via telephone, e-mail, or returning the response slip in the post.

(b) The use of non-heterosexual Press: *Gay Times* and *Diva*, the monthly magazines with large national circulation, were willing to carry a small notice about the project.

(c) The use of the research team’s personal networks: The research team, being experienced in research on the non-heterosexual population in various contexts, requested personal contacts to publicise the project through the use of the leaflet and word of mouth.

(d) Snowballing: Participants themselves refer others to the project. This was a particularly effective and important method, as participants, using their own positive experience, encouraged others to take part.
(e) Publicity in non-heterosexual venues and events (e.g. women’s meetings, parties): The Research Fellow attended several of such events, in which she distributed publicity leaflets. This method was effective as potential participants had the face-to-face opportunity to seek further information about the project and the research team, thus enhancing their confidence in both. This was particularly significant in the case of female participants.

All the above sampling methods have succeeded in generating participants, albeit to varying degree. Methods (a) and (b), as expected, were the most successful, generating 67% of the participants.

The Sample

Contrary to initial expectation that men would be disproportionately over-represented in the sample, due to men’s greater access to, and lesser degree of isolation from, the non-heterosexual community, the project successfully recruited 20 women and 22 men. This is evidence of the successful employment of sampling methods, particularly in the case of women.

The majority of the sample (71%) lives in Greater London and the Southeast of England. Some 88% of the participants are of South Asian descent (Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi). The sample is relatively young, with 64% under the age of 30. The majority of the participants are highly educated (52% have at least a first degree), in full-time employment (76%), and have an annual income of at least £13,000 (67%). Since this is a non-random convenience, it is of paramount importance that the findings should not be generalised to the entire non-heterosexual population. Nevertheless, the findings offer illuminating insights into the sample’s life circumstances.

Focused Group Discussion

As planned, two focus group discussions were undertaken, one with five members of the all-women group KISS, and one with five members (two women and three men) of Al-Fatiha UK. Through the respectively two-hour discussions, the research team successfully documented significant issues and concerns the participants identified. The participants also provided positive and useful feedback to the provisional semi-structured interview guide. This played an important role in the revision of the interview guide (which was minor, as there was consistency between the planned research questions and the participants’ feedback).

Brief Questionnaire

This was not one of the planned research tools. However, having considered participants’ feedback in the focus group discussions, the research team decided that a brief questionnaire should be designed to collect the participants’
biographical data (e.g. age and ethnic origin) prior to the interview. This served two purposes: (i) the research team would have had some background knowledge about the participant before the interview, thus enhanced rapport-establishment; (ii) having collected such basic information in advance, the research team could devote all the interview time on the three substantive lines of enquiry. A four-page questionnaire, containing exclusively closed-ended questions, was posted or e-mailed to the participants, who subsequently returned it, prior to the interview.

Semi-structured Interviews

A two-page interview guide was designed, based on the three levels of enquiry of the participants’ lived experiences, as detailed above. These lines of enquiry constituted three distinct sections, with relevant sub-sections. For instance, under the Interpersonal Level section, there were three sub-sections, namely, Family, Kin, Broader ethnic and religious community. All the interviews were taped recorded, with one exception. In this case, the interview was conducted in a prison, and the authorities did not allow the interview to be recorded.

Data Analysis

All the 42 questionnaires were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). This generated a small body of biographical data, which provide an overview of the sample’s characteristics.

All the 42 individual and 2 focus group interviews were transcribed, generating a rich body of meaningful data. Transcribing the interviews proved to be a time-consuming process, as secretarial staff encountered great difficulty in deciphering some participants’ accents and unfamiliar terminology about Islam and the Asian culture. The research team, therefore, spent a substantial amount of time checking the transcripts.

The qualitative data were analysed using a computer-assisted thematic approach. First and foremost, the analysis was informed by the three levels of enquiry which constitute the research questions. In this process, significant moments, meanings, processes and strategies were teased out.

Ethics

The project was conducted in accordance with the British Sociological Association guidelines on ethical research practice. This research is highly sensitive. Therefore, great care was taken throughout the research process, particularly in relation to participants’ anonymity and confidentiality of data. Various strategies were employed to achieve this, and the participants were informed about them prior to their participation. These strategies included: the
restriction of all data handling to the research team; all data are saved in
securely locked files; the removal of or amendment to participants’ personal
details in all forms of data dissemination, including interview summaries for
archival purposes.

Results

Consistent with the project’s objectives, the above-mentioned three themes
frame the data analysis, as well as the presentation of the following preliminary
results.

1. The individual level

(a) Islam and homosexuality

The vast majority of participants acknowledge that non-heterosexuality
(particularly homosexuality) is strictly censured in Islamic religious texts,
namely the Qur’an, the Shari’ah (Islamic law) and the Hadith (Sayings of the
Prophet Muhammad). Nevertheless, only a very small minority is well-informed
about the specific theological and religious arguments. They all acknowledge
the pervasive belief within the Muslim community, that heterosexuality is the
only God-created, and therefore morally acceptable, human sexuality (e.g.
Green and Numrich 2001). This is compounded by the social expectations of
marriage and cultural conformity, which will be elaborated in the next section
(i.e. The interpersonal level).

In spite of the difficulty in reconciling their sexuality to Islam, the participants
in general consider Islam an important aspect of their lives. The following is a
typical narrative.

Islam is a beautiful religion. It is a way of life....... And I feel privileged that
I’ve been born into such a religious Islamic family. I’m happy to be a
Muslim. I am proud to be a Muslim. (Muhammad)

Living in an ethnically and religiously different society, ‘Muslim’ is more than a
religious identity. The participants argue that it is also a political and cultural
marker, signifying their existence and difference, even though some do not
consider themselves as ‘practising’ Muslims. Female participants are often more
adamant about this point compared to male participants.

(b) De-emphasising or relinquishing religious faith

Some participants consider being non-heterosexual and Muslim incompatible,
powerfully illustrated by the following narrative.
From what my understanding is and from what I’m made to believe, I know there will never be a time when it [lesbian sexuality] will be accepted by Islam…. I’m too scared to face up to it, because I know, subconsciously, that homosexuality is very wrong. (Azlina)

While several participants succumb to such dissonance by relinquishing their religious faith (while maintaining the ‘Muslim’ label as a cultural/ethnic marker), others manage by de-emphasising the religious aspect of their identity. Nevertheless, they argue that sexuality is an intrinsic part of their being. It cannot, and should not, be denied expression, despite its seeming contradiction to religious strictures and cultural norms, as Faruq asserts.

I didn’t choose to be like this [being gay], I always knew that this is how I was, this is how I was born… it wasn’t a choice.

Such ‘ontogeneric argument’, that sexuality is created by God and inborn, is widely used by religious non-heterosexuals to justify the acceptability of their sexuality (e.g. Yip 1997). This is buttressed by their belief that God is compassionate and loving to all creatures. Participants in this case rationalise their struggle in religious term, as a ‘test of life’.

(c) Compartmentalisation

Compartmentalisation of their sexuality and religion is a context-specific strategy, effectively used by the majority of participants. Insisting that they want to be honest and happy, but recognise the complexities of social relations (e.g. with family), compartmentalisation proves to be an effective strategy. In most cases, this means either their sexuality or religion takes prominence in a particular context, without leading to the relinquishing of the other, which takes on prominence in a different context. Imran’s account illustrates this.

If I’m going to clubs I am not being religious and religion is at the back of my head. And then if I’m religious, I will not go out clubbing. So that’s the way I deal with it.

(d) Re-framing Islam within a sexuality-affirming paradigm

This strategy is used by a small number of participants who have successfully incorporated their sexuality and religious faith. Besides being skilled in using the ‘ontogeneric argument’, they are in general actively involved in support groups. They are also open about their sexuality in most, if not all, areas of their lives.

There are two dimensions to this strategy. The first dimension involves the critique of traditions, by distinguishing Islamic and cultural practices. The second focuses specifically on the re-interpretation of religious sources that seemingly censure non-heterosexuality.
These participants argue that pure Islam upholds social justice, equality and respect for human diversity. The censure of non-heterosexuality is therefore an outcome of Islam having been tainted by traditional cultural practices that are andocentric, hierarchical and heterosexist. This is particularly relevant to female participants who also have to grapple with issues of gender relations and personal freedom.

Further, they argue that Islam and its written sources are progressive. They assert that current interpretations of Islamic written sources on sexuality and gender relations are andocentric and heterosexist. Non-heterosexuality is constructed as the ‘immoral other’ vis-à-vis normative heterosexuality. Using the rather limited theological resources currently available (e.g. Jamal 2001), these participants argue for a new paradigm that allows the same sources to be re-interpreted in context by progressive agents, informed by current socio-cultural realities. The following narrative demonstrates this effort.

It [the censure of homosexuality] is all based around the story of Lot. I don’t think it [the story] especially [refers to] gay people. It has a lot to do with idolatry and inhospitality…. That story is about violence and abuse, and not about consensual [same-sex] love. (Jamila)

Such a strategy of re-framing Islam has been reported by other research on second- and new-generation Muslims in diaspora, particularly feminist Muslims (e.g. Bose 2000). On the whole, the participants, like many second- and new-generation Muslims, are highly reflexive in their personal identity construction, drawing upon both the Western and their own cultural base patterns (Roald 2001).

2. The interpersonal level

(a) Negotiating space with family members

Three issues are particularly significant in managing familial relations: expectation to marry (as a social and religious duty), maintenance of family honour (izdat), and respect and care for elders (particularly parents). These are significant characteristics of the Muslim and Asian culture (e.g. Norcliffe 1999; Zokael and Phillips 2000), which form the structural framework within which the participants manage information about their sexuality and familial relations.

Participants generally acknowledge that their parents consider it their social and religious duty to ensure their children get married, a significant rite of passage. Expressing a non-heterosexual identity (e.g. not wanting to get married) within such a context is extremely challenging, particularly if they are not sufficiently confident to disclose information about their sexuality to their families. This is illustrated in the following narrative.
In my interpretation, it [Islam] makes marriage compulsory..... You know, meaningful relationships can only happen through marriage... And this whole thing about family unity and community involvement..... I think you have two options. You either pull away from that particular community and faith... or you [get married and] lead a life that is a lie. (Imran)

While some participants take the first option that Imran spells out, others opt for the second. Marriage, ironically, could serve as a cover of convenience for them. Having fulfilled their social and religious duty and distanced themselves from the ‘parental gaze’, they obtain the space to explore their sexuality outside marriage. This subsequently leads to divorce in some cases, as Zafar recounts.

I think it is very important to do what is publicly expected of you. I’m sure that had I chosen to have stayed married and led a double life, it would have been far easier, because as long as your public behaviour is what people want to see, and is above board, then privately what you do isn’t highlighted at all.

Interestingly, some participants also opt for marriage with the hope that their counter-normative sexuality could be ‘cured’. This reflects the immense difficulty they face in reconciling their sexuality and religion, leading to their conformity to cultural norm.

Another significant issue that affects familial relations is a direct outcome of the Muslim and Asian community being a religious and ethnic minority in the British society. Participants report that non-heterosexuality (specifically homosexuality) is widely perceived within the Muslim and Asian community as a ‘western disease’, a natural outcome of the majority society’s secularity, permissiveness and individualism. Non-heterosexuality is therefore constructed as an ‘other’, capable of contaminating their own moral rectitude. Within this context, expressing one’s non-heterosexuality not only reflects the defilement of one’s moral character, but also, symbolically, a defilement of the community’s collective religious and cultural purity. Thus, non-heterosexual Muslims are perceived not only as immoral individuals, but also traitors of their religious and cultural heritage. The following narrative illustrates this.

My mother thinks.... I have two men in my arms all the time, and I’m always having sex in seedy places, and drinking and dancing with nude men...... she thinks it’s a western disease and I am in that cult! I think the majority of Asian mothers or fathers or brothers or sisters think that way. (Jamal)

Not surprisingly, some participants report that their parents pressurise them into marriage even more earnestly when they learn about their children’s sexuality, believing that marriage would serve as a ‘cure’ for such moral and cultural defilement.

(b) Managing relationships with kin
Kinship network (e.g. biradari among Pakistanis) plays an important role in Muslim and Asian community life. The participants recognise the importance of this close-knit kinship network in a religiously and ethnically different society, particularly for the first-generation of economic migrants.

However, they also argue that this network often works as an extension to the 'parental gaze'. Alongside the emphasis on family honour, it significantly complicates social relations. This could affect, for instance, the boundary beyond which information about their sexuality should not exceed, as Deepak argues.

On the individual level, people might accept their son and daughter as lesbian or homosexual. But they would not like the extended family or neighbours to find out about that..... because the social network is like this.... They [kin] would think it [non-heterosexuality] is just another attack on their cultural and ethnic heritage or their identity.

(c) Managing relationships with the broader ethnic and religious community

The participants are quite unanimous that, given the strict censure of non-heterosexuality within their ethnic and religious community, disclosing one's sexuality exacts high social and psychological costs. Even among those who are confident about their sexuality and committed to effect political and social change, there is a recognition that efforts in this respect are in an embryonic stage, and in great need of support (see below for more details).

3. The intergroup level

(a) Participation in and perceptions of the broader non-heterosexual community

The non-heterosexual community is predominantly 'white', secular and male-oriented. This is particularly true in the case of the 'scene' (e.g. entertainment and socialising venues such as pubs and clubs). Under 30% of the sample considers themselves 'active or regular participants' (most are men). Nevertheless, the vast majority has no difficulty in accessing this community, since they generally live in or near urban areas where such facilities concentrate, which also offer much-needed anonymity.

The participants generally acknowledge the importance of this community, as it offers safe places and spaces for network establishment and mutual support. Very few claim that they are not active because of the fear of exposure. Nevertheless, their ethnicity and religion could be potentially inconvenient, or even problematic. The high consumption of alcohol, and to a lesser extent cigarette, often makes such venues unappealing. As Muslim, most find this scenario a hurdle to their access, as Salena argues:
I love dancing, but I hate smoke and I dislike alcohol. As a Muslim, I don’t drink at all. So if I go out I have to compromise, which is a shame.

Thus, some participants become selective in their access patterns. They frequent venues such as cafés, social/political meetings, and bookshops, rather than clubs and pubs. Some are also put off by queries from ‘white’ non-heterosexuals who, under the assumption that Islam and non-heterosexuality are incompatible, are amazed by their sheer presence in such milieus. This generates a sense of rejection. Often, this is perceived as one manifestation of ‘Islamophobia’.

Only a small minority of participants describes this community as ‘racist’. To most, their ethnicity, when it is highlighted, contributes not to racism but ‘exoticism’, namely, being perceived as different. Some argue that this could be an advantage, as ethnic difference could be constructed as attractive and appealing in a predominantly ‘white’ environment. Some, however, also find it patronising and off-putting for being ‘looked at’. This affects negatively their desire for such venues, as Samad states:

"Yeah, they see you as exotic and different. Oh you are a novelty and I'm going to have sex with you tonight because I've never had sex with an Indian before... it is a very colonial kind of attitude. I find it off-putting."

Significantly, female participants are much more likely than their male counterparts to report their unease with the above issues. They are significantly more aware of and articulate about such issues. Some of those who have totally or partially withdrawn from this community also describe it as ‘bitchy’, ‘cruisey’, ‘pretentious’, ‘cold’, ‘competitive’, ‘promiscuous’ and ‘ageist’.

Some participants also report that while they have no concern about accessing facilities within the community, they would not take part in the ‘gay pride’ march. They believe there is no need to ‘flaunt’ their sexuality, which is merely one aspect of their identity. Some participants comment that being ‘gay’ appears to be more important to ‘white’ people compared to Asians. But more importantly, participation in the ‘gay pride’ march undermines the anonymity factor.

(b) Participation in non-heterosexual Muslim support groups

The participants acknowledge that at present there is a distinct scarcity of support groups for non-heterosexual Muslims. Yet, such groups are of paramount importance. Not only do they offer safe places and spaces for mutual support, their specific nature also minimises, if not eradicates, the difficulties posed by their religion and ethnicity, as discussed above.
All but one participant (who was serving a prison sentence) report that they have access to support groups. Despite this, about 30% of the sample is not involved in such groups at all. There are two primary reasons for this. First, these participants claim that they, on the individual or psychological level at least (see above), have reconciled their sexuality to their religion. Their positive identity thus minimises the need for such groups. Second, such participants have established a support base on their positive relationships with friends (both Muslims and non-Muslims), and in some cases, partners, even family members. The following account is typical.

No, I don’t really feel the need. I am quite confident now in my sexuality and faith. I have got a strong network of friends, who have been wonderful. [Her partner] is also a constant source of support, particularly when I had problem with my family. Now my parents are quite OK generally. I feel supported, really. (Serena)

For the majority who do access such support groups (with varying degrees of involvement), their importance is undeniable. Most significantly, such groups offer a safe environment for the exploration of the thorny issue of Islam and non-heterosexuality, which the broader non-heterosexual community rarely offers. This is particularly crucial to participants who have not developed a positive sexual and religious identity. Further, meeting other non-heterosexual Muslims also offers the much-needed opportunity for mutual support. As other research on religious (e.g. Yip 1996) and non-religious (e.g. Weeks et al. 2001) non-heterosexuals demonstrate, this kind of support is crucial to dissident identity construction and management. The following narrative encapsulates this point.

It really is just nice to go somewhere where you could use the words ‘gay’ and ‘Muslim’ in a sentence without someone jumping down on your throat and saying ‘Oh, that’s wrong’ or ‘You’re not a real Muslim’. And it is nice to know that other people have lived it [the struggle]… . Their presence validates me. (Shazia)

Even for participants who are confident about their sexual and religious identity, such support groups offer a platform for socialising. Some participants also argue that their active involvement is underpinned by the altruism to help others in their journey of sexuality and spirituality.

A small number of participants also argue that support groups must take into serious consideration the ethnic and religious specificity of non-heterosexual Muslims. They caution against uncritical adoption of a ‘western’ model in service and support provision.

(c) Views on the non-heterosexual Muslim movement

The vast majority of participants consider ‘movement’ too broad a term to describe the limited support and political network currently available to non-
heterosexual Muslims. To them, such efforts are in an embryonic stage, too insignificant to be taken seriously by the Muslim community, let alone effecting change. In fact, some are rather pessimistic about the plausibility and effectiveness of such efforts, against a dominant counter-current of socio-cultural and religious disapproval of non-heterosexuality. The following narrative illustrates this pessimism:

Homosexuality is simply too big an issue for the Muslim community I think. Any attempts [for change] will be banging their heads against the wall. It’s simply too difficult, too high a price to pay…. I cope by keeping quiet. (Husain)

Nevertheless, the majority of participants recognise the potential of current efforts. They believe that, in the near future, such efforts will establish a well-organised movement. To most, the most important role of this movement is education. Through meaningful engagement with the Muslim community particularly (though not exclusively), such a movement could, among others, challenge the conventional interpretation of religious texts, debate the issue of human sexuality and Islam, and distinguish the essential principles of Islam (e.g. social justice) and un-Islamic cultural practices. These efforts would promote a better understanding of non-heterosexual Muslims, thus dislodge the prejudice against them. The following quote argues this significant point:

I am confident that this movement will grow and be more established. I think the Asian community in Britain is becoming more liberal. We need to equip ourselves well and have dialogue with liberal people in the community. And then the dialogue will spread….. At the end of the day, the main thing is educating people, so they can throw away their prejudice. (Mustafa)

While such a movement would unavoidably take on a political dimension, some participants argue that it is nevertheless important for it to perform its fundamental role of providing support, which is more urgently needed at this current juncture.

Activities

1. Links were made with, and information about the project (and in some cases selective findings) disseminated to, a wide range of user groups and organisations. They include: Al-Fatiha UK, NAZ Project, Al-Fatiha Foundation (USA), Yoesuf Foundation (the Netherlands), the Lesbian and Gay Federation of Germany, Citizenship 21, KISS, City Parochial Foundation, Rainbow Network, Safra Project, the Nottingham Lesbian and Gay Switchboard, and the Consortium of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Voluntary and Community Organisations.

2. Preliminary findings were presented at the following academic and non-academic events:

(b) ‘Negotiating space with family and kin in identity construction: The narratives of non-heterosexual Muslims in the UK’, *Annual Conference of the British Sociological Association*, University of Leicester, 25-27 March 2002.

(c) ‘The importance of respecting clients’ specific needs in service provision’, *Nottingham Lesbian and Gay Switchboard* meeting, Nottingham, 1 May 2002.

(d) ‘Negotiating space with family and relatives’, *Al-Fatiha UK* meeting, London, 19 May 2002.

(e) ‘Patterns of and difficulties in accessing mainstream non-heterosexual community’, *Al-Fatiha UK* meeting, 9 June 2002.


**Outputs**


6. Qualitative dataset, anonymised summaries of 42 in-depth interviews deposited with *Qualidata*. An embargo has been placed on this until 31 December 2004, subject to approval by ESRC.
Impacts

The impact of the project will increase as the findings are disseminated more widely through various channels. Thus far, the project has attracted much interest within both academic and user-group circles.

1. Within the academic circle, there has been much interest in the project’s topic of investigation as well as its sampling and data collection methodology. Feedback in conferences has been mostly positive, and there have been requests for conference papers, and in due course, publications. This is recognition for the project’s importance in (i) studying an unexplored dimension (i.e. sexuality) of the biggest other-faith community in Britain; (ii) broadening the understanding of non-heterosexual identities and lifestyles in contemporary Britain which, at present, is predominantly based on the lived experiences of the ‘white’ majority population; (iii) broadening the understanding of the nature and dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion.

2. Relevant user-groups (e.g. non-heterosexual Muslim support groups, social and voluntary groups) have expressed great interest in the findings. The dissemination of data in England and Germany has met with positive feedback not only from user-group organisers, but also non-heterosexual Muslims themselves. In the case of the Lesbian and Gay Federation of Germany, I have been invited to play an advisory role in their forthcoming research in the same area.

3. The publicity about the project on the internet has generated primarily positive responses. Some individuals (many of whom insisted on anonymity) expressed gratitude for such a project, with the hope that it would generate much-needed information about the plight of this largely hidden minority. Such e-mails were replied to with details about the project as well as a resource list (e.g. websites, support groups) compiled by the project.

Nevertheless, in copying his e-mail to a sizeable group of contacts, an individual accused the project as ‘an insult to Islam’. This individual was eventually pacified after several diplomatic e-mail exchanges. This e-mail encapsulates the pervasive and deeply-held view of homosexuality within the Muslim community, and therefore the immense difficulty non-heterosexual Muslims encounter. This also heightens the importance and impact of this project’s findings as resources for the debate on Islam and non-heterosexuality.

Future Research Priorities

This study is primarily exploratory in nature. However, it is hoped that it serves as an effective platform for broader and more in-depth study on related research, such as the following:
1. A quantitative and qualitative study on non-heterosexual Muslims in Britain, using a more sizeable sample. This study could be of a sociological and social policy orientation, focusing not just on lived experiences, but also social welfare needs (e.g. awareness promotion in school or workplace, housing needs, and support group service provision).

2. A comparative study of non-heterosexuals of Islam and Christian tradition. This study could examine a wide range of prominent issues within the sociology of religion such as secularisation and its relation to religious and sexual identity construction.

References