MORAL DIVERSITY ON THE STRAIGHT PATH:

PERSPECTIVES ON SEX EDUCATION, SEXUALITY AND ROMANCE AMONG

UNMARRIED MUSLIMS IN SINGAPORE AND AUSTRALIA

Lisa Siobhan Irving

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Contents

Summary

This ethnographic study explores attitudes towards sexuality, dating and reproductive health among Muslim young people aged between 18 and 30 in the small city-state of Singapore and the Sydney metropolitan area of New South Wales, Australia. The intention of this research is to document how some unmarried Muslims of various ethnicities, gender identities and sexual orientations position themselves within local Muslim community discourses of piety, shame and reputation while simultaneously negotiating their position within the multicultural societies in which they live. The contrasting Asian and Anglo-dominated Pacific field sites chosen for this research illustrate a rich diversity of everyday Islamic practice. The purpose of examining this diversity is to highlight how some young Muslims go about individualising their faith and personal sense of morality in ways that reflect the wider social and political climate of their environments and challenge discourses that portray Muslims as being inherently more pious than other religious groups. Beyond exploring Muslim piety and religious ethics, which have already been discussed at length by anthropologists, this study instead explores the ways in which young Muslims engage with discourses of what sexual choices are open to a 'good Muslim' and argues that they accept, negotiate or resist those choices on a situational basis that is influenced by a range of factors such as experiences of discrimination and disadvantage. Using data obtained from participant-observation, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, this thesis seeks to meaningfully add to the emerging body of literature on everyday Islam with a unique comparative contribution to understanding the moral diversity that exists both within and between Muslim communities in Sydney and Singapore.

Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself. I have obtained ethical approval for this research from the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee (5201300128).

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Chapter One

Introduction

The 'dry' season in Singapore is not really all that dry. Afternoon thunderstorms are an almost daily occurrence in the tropical city-state and after having lived there for four years, I knew to take shelter as soon as I felt the wind pick up. It was a soon-to-be soaking July afternoon and I was tired after spending the day both conducting interviews and exploring local sexual health clinics and organisations in the city centre. My last appointment had been in a bookshop near Singapore's beautiful Sultan Mosque, so I wandered down to the Kampong Glam Cafe on Bussorah Street to relax, write down some notes, and enjoy an iced milk tea while waiting for the rain to stop.

I was not there for long when my phone buzzed with the familiar trill of a text message. Five friends of mine -- one Chinese Singaporean Muslim and four Malay Singaporean Muslims -- had offered to participate in my research and wanted to know if I was free to meet up that evening to discuss it. Their proposal was to meet at the Golden Mile hawker food centre on Beach Road to get some food and then afterwards go to Chin Yong Fruits Trading in the nearby Geylang neighbourhood to buy some durians and hold a focus group discussion there. At that point in my research in both Sydney and Singapore, I had found

Fig. 1.): A photo taken of me standing on Bussorah Street, in front of Sultan Mosque, in 2014.

semi-structured focus groups to be a rewarding source of data and ideas. Research participants in group discussions would often continue conversations in directions that I could not have foreseen and this refined both my lines of inquiry as well as my understandings of whichever topic was designated for discussion. Even though I was tired, I could not pass this opportunity up, so I agreed. I did not yet know that this particular focus group discussion would shape the course of my research more than any other. My decision to explore the various ways that young Muslims conceptualise intimacy, romantic relationships and sexual propriety began in an unlikely place: a roadside durian stall.

Durian is affectionately known in Singapore as the 'king of fruits' and its impressive size and formidably sharp hexagonal thorns give it a suitably regal appearance. Some varieties of whole durian fruit can weigh up to 4kg and their tough skins make them impossible to open without skilful handling. The green thorny husks typically conceal 5 sections that contain 1-3 creamy pulp covered seeds each. Although durian pulps can sometimes be spotted packaged and cling-wrapped in local western-style supermarkets such as Cold Storage, my local friends preferred to buy durians from the many fruit vendors on roadsides or in open-air hawker centres who either extract and package up the pulps in front of customers or machete a crack in the fruit for them to open themselves later.

Despite their almost emblematic status in Singapore, their pungent odour has resulted in strict controls that forbid eating (or in some cases even possessing) durian in certain places such as in hotel rooms or on public transport. The smell, which has been likened to 'French custard passed through a sewer' (Somsri, 2008: 19) or 'pig shit, turpentine and onions garnished with a dirty gym sock' (Tan, 2014), puts off many people – non-Singaporean and Singaporean alike. Yet, for those who enjoy durian fruit, eating it

together builds intimacy. Indeed, sharing durian with others is almost unavoidably intimate.

When durian is consumed among friends, as I did that evening, it is typically shared with each person plucking a pulp from the fruit with their fingers. At roadside vendors, simple tables and chairs are often provided together with large baskets to collect the seeds and husks. While there are usually some hand-washing facilities nearby, some stalls provide disposable plastic gloves to make eating the fruit less messy yet I have rarely observed people using them. It is more common to simply make use of the tissue boxes that are normally provided for quick clean-ups. Durian pulps are squidgy and it is nearly impossible to resist licking one's fingertips while eating them. The scent of the strong smelling pulps linger on hands and a person's breath long after the fruit has been consumed.   Durian lovers are also familiar with lengthy discussions about varieties, seasons and best places to buy durian. It is an expensive fruit with some varieties like the 'Musang King' selling for SG$20-30/kg, which adds up quickly for a fruit that weighs about 1.5-2kg each. For our focus group discussion, we were able to buy 10 small durians for SG$60 and after much debate I convinced my friends to let me pay for the fruit as a token of my gratitude for their patience with my questions. All these factors, from the experience of smelling the same to

Fig. 2.): Research participants and I at Chin Yong Fruits Trading, Geylang, Singapore. Used with permission of all pictured.

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helping each other open or pay for durians, contribute to the intimacy of eating them together.

I had expected the evening to be filled with as much laughter as serious discussion and I was not disappointed. Although the discussion centred around the potentially awkward topic of sexuality and dating, our familiarity with each other encouraged amusing anecdotes and entertaining stories as well as more sombre, heartfelt reflections on the realities of being a young Singaporean navigating relationships alongside the pressures of family expectations and career demands. Including myself, we were a group of 2 women and 4 men all below the age of 30. No one present was single yet I was the only one who was married at the time. My friends would all define themselves as religious Muslims and no one at the table that evening considered anything that we spoke about or did together to be Islamically inappropriate. We ate together, laughed and talked together, and travelled together in two cars to get from the food court to the durian stall. We took photos together and posted them on Facebook, such as the one above, and no part of the evening caught my attention as being in any way unusual or risqué until I opened the Facebook messenger app on my phone the following day.

A group of 4 female Australian Muslim research participants in Sydney, my second field site, had seen some photos of my evening pop up on their Facebook feeds and had been debating online amongst themselves whether or not to contact me about it. At the time, I was married to a Muslim academic who was preparing to co-supervise the postgraduate study of a well-known conservative Muslim public figure in Sydney. My ex-husband's connections made access to some conservative Muslim circles easier for me, yet it also made me vulnerable to certain expectations I was not prepared to live up to. While I had identified as Muslim since my late adolescence, my religiosity had become over the years more of an interest in spirituality than a commitment to ritual practice and this left me open to criticism from more conservative friends and research participants.

Zikra, who was a 26-year-old Australian Muslim of Lebanese heritage, was part of the private online discussion about my photos and she worried that it was becoming unkind and could potentially damage my reputation. She reached out to me the following morning through Facebook messenger and explained that people understand that I might behave differently because I was not raised Muslim, but the fact that I allowed myself to be tagged in photos depicting me cheerfully mixing with the opposite sex while dressed in a snugly fitting red shirt with no headscarf was disrespectful to my then-husband. She also mentioned that the fact I was pictured eating durians, whose folk reputation as an aphrodisiac she and others were aware of, only made me look worse and that I should remove the photos or at the very least un-tag myself.

Zikra's message was tactful and well-meaning, but it upset me all the same. I was aware that she and a select few others among my Sydney Muslim research participants did not approve of many of my choices, such as not to wear a headscarf, to interview young men alone, or to attend Muslim events in Western Sydney and make the 1.5 hour commute alone back to my Central Coast home late at night. However, I always believed that we could agree to disagree and respect each other's differences as Muslims and as people of differing cultural backgrounds. The message I received challenged this belief and it initially hurt to find out that people with whom I had established a relationship over several months with were now suggesting I had behaved badly while away on my field trip to Singapore. After some reflection, however, I saw both the message and the conversation that prompted it in a different light. Zikra's message offered earnest advice and demonstrated care. The conversations that prompted it were unsurprising when I considered how frequently I had heard similar discussions about the conduct of other women in this particular social circle who did not conform to the agreed understanding of correct behaviour. Moreover, in a way it was a compliment of sorts because it demonstrated a degree of inclusion. Were I a complete outsider, after all, I would not even

be worth mentioning.

I did not un-tag myself from the photos nor ask my Singaporean friends who posted them to take them down. I did, however, thank Zikra for her message and gently explain that Muslims in various places have different ideas about what is appropriate, with many young Singaporean Muslims believing that the social mixing of the sexes is not something shameful as long as it is in a group context. Since Zikra had closely collaborated with me in my research up to that point, I also mentioned that I would likely be shifting the focus of my research away from strictly sexual health and romantic relationships among Muslim communities to an exploration of precisely this kind of diversity of everyday Islamic belief. At the time that this happened, I was already well aware that understandings of Islamic theology as well as Islamic practice were hardly monolithic. However, the incident inspired me to investigate the forces that shape Islamic diversity as well as the inspiration behind the attitudes of tolerance or condemnation that surround it.

This study, which is based on anthropological fieldwork in both the small city-state of Singapore and the suburbs of Sydney, in the Australian state of New South Wales, attempts to illustrate just how diverse everyday Islamic practice can be. Examining this diversity will highlight some of the ways in which young Muslims go about individualising their faith and personal sense of morality. This focus goes beyond exploring 'piety', so to speak, because the individualisation of religious practice or belief does not imply a particular level of commitment to religiosity nor does a person's compliance with the expectations of a religious family or community. Instead, this study both examines discourses of what sexual choices are open to a 'good Muslim' as well as how people adopt, negotiate or resist those choices and position themselves within local Muslim community discourses of piety, shame and reputation. This research seeks to meaningfully add to the emerging body of literature on everyday Islam with a unique comparative contribution to understanding the moral diversity that exists both within and

between Muslim communities in Sydney and Singapore as well as the impact that living in a multicultural society may have on such diverse moralities.

This introductory chapter will first review the origins of this research project and the motivations that underlie my choice to study moral and sexual diversity among young Muslims. From there, I summarise what my fieldwork involved as well as consider some of the problematics of concepts such as the field site, the complexity of defining a 'community' and the ethnographic challenges of navigating both in metropolitan contexts where field sites may be very large, multiple or ill-defined and a community's boundaries might seem blurred or mobile. The chapter then explores some scholarly discussions of Muslim identity, how this thesis approaches this topic with regard to my own research participants, how I perceive my own identity to have affected data collection and some challenges I faced during the research process. A brief discussion of everyday Islam as an emerging field of inquiry follows together with a review of work written about Muslim communities in Sydney Australia and Singapore to contextualise my research findings in the subsequent chapters. This introduction concludes with a summary of the purpose of this research and a plan of the chapters.

Origins of the research

This study was inspired by volunteer work I carried out in Singapore for the non-profit organisation Clubilya between 2009 and 2011. At the time, I was living in Singapore and unemployed because the visa I held was a Dependant's Pass that prohibited paid work or study. I had a lot of time on my hands, so I devoted my time to continuing research on Islamic environmentalism that I had started in the United Kingdom and taking up opportunities to volunteer my time and skills locally. Having some previous experience mentoring young people, Clubilya caught my attention because of their mission to reach out to disadvantaged youth and in turn empower them to improve their own communities.

Although Clubilya explicitly did not limit their scope to a particular ethnic or religious community, the overwhelming number of people I met through this organisation were young Muslim Malay Singaporeans. Likewise, the mentors and leadership within the organisation were mostly Muslim Malay Singaporeans as well. Their commitment to engaging with the Malay Muslim community has resulted in them being recognised as a 'Muslim organisation' despite their official self-description (Kamaludeen, 2016: 99).

Over time, and with the help of social media, I developed enduring relationships with many of the young people I worked with. Activities organised by Clubilya included music events, park clean-ups and various team-building exercises. I was also asked to run a jewellery-making workshop for young women and invited to talk to them about my own background, which was very similar socioeconomically albeit from a different cultural context. What often began as a simple mentor/mentee relationship where I would be added on Facebook after an event or workshop and then asked for dating advice and guidance with schoolwork or vocational choices developed over time as my mentees, and later friends, aged into young adulthood. These relationships gave me an opportunity to observe the choices and challenges my young friends faced while entering adulthood. I could also see the various ways in which local Muslim community expectations, such as that young people should remain chaste or marry while young, were either embraced or rejected by my friends and be able to discuss this with them. I was also a person some trusted to reveal personal secrets to that they feared others may judge them harshly for, such as coming out as gay or in seeking advice about avoiding an unplanned pregnancy. These experiences were often challenging because they placed me in an immense position of responsibility and it was impossible to not become emotionally involved. My ability to help was also limited to simply providing a listening ear in many cases. Although these experiences predate the current study, they are an important part of my motivation for conducting research about moral diversity among young Muslims and they also

facilitated data collection because the key collaborators in the research I conducted in Singapore include my former mentees and their friends.

I moved to Sydney, Australia in 2012 on a permanent visa that was linked to my former husband's employment. My new visa privileged me with the opportunity to pursue postgraduate studies and so I eagerly set about planning to apply. At this point, Singapore still felt very much like home to me and the idea of conducting research there was very attractive not only because it meant returning to the familiar, but also because I felt that I was in a position to potentially create something tangible and useful to young people like those I once worked with at Clubilya. Traditionally, ethnographic fieldwork often works the opposite way in that it transports the researcher from familiar surroundings to new ones. I had instead moved into my new surroundings with the intention of establishing a permanent home.

Once settled in Sydney, I quickly realised that my research could only be strengthened by exploring local Muslim communities and adding a comparative element to my research. I approached this research aware that there are both great rewards and great challenges in conducting ethnographic research. A combination of the advice of my mentors and my previous research experience had prepared me to expect difficulties as well as anticipate a rich wealth of topics to explore in both Singapore and Sydney, yet I did not foresee that some of those challenges would end up inspiring some of my most rewarding lines of inquiry. I had expected my fieldwork in one place to remain separate and uninfluenced by my work in the other due to the 6000km distance between the two cities. The naivety of this assumption would become clear early in my research, perhaps as early as the morning after that July evening I spent eating durians with my Singaporean friends. Challenge and reward, as I would find out then as well as on other occasions, can be two sides of the same coin.

The fieldwork

It is impossible to conduct fieldwork without first identifying the 'field' in which one expects to work. In two urban settings such as Sydney and Singapore, this can be challenging for reasons that will be explored below. The 'work' aspect of fieldwork is easier to explain, at least in principle. Being an anthropologist, I planned to collect my data for this study primarily though participant-observation as well as semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Supplemental use of social media, email and Skype was also used to keep in touch with participants across field sites and to occasionally seek additional information subsequent to in-person interviews. Participant-observation traditionally involves living among the people studied, using the local language, participating in the social world of the community as well as noting down observations about everyday life and relationships (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011: 5). As a research methodology in anthropology, participant observation is often said to have its origins in the methods popularised by the Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, who found himself in Australia at the beginning of the First World War and was forced into an extended fieldwork in exile to avoid internment (Sanjek, 1990). Malinowski went to live among the Trobriand people of New Guinea and the result of his fieldwork was an immensely influential ethnographic study, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (Malinowski, 1922). While Malinowski was not the first to conduct extended fieldwork or make notes on the everyday life of a studied community (Wax, 1971), he was the first to systematise this method of data collection and analysis to a level of sophistication previously unknown (Firth, 1985: 30; Tedlock, 1991: 83).

The introductory chapter of *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* contains reflections on carrying out ethnographic research. Malinowski suggests that the essence of ethnographic fieldwork is threefold, which in summary is to: record the organisation of the group and its cultural anatomy; record the minute details, or 'imponderabilia', of daily life and behaviour; and finally to record ethnographic statements, narratives and folklore to

document 'native mentality' (1922: 24). The goal of this form of data collection is, according to Malinowski, 'to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world' (1922: 25, emphasis in original). Much has changed within anthropology since the time in which Malinowski was writing, yet the ultimate goal of ethnographic research remains the same. It is with this goal in mind that this thesis explores the lives of young Muslims in Singapore and Sydney. Here the objective is to accomplish more than to merely explore variations in regional Islamic orthodoxy or orthopraxy and instead to also look at how my research participants view themselves and understand the communities in which they live regardless of their relationship to religion or to other Muslims. This approach seeks to craft a nuanced description of the social worlds which participants navigate and offer a holistic understanding of their lived realities (Brewer, 2000; Wolcott, 2005).

Carrying out Malinowski's threefold approach to ethnography would be challenging in an urban context. Recording the political and kinship organisation of a group is manageable if still difficult when working with a relatively small, concentrated and stable population in a rural location, but it is impossible with a group who is highly mobile, diffuse and very large. Recording the 'imponderabilia of actual life' is challenging yet straightforward in the context in which Malinowski describes it (1922: 18), but the practicalities of this kind of data collection must be adjusted when the research includes two metropolitan field sites when time is scarce and research participants are many. Recording the ethnographic statements, narratives and beliefs with which research participants represent themselves, however, is not only possible but unavoidably necessary. Research cannot accurately be considered ethnographic if it does not represent the voices of the people who have contributed to the study. Across my two field sites, I did not record kinship data except where I anticipated it to be relevant to this study, such as noting down the immediate family members, friendship ties and living situations of

my research participants. I also did not intend to use my data to identify a particular

political organisation of the Muslim communities with which I worked because the

boundaries of who the 'community' included as well as who were considered 'leaders'

among the community were highly contested in both Sydney and Singapore. Instead, I

focused on documenting the ways in which each research participant situated themselves

within, or in relation to, a Muslim community, how they perceived other local Muslims, and

how they understood local leadership.

Data were recorded for the most part in handwritten notes. I often avoided tape

recording conversations because of the strong possibility that some might feel awkward

having their personal opinions about sensitive topics stored in an audio file. Notes can be

fully anonymised in a way that disguises the identity of participants in a way that an mp3

file cannot and I found that this offered a level of reassurance to participants that password

protection alone did not. Since I relied heavily on notes for data recording, I also had to

decide carefully when to turn my attention to note taking and when to fully engage in

observing my surroundings. As a compromise, I found myself making shorthand notes of

details I was likely to forget such as the ages, ethnic backgrounds and occupations of

some participants. I complemented the brief notes by keeping 'headnotes', or a mental

account of my day of research, to write down later in more detail (Emerson, Fretz and

Shaw, 2011: 23). In recording dialogue, I did my very best to reproduce verbatim

quotations of what was said, yet some passages will be paraphrased because of the limits

of my memory. Quotations used in this thesis that were tape recorded and transcribed are

marked with an asterisk (*) at the end of the excerpt, yet to improve readability all dialogue

has been rendered in quotation marks regardless of how it was recorded.

I received clearance to conduct this research from the Macquarie University Human

Research Ethics Committee in early April 2013. As part of the application for ethics

approval, I created a long list of carefully formulated questions that were to serve as the

basis for future interviews and focus groups. Fortunately, these questions were approved as a rough guide to what I intended to explore because my original list was all but abandoned by the end of my first year conducting research. Although I continued to create lists of topics for discussion and questions I wanted to ask ahead of interviews and focus group discussions, I quickly discovered that the questions needed to be carefully tailored to best communicate with interview participants. I would also vary the topics I brought up in interviews according to how well I knew the interviewee(s), starting with the least potentially embarrassing subjects. This was especially important because of the sensitive nature of this research.

Researching any topic related to human sexuality is not only difficult but extremely sensitive, and this is even more so in the case of religious and ethnic minority groups (Wiederman, 2002). It took over a year for some of my research participants to trust me enough to be completely open about some sexuality-related topics. Some later told me that they feared that I might judge them for having what they imagined to be unorthodox or un-Islamic opinions, such as believing it is good for young couples to engage in premarital sex to ensure sexual compatibility before marriage. Others had opposite concerns and, perceiving me to be liberally-minded, worried that I might view their religiously-framed intolerance, such as of premarital or same-sex sexuality, as a sign of backwardness. Recruitment for this project was based on a non-random 'snowball sampling' method (Browne, 2005), where participants are invited to participate in focus groups or semi-structured interviews through individuals I already know, and who then in turn invite future participants. This sampling method I chose, which allowed research participants to introduce me as a trustworthy person to potential participants, helped reduce such concerns but it did not eliminate them.

To better understand sources of guidance and education for young Muslims, I also engaged where welcome in participant observation of the activities of various Muslim and

non-Muslim organisations dealing with 'at risk youth', sexual health, marriage and family planning in both Sydney and Singapore. Some of the Muslim organisations I approached in both locations were hesitant to collaborate because of concerns about how I might represent them publicly. In Sydney, previous bad experiences with journalists had made some particularly wary of anyone seeking to conduct interviews, and rumours of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) sending undercover investigators to Muslim organisations left others wondering whether or not I might be a spy of some sort. The climate of Islamophobia in Sydney (Dunn, Klocker and Salabay, 2007; Mansouri and Kamp, 2007; Bloul, 2008; Woodlock, 2011; Akbarzadeh, 2016; Colic-Peisker, Mikola and Dekker, 2016), which will be explored later in this chapter, had made many wary of unsolicited interest in group activities. My own religious affiliation had little bearing on these suspicions because the fact of being Muslim is not enough to guarantee a person will not write unflattering pieces about Sydney Muslim communities or organisations. I was first and foremost a stranger and as such my research depended upon establishing relationships of trust.

In Singapore, I benefitted from being introduced to new research participants by friends who had agreed to collaborate in the research, understood my objectives and could explain them to potential participants on my behalf. Having a reputation as someone with an interest in helping young people also facilitated conversations with research participants I did not know personally. In Sydney, however, I had to work hard to establish trust with participants. At this early point in my research, the only published work I had produced was on the topic of Islamic environmentalism so I had no example to show how I might discuss such sensitive topics in scholarship. To help allay concerns, I kept a very public social media presence so that research participants could easily look me up and view details about my personal life as well as my political views, hobbies and interests. Following Bolognani's arguments in favour of the benefits of reciprocal exposure

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(Bolognani, 2007), which involves engaging in social activities with the purpose of revealing one's personality over time, I attended events of interest to my research participants that had no direct relevance to my study, such as the poetry slam evenings held at the Bankstown Arts Centre. I also attended Muslim events in Western Sydney and I made an effort to not only network and reach out to potential research participants but also to present my research aims and my intentions for the data I collected. I also took every opportunity to reassure research participants that I was professionally committed to protecting their privacy and anonymity and that my objective was to listen and learn. I made many friends throughout the duration of this study who remain personal friends to this day. Of course, I did not establish enduring friendships with all of my research participants yet in most cases once they had an opportunity to know me as a person and understand my motives for carrying out this study, suspicions subsided and both recruiting participants and conducting interviews became a lot easier.

All interviews and focus group discussions were semi-structured around open-ended questions (Spradley, 1979), where the intention was to let the respondent provide as much as narrative and self-information as s/he is comfortable with. Open-ended questions also help reduce embarrassment in discussions of sensitive or controversial topics and provide a safe space for narrative to begin (Elliott, 2009), the analysis of which is central to this thesis. Marjo Buitelaar (2002) has written about the challenges of discussing virginity among Dutch Moroccan Muslims in the Netherlands and her use of McAdams' metaphor of the life-story as a book to overcome awkwardness (McAdams, 1993: 251-276).   Buitelaar believed this approach would allow her participants to relate their experiences in a general way and choose which topics they considered interesting, or in other words to author their own 'book', allowing her to observe how they framed the topic of research interest in their life stories (2002: 479). My exclusive use of open-ended

questions was similarly intended to encourage my research participants to narrate their views and experiences in directions that they considered important or appropriate.

Despite these intentions, however, there were clear signs that research participants and I influenced each other and the content of interviews. For example, I observed nonverbal cues of interest on my part or shyness on the part of the interviewee(s) to heavily impact upon both the direction and duration of interviews. The fruitfulness of interviews was also affected by factors such as mood, fatigue, the emotional response to the topic discussed on the part of either myself or interviewees as well as the environment in which the interview took place. Holstein and Gubrium (1995: 65) have documented this 'give and take' relationship and suggested that the term 'active interviews' might be used to describe interviews that acknowledge this dynamic between interviewer and interviewee, viewing both as equal collaborators in constructing meaning. Data collection through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions is indeed a collaborative effort in which meaning is co-constructed (Ryen, 2001). While an acknowledgement of this dynamic can help level the interviewer-interviewee relationship somewhat (Merriam *et al.*, 2001), a researcher's identity, background and biases influence the choice of questions asked as well as interactions with participants and consequently shapes the findings of the research (Harding, 1991). Although I did my best to engage in active interviews (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995), and also to allow interviewees to guide the conversation in directions of personal importance to them as Buitelaar (2002) did, I am not confident that my research participants and I were always *equal* partners in creating data. Inequalities in education and gender as well as differences in communication styles affected both data collection and analysis.

My experience with recording the details of everyday life in both field sites differed. In Singapore, because I had lived there before, I focused on recording subtleties in my field notes that I may have become blind to over the years and followed the suggestions

made by Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw (2011: 24–27) to record sensory data such as sounds and smells as well as making note of the routine details of everyday life. Fortunately, emigrating to Sydney helped me to observe the lives of my Singaporean research participants from a somewhat fresh perspective upon my return. Sydney, by contrast, was a truly new field site for me. I found myself working with people from ethnic backgrounds I was unaccustomed to. In my previous research on Islamic environmentalism, my research participants were mostly South Asian Muslims in the United Kingdom and Southeast Asian Muslims in Singapore. In Sydney, my research expanded to include Muslims from Middle Eastern and African backgrounds as well as others of Eastern European and Turkish heritage. I was keen to learn the nuances of etiquette, Islamic norms, and humour among my new research participants, yet I struggled at times to keep up with the sheer wealth of information I was presented with.

Identifying a specific 'field' in both Singapore and Sydney was challenging for a number of reasons. The geographical locations of my fieldwork are of course unambiguous, yet the composition of the communities that I worked with are far less so. Although the term 'Muslim community' is often used in the singular in scholarly work (Haniff, 2003), in media discourse, and by Muslims themselves in both Sydney and Singapore, it is far from a singularity in the locations I studied. Among Muslims in both cities I observed sectarian divisions, racism and disagreements upon what actions or beliefs disassociate a Muslim from the fold of Islam and demonstrate that person to be a *kafir*, or disbeliever. However in those same cities my research participants overwhelmingly believed in the existence of a single *ummah*, or community of believers in Islam, although they did often also have a clear vision of which kind of fellow believers rightfully belonged to it.

The concept of community by itself is often taken for granted as a commonsense term and as such has limited analytical use without parameters being set for its definition

(Bauman, 1996). Cohen (1985) and Anderson (1991), for example, have defined community as a mental construct with the difference between them being that Cohen sees manifestations of a community in a given locality as lending it a kind of credibility while Anderson believes a community may be entirely imagined. Migration and the establishment of diasporas challenges how we might think of community as an object of analysis because of the deterritorialised nature of transnational communities (Appadurai, 1990; Clifford, 1994; Vetrovec, 2001). In reference to specifically Muslim communities, the Internet further complicates the concept because, as Bunt has observed, 'It is through a digital interface that an increasing number of people will view their religion and their place in the Muslim worlds, affiliated to wider communities in which "the West" becomes, at least in cyberspace, increasingly redundant' (2003: 211). The Internet, then, may be thought of as allowing Muslims to 'create a new form of imagined community, or reimagined umma' (Mandaville, 1999: 24).

The boundaries of the field are blurred in the multicultural metropolitan contexts in which I conducted this research. Although the discipline of anthropology has a tendency to view the world as divided into 'sites' populated by 'coherent Peoples and necessary Others' (Passaro, 1997: 148), the boundaries between cultures as well as spatial perceptions of the field have blurred with the increasing transnational flows of both people and ideas (Bhabha, 1994). A range of scholars in recent decades, such as Marcus (1986, 1995); Appadurai (1991); Clifford (1992); Gupta and Ferguson (1992, 1997); and Ortner (1997) have encouraged reflection upon the fluid boundaries of the field site and the interconnectedness of communities and cultures. To illustrate this with an example from my own research we might look at the family of Jihan, who is a 24-year-old Muslim Australian who lives in the Western Sydney suburb of Bankstown.

Jihan describes himself as being Lebanese Australian, a heritage that he inherits from his mother who was also born in Australia. His father is an Anglo Australian convert

to Islam who takes pride in his Welsh and Scottish ancestry. Jihan's oldest brother married an Australian Muslim of mixed Arab-Javanese heritage and his sister married a Lebanese Muslim migrant to Australia. His younger brother is not yet married and is considering spending some time in Amman, Jordan to pursue Islamic religious studies. While Jihan's family maintain a close relationship with some other Lebanese families in their neighbourhood, and Jihan identifies himself primarily with his Lebanese heritage, he did not consider himself or his family to be part of a Lebanese Muslim community as such. As he described it to me, 'We have lots of Leb friends and family but we have lots of other friends and family too'. Jihan's favourite local religious leader is a Fijian Indian imam who migrated to Australia named Afroz Ali and he spends some time on YouTube every week listening to sermons from overseas imams to make up for not being able to attend the Friday *jumu'ah* prayer at a mosque.

The Muslim influences on Jihan's life and that of his family are clearly varied. The non-Muslim influences on them are even more so. Bankstown is a suburb with a high Muslim population and Jihan defines himself and his family as religiously conservative yet this does not cut them off from the non-Muslim majority context in which they live. Jihan made some non-Muslim friends at university and the whole family enjoy good relationships with a number of non-Muslim acquaintances in the neighbourhood in which they live. Western Sydney's multicultural influence is reflected in many aspects of their lives, from Jihan's brother's almost obsessive devotion to the Canterbury-Bankstown Rugby League Club to some of the dishes prepared in the family kitchen. For example, I once observed Jihan's mother making Algerian borek, which are small spring-roll shaped meat-filled pastries, with pre-made Chinese wonton wrappers. Jihan and his family are also exposed to a plethora of ideas through education, the media, advertising and other avenues.

These varied influences affect individuals in different ways, yet they inevitably touch the lives of everyone and challenge bounded notions of community and identity. In my

research I have observed some young Muslims who believe very strongly in the existence of, and their membership to, a bounded ethno-religious community. However, I have also observed many others who, like Jihan, see themselves as a Sydney Muslim without strong ties to a particular ethnic community. In an acknowledgement of this diversity, this thesis does not focus on Muslims of any particular ethnic group. In the early stages of this research, I did consider narrowing my focus to Muslims of a specific ethnic heritage yet I soon discovered that such an approach would be impractical. Young Muslims in Sydney commonly have friends from all sorts of ethnic backgrounds and there is often ethnic diversity within families as well. Adding this reality to the other vibrantly multicultural influences on young Muslim Sydneysiders' lives, it became apparent that the most holistic and natural approach to conducting ethnographic research in this context, and also in Singapore where many Malay Muslim Singaporeans have relationships with Muslims of Arab and South Asian heritage, would be to socialise widely as a majority of my research participants do and collect data from a broad range of participants.

Documenting Muslim identities in the field

In public discussion and political discourse in the West, migrants from Muslim communities overseas have come to be perceived primarily in terms of their religious backgrounds instead of their various ethnic identities. Studies of Muslim immigrant communities and second-generation migrants in Western countries appeared to feature more of an emphasis on the religious aspects of migrant identities from the 1980s (Abu-Laban, Qureshi and Waugh, 1983; Krieger-Krynicki, 1988; Djait, 1989), and 1990s (Gerholm and Lithman, 1990; Metcalf, 1996; Kepel, 1997), than similar literature had in previous years, though there are some exceptions (Joly and Nielsen, 1985). In more recent years, (Jeldtoft, 2016: 25) has used the examples of Roy (2004), Allievi (2005) and Hervik (2011) to show that Muslims are increasingly identified in public and political discourse by their

religious belonging in a process referred to by Schmidt (2002) as the 'ethnification of Islam'. This process implies that the primary identity of anyone who practices Islam, or is from a Muslim background, is a religious one and has major political and social consequences.

In 2000, Haddad and Qurqmaz wrote that '[…] the presence of Muslims [in Europe] has become a political issue utilised by various European right-wing political parties such as the Front Nationale in France, Vlaams Blok in Belgium, Republikaner in Germany and the Centrumpartij of the Netherlands in their bid to gain power' (Haddad and Qurqmaz, 2000: 6). Seventeen years later, after the Brexit debate which saw right-wing political figures identify various 'Muslim issues' as threats to British identity (Mandaville, 2017: 59), and after several European countries have attempted or succeeded in legally regulating the public clothing choices of Muslim women (Ferrari and Pastorelli, 2016), the situation that Haddad and Qurqmaz (2000) describe appears to have not changed. Moreover, European governments are not alone in cultivating a climate of Islamophobia for political gain. In the United States similar rhetoric has intensified after the election of President Donald Trump and resulted in new government policies, such as the 'Muslim ban' that prohibits the citizens of six Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States and directly implies that anyone from Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, or Yemen may be a potential or actual terrorist (Hassan, 2017: 2; Haynes, 2017: 66). Drawing upon similar moral panics surrounding Islam and Muslims (Morgan and Poynting, 2016), some Australian politicians and political parties also use Islamophobic messages to attract votes and the most notable illustration of this is Senator Pauline Hanson's One Nation party (Miller, 2017). Shortly before the 2016 Australian federal elections, One Nation not only strongly emphasised its distrust and suspicion of Muslims but also pledged to call for a Royal Commission inquiry into whether Islam is a religion or an inherently violent political ideology (O'Donnell, Davis and Ewart, 2017: 43).

Islamophobia appears to be on the rise globally (Poynting and Mason, 2007: 61).

Social and political concerns about Muslim communities in non-Muslim countries has

provoked scholarly interest in Muslim identity. Studies explore Muslim identity as a

creative project (Qureshi and Moores, 1999; S. Khan, 2000; Aitchison, Hopkins and Kwan,

2007), probe uncertain and questioning aspects of some Muslim identities (Nielsen, 1987;

Dwyer, 1999; Haddad, 2004; Jacobson, 2015), and others look into the more political

dimensions of Muslim identity, such as the various impacts of public debates about Islam

(Shadid, 2006; Mandaville, 2009), Islamism (Ismail, 2004), and also how Muslims perceive

their own identities in the midst of all this discussion (Lewis, 2002). Bold claims have also

been made about Muslim identities that privilege the influence of religion, such as Khan's

assertion that, 'Over and above other competing associations and identities, Islam is

central for Muslim existence, hence the level of connection with Islam and everything

Islamic is quite relevant for Muslim communities' (Z. Khan, 2000: 37). Although Khan's

comments about Muslim identity are definitely true for many (Peek, 2005), they are not

true for all. For example, many Muslims identify as such as an acknowledgement of an

ethno-religious heritage more than as a spiritual commitment to Islam (Mandaville, 2007:

294; Stephenson, 2011). Furthermore, among Muslims who prioritise the religious aspect

of their identities, such as in the studies conducted by Werbner (2002), Lewis (2007) and

Jacobsen (2011, 2015) among others, not all will do so out of piety alone. Factors such as

experiences of Islamophobia and other forms of discrimination may motivate identification

and solidarity with a Muslim community among some (Yip, 2004: 339; Spielhaus, 2010:

16). For Muslims living as minorities in non-Muslim majority countries, identifying with a

Muslim community may serve as a strategy for gaining recognition (Jeldtoft, 2016: 28) or

for accessing governmental resources (Salvatore, 1997).

Aspects of identity such as religious affiliation inform categories that are necessary

to make sense of the world in which we live, yet they are dynamic and can shift depending

on circumstances (Jeldtoft, 2009: 11). Individuals draw on such labels in order to define themselves and others, using them to cultivate closeness as well as to create divisions. In the context of my research, it has been precisely the variable nature of identity that I have observed throughout my fieldwork that has prevented me from trying to define or discuss the identities of my Muslim informants beyond the terms that they have used to describe themselves. Brubaker and Cooper have summarised some varied uses of the term 'identity' in social scientific scholarship and suggested that describing 'all affinities and affiliations, all forms of belonging, all experiences of commonality, connectedness, and cohesion, all self-understandings and self-identifications in the idiom of "identity" saddles us with a blunt, flat, undifferentiated vocabulary' (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 2). To avoid this, this thesis focuses on research participants' 'reportive definitions' of themselves (Barker, 2004: 89). This approach acknowledges the fluidity of self-understandings and self-representation and the fact that people can choose to emphasise specific aspects of their identities according to the context and company that they find themselves in (Adib and Guerrier, 2003: 430).

Situating myself in the study

Writing about relationships between researchers and participants, sociologist Louise Archer (2002) has used feminist research to reflect upon the benefits of locating oneself and one's values within research as well as being clear about the motivations behind the study and the methods intended for use in carrying it out (Edwards, 1990; Stanley and Wise, 1990; Maynard and Purvis, 1994; Gill, 1995). Also from the perspective of feminist research, Letherby (2003) has suggested that 'being reflexive and open about what we do and how we do it, and the relationship between this and what is known, is crucial for academic feminists as it allows others who read our work to understand the background to the claims we are making' (2003: 6). This introductory chapter has so far described the

origins of the research, the methodologies employed in carrying it out and some of the influencing factors that impacted upon the final results. However, I have yet to properly introduce myself so that I might clearly identify the place from which I write, identify some of my biases and attempt to fully situate myself within my research.

It is difficult for me to identify 'home' because I have been an outsider in one way or another since childhood. To illustrate, I was born in Scotland yet the skin colour I inherited from my Mexican-American father, the poverty my family endured and the fact that my Scottish mother did not enrol me in elementary or middle school marked me very much as an 'other' among the neighbourhood children. I lost my mother to cancer when I was 12 and went to live with my father in Southern California, where my lack of schooling and Scottish accent continued to mark me as an outsider. Fortunately, I adapted quickly not only to life in a Los Angeles public high school but also to growing up in my Mexican family, whose language, food and customs were until that point almost completely alien to me. These early life experiences were important to the kind of interests and sensitivities I would have, and hence the research I would go on to conduct, because they shaped my ability to relate to those who experience ostracism or bullying. I grew up with a keen empathy for those considered outsiders or others. It is no surprise then that I was motivated in this research by a desire to assist the marginalised, which Muslim communities in both field sites are, and that some of my closest friendships to emerge from this research are with queer Muslims, who are marginalised yet further.

I began this study five years ago when I was 27 years old. My various statuses as an outsider, a young yet heterosexually married woman, and a Muslim among others influenced how research participants chose to represent their lives and their communities in interviews, with some feeling free to teach and guide me and others presuming knowledge on my part and reluctant to explain things that they considered obvious. The fact that I was not born into a Muslim family allowed me to capitalise on my ignorance and

learn much from the many Muslims I met who were keen to teach a convert such as myself. It provided me with an opportunity to explore the importance of certain beliefs and aspects of Islamic ritual practice to some of my research participants. Among some, my identities as an ethnic minority, a migrant and a Muslim brought me privileged access I might not have otherwise had. I also observed that religiously conservative research participants often showed a great degree of patience with my transgressions of what they considered to be correct Islamic behaviour because of my status as a convert. However, towards the later phases of my research, once my marriage collapsed and I began to earn a reputation after marching with queer Muslim research participants at the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, my religious identity brought condemnation from some who believed I had become corrupted and was at risk of corrupting others.

My relationship to my faith has always been complicated. My father became a Jehovah's Witness while I was in high school and as an act of rebellion of sorts, I embraced Islam in my late teens. Although my interest in spirituality has always been genuine, I have lived my life throughout the years in ways that many might consider did not quite make me 'Muslim' anymore. For example, I have rarely observed rituals such as prayers or fasting, I do not wear a headscarf or go out of my way to dress modestly, and I identified myself as Muslim in a similar way to how most of my family identify as Catholic: nominally. For my Mexican family, claiming a Catholic identity is part pride in maintaining cultural tradition and part habit. For me, my Muslim identity was and is an assertion that I am not Christian and that I accept the basic spiritual premises of Islam, although what I have understood those premises to be has changed over the years. My lack of piety in some ways facilitated my relationships with research participants in both Sydney and Singapore who expressed embarrassment about their own self-perceived lapses in religious observances. It also helped reassure my queer Muslim research participants,

who had in many cases experienced homophobia from other Muslims and were often likely to stereotype women who wore a headscarf, that I was unlikely to judge or condemn them.

Understanding how I am personally situated in this study is important because, as Linda Woodhead has observed, 'There is no neutral access to "data", untouched by the instruments which elicit it and the spaces and relationships within which it is produced' (2016: 13). Carefully considering 'the dynamics of our interactions as well as the differences between our locations and those of our interlocutors', as Borneman & Hammoudi (2009: 19) suggest, can help ethnographers to reduce bias. It can also help produce a heightened awareness of the role of emotional embodied responses and communication in the research process. As Woodhead has observed, 'a gesture, a kiss, a tear, a material symbol, a set of clothes or a song are all modes of communication which can convey as much as or more than words. Research on everyday life prompts us to pay more attention to such things—something which ethnographers have often been much better at than those who favour more word-based techniques of research' (2016: 14). My personal history has influenced my emotional reactions to some of my research participants' stories as well as some of the activities I have participated in. These reactions, which were likely communicated through nonverbal cues more than through words, shaped the rapport I established with some participants. In this study, I have endeavoured to be sensitive to these forms of communication as well as the reactions of my research participants to the unspoken ways in which I communicate.

Researching everyday Islam

For the past three decades, as noted above, Muslims have been written about in terms that tend focus heavily upon their religion and prioritise it as a key influencer, and in some cases the main influencer, in their lives. Research topics have varied widely across several social science disciplines. A common theme running through many studies is a

focus on various aspects of Islamic revivalism, which Fadil and Fernando (2015: 60) define as 'the unprecedented worldwide engagement with exegetical texts and theological reasoning by Muslims untrained in traditional Islamic institutions'. Research exploring aspects of Islamic revivalism or Muslim interpretations of Islam include work on Islam's compatibility with secular modernity (Gellner, 1981; Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996), as well as modernity's relationship with traditional religious authority in Islam (Mahmood, 2005; Hirschkind, 2006; Salvatore, 2007; Agrama, 2012). Many studies focus specifically on Muslim women, exploring topics such as feminism (Mernissi, 1987; Ahmed, 1992; Cooke, 2001, 2007; Ali, 2006), sexuality (Ong and Peletz, 1995; Lock and Kaufert, 1998; Buitelaar, 2002; Mir, 2007; Khoei, Whelan and Cohen, 2008), resistance (Abu-Lughod, 1992; El Guindi, 1999; Bennett, 2005), and also Islamic dress (Hussein, 2007; Dreher and Ho, 2009; Bilge, 2010) among many others. Other research has studied Islamic radicalisation (Mamdani, 2002; Wiktorowicz, 2005; Abbas, 2007a, 2007b), Islamic political activism and civic participation (Klausen, 2005, 2009; Lewis, 2007; Meer and Modood, 2009) and also, of course, Muslim identity (Dwyer, 1999; Limage, 2000; Werbner, 2002; Lewis, 2002; Schmidt, 2002; Buitelaar, Bosma and Ketner, 2004; Ismail, 2004; Peek, 2005; Kibria, 2008; Furseth, 2011; Jeldtoft, 2011).

Writing about the context of Western Europe, Jeldtoft has observed that both popular and academic discussions involving Muslims are often based upon an assumption of 'secular normality' which positions Muslims as hypervisible in relation to a 'secular West' (Jeldtoft, 2016: 26). This hypervisibility suggests that 'Muslims' and 'Islam' are considered worthy of study as a subject in its own right because of their mere existence in the West and Jeldtoft cites first volume of the now the annual *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*[1] (Nielsen *et al.*, 2009), together with various surveys of Muslims in Europe, as examples to

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[1] The Yearbook of Muslims in Europe surveys Muslim communities over 37 Europeans countries and provides statistical data and expert analysis of issues relevant to those communities.

illustrate this (2016: 27). Comparing with her own previous work (2009) as well as work written by Allievi (2005) and Sunier (2009), Jeldtoft (2016: 27) concludes that,

> Muslims and Islam are cast as 'a matter out of place' (Douglas 2005: 50) in terms of both geography/spatial and identity: Muslims are (re)presented as not belonging in the West, as newcomers, as immigrants, as Muslims and so they are presented as one 'group' acting out their perceived 'Muslimness', and out of their subordinate position to majorities.

Such scholarly investment in Islamic revivalism, pious pursuits, and other ways that Muslims act out their perceived 'Muslimness' has inspired criticism and encouraged an emerging body of research on everyday Islam.

Interest in everyday religion is not new. In France, the concept of lived religion, or *la religion vécue*, has been long discussed in the sociology of religion and this tradition went on to inspire Anglo-American cultural and religious studies from the 1980s (Dessing *et al.*, 2016: 2). Meredith McGuire has used the concept of lived religion to differentiate religion as 'practiced, experienced, and expressed by ordinary people' from the beliefs and practices prescribed by religious institutions (McGuire, 2008: 12). Nancy Ammerman, another scholar writing about everyday religion, suggests this approach privileges 'the experience of nonexperts' as well as 'activity that happens outside organised religious events and institutions' (Ammerman, 2007: 5). Naveeda Khan sees everyday religiosity as uncertain and skeptical (2012), Osella and Soares write of the need to study 'struggle, ambivalence, incoherence, and failure' that is part of everyday religion (2010: 11), and Amira Mittermaier writes of the experience of vulnerability within it (2012). Writing specifically about Muslims, Jeldtoft argues that although orthodox religious prescriptions may be a part of everyday life for believers, there is a need to 'study how these phenomena are then used and adapted in everyday life rather than accepting the view that these phenomena always play a coherent, transcendent and sacred role in people's

lives' (Jeldtoft, 2016: 30). This thesis contributes to this emerging body of literature that focuses on these lived, everyday aspects of Muslim religiosity with a unique comparative study of moral diversity among Muslims in Sydney and Singapore.

Research exploring everyday Islam has been criticised for making assumptions that some forms of religiosity are more natural or normal than others. Fadil and Fernando have argued that some scholarly work, such as Marsden (2005), Schielke (2009), and Schielke and Debevec (2012), presents religious norms as impossible ideals with 'the natural attitude toward religious rules' being 'one of ambivalence and contestation, hence the discrepancy between moral rules and actual behaviour' (2015: 77). Fadil and Fernando (2015: 61) also warn that calls to focus on everyday Islam risks marking 'revivalist or pious Muslims as exceptional and, more insidiously, not "real"'. With Fadil and Fernando's warning in mind, I follow Islamologist Jonas Otterbeck's call to observe the rich diversity of Muslim religiosity on participants' own terms (Otterbeck, 2011, 2016). In doing so, this thesis works towards broadening the scholarly gaze beyond a 'dualist model distinguishing between believing, practising Muslims and non-practising Muslims, presupposing a fixed entity called 'Islam' (Otterbeck, 2011: 1169). To avoid reproducing such division between *everyday* Muslims and pious exceptions, this thesis neither focuses exclusively on outliers and nonconformists nor on self-defined Salafists and the very pious. What I present here is instead not only a mix of participants with various self-declared identities but also an exploration of the blurred boundaries of many of those identities.

Robert Orsi has written that 'Lived religion cannot be separated from other practices of everyday life, from the ways that humans do other necessary and important things, or from other cultural structures and discourses (legal, political, medical, and so on)' (2003:172). In this study, I set out to explore how Muslims of all self-defined degrees of piety engaged with various ideas and how they considered themselves a part of the communities and contexts in which they lived. I did not seek members of a specific group

nor did I discriminate on the basis of self-described piety. I spoke to and spent time with anyone and everyone who was generous enough to share their time with me. This biased my findings in that I spoke to more women than men being that I found female networks easier to build, yet it also ensured that I was exposed to a diverse mix of opinions, attitudes and ways of being Muslim. I did not focus upon my Muslim participants' religious identity yet I did observe the ways in which their assertion of it, at any given moment, impacted their lives. At best, religious identity informed the expectations of participants by others around them and at worst, it was a source of discrimination for them. In other words, my research participants' religious identity, even if it was imposed upon them by others, is part of the structural reality in which they live in both Sydney and Singapore. At this point in the chapter it is appropriate to briefly sketch these structural realities.

Muslims in multicultural Australia

Australia has long been a nation that is home to many cultures and where migrants and their descendants have come to far outnumber Indigenous communities. In recognition of the cultural diversity among its residents, Australia has institutionalised 'multiculturalism' as a national policy from the 1970s, yet what that policy looked like in practice has varied according to each serving government's visions and objectives in implementing it (Pardy and Lee 2011: 298). In recent years, many governments of multicultural countries have rethought their commitment to protecting cultural diversity and have instead started emphasising a need to cultivate integration and cohesion (Isin and Turner 2007: 11), which are often spoken of in terms of 'security'. Australia, in this respect, is no different and in 2007, the Howard government replaced the term 'multiculturalism' with 'citizenship', which according to Pardy and Lee (2011: 297) both reflected and led a national 'mood of frustration and fatigue with the labour of living with cultural diversity'. In 2011, the Australian Federal Government reinstated the usage of multiculturalism in Australian

political life, yet the tensions and disagreements surrounding what constitutes 'Australianness' in a multicultural Australia, as well as the compatibility of multiculturalism and 'Aussie values', continue at both the popular and political level (Hage, 1998; Hopkins, 2011; Mansouri and Pietsch, 2011; Woodlock, 2011).

Despite the fact that some of the earliest settlers in Australia were Muslim (Ganter 2008: 488), Muslim migrants and Muslim Australians have been often discriminated against and negatively stereotyped from the arrival of the first Afghan cameleers in the 1860s to the present day (Saniotis 2004: 50). Common among these stereotypes are beliefs that Muslims, as a result of some inherent quality of 'Islam' (Hopkins 2011: 111; Poynting et al. 2004: 14), are backward and violent (Ganter 2008: 482), wish to 'take over' Australia (Dunn, Klocker, and Salabay 2007: 571); are misogynistic (Kabir 2011: 246), are irrational (Kabir 2008: 274); are unable to adapt to Australia's 'Judeo-Christian culture' (Kabir 2007: 1286), and are more religiously observant than any other faith community in Australia (Hopkins 2011; Woodlock 2011: 398).   Although Muslim communities in Australia are highly ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse, this heterogeneity is frequently overlooked in general discourse and in the media (Kabir 2006: 313), particularly following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States (Saniotis 2004: 51) as well as the tragic 'Sydney rapes' in 2000, the 2005 Cronulla riots, and Sheikh Hilali's highly publicised comments about rape in 2006 (Bloul 2008: 11)[2].

The widespread discourse of mistrust and stereotypes that circulates around Muslims in Australia has consequences for how many Muslim and non-Muslim Australians perceive and interact with each other (Hopkins 2011). This in turn influences popular ideas of 'Australianness', and as a result many recent discussions of Australian multiculturalism

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[2] To summarise briefly, the 'Sydney rapes' in 2000 were perpetrated against Anglo-Australian women by a group of Lebanese Australian young men (Carne, 2015); the 2005 Cronulla riots resulted from racial tension following a brawl between young men of Anglo and Middle Eastern appearance (Farrell, 2015), and Sheikh Hilaly's comments compared women who do not dress modestly to 'uncovered meat' (Tran, 2006).

include debates about the compatibility of Islam and 'Aussie values' and whether or not Muslims, in particular, pose a cultural threat. Although assimilation is no longer a policy aim in Australia, religious groups are still widely expected to be assimilated to a 'secular society' (Bouma 1997: 74). Furthermore, there exists a common perception among both Muslims and non-Muslims that an authentic Australian identity is not accessible to members of minority communities (Woodlock 2011: 396; Hage 1998). Many Muslims, then, may feel that they are in a bind where it is possible to be 'either truly Australian or truly Muslim but not both at the same time' (Woodlock 2011: 392).

Noble and Tabar have suggested that the children of migrants to Australia are 'caught between cultures' in that they live in both the culture of their parents as well as that of wider Australian society (2002: 131). While this is certainly true for some, others may strive to reject everything that they associate with 'Australianness', the definition of which can vary greatly from person to person (Kabir 2011: 248; Rane et al. 2011: 131). Others still forge what may be considered to be 'new' identities that reject any dichotomy between the categories 'Muslim' and 'Australian' (Dunn 2004: 347). Finally, there are also cultural nominalists who have little, if anything, other than a distant familial connection to Islam (Saeed 2007: 400), with many Aboriginal Australians among them (Stephenson 2011), yet this does not suggest that such people have no Muslim identity. Indeed, there are many non-practicing Muslims for whom being 'Muslim' denotes membership of a social category rather than a religious one (Martin 2010; Spielhaus 2010: 18). With the boundaries between 'practicing' and 'non-practicing' being highly subjective and variable, the simplest element of a person's Muslim identity is arguably an individual's commitment to identifying themselves as such. How that assertion of Muslim identity translates into lived experience is what we observe when we study the immense diversity of discourses and practices that exist both within and between Muslim communities.

Muslims in multicultural Singapore

Singapore is a small, yet economically prosperous, city-state in Southeast Asia with a resident population of about 3.7 million (Singapore Department of Statistics 2010). The vast majority of Singaporeans are either descended from migrants, or migrants themselves, and this has caused Singapore to be described as a 'settler country' (Chua 2003: 59), although 'indigenous status' has been constitutionally granted to the ethnic Malay community (Mutalib 2012: 33), which is overwhelmingly Muslim. Home to an extremely diverse ethnic mix of people, race, culture and religion are common topics of discussion, as are the government's strategies of managing the population's intercultural relations. Indeed, Singaporeans are keenly aware of this given that all citizens, upon birth, are assigned a 'race' that will remain with them on their ID cards (Vasu 2008: 24), determine which public Housing Development Board (HDB) blocks they can and cannot live in (Sin 2003: 530), and sometimes impact upon which public resources are available to them during their lives (Chee 1995: 9).

In its treatment of race as an objective and real category, the Singaporean state recognises all citizens as 'hyphenated-citizens' (Chua 2003), where multiracialism is seamlessly integrated into Singaporean society as a 'cultural and social institution' (Benjamin 1976: 115). The 'hyphenation' of Singaporeanness is evident in many spheres of everyday life from the 'mother tongue' language a child will learn in school to the colourful displays of community-specific public holidays, such as Chinese New Year, Deepavali or Ramadan, which are widely perceived as cheerful reminders of Singapore's 'salad bowl' (as opposed to the U.S. metaphor of a 'melting pot' [Mutalib 2012: 39]) approach to multiculturalism. However, the hyphenation of Singaporean identity is perhaps best illustrated in the classification of people into the categories of 'Chinese', 'Malay', 'Indian' or 'Other' (often abbreviated to CMIO), which were inherited from the British administration of Singapore and which gloss over the heterogeneous nature of the

respective communities (Chua 2007). This system of classification, besides proliferating stereotypes (Chua 2003), complements a racial hierarchy of sorts that exists in Singapore where the politically dominant Chinese are positioned (and not only by those who are identified as 'Chinese') at the top of the social stratification (Barr & Skrbis 2008: 10-13; Lee 2004: 41).

While Chinese Singaporeans are widely considered to be privileged by simple virtue of their being born Chinese, Malay Muslim Singaporeans are often perceived as being disadvantaged in many respects, based on economic and educational disparities between the communities (Chua, 2003; Lee, 2004; Rahim 2012). The Singaporean government has instituted some measures to assist the Malay community, such as the establishment in 1982 of the Council for the Development of Singapore Malay/Muslim Community, Yayasan MENDAKI, which was intended to tackle issues considered to be troublesome among the Malays in particular (Mutalib, 2012: 34), such as drug abuse, poor sexual health, teen pregnancy and educational underachievement. However, as Lee (2004: 41) has noticed,

> These affirmative policies that aim at 'upgrading' the Malays, together with a state policy of using ethnicity as a primary social identification, further accentuate ethnic differences and cultural inferiority of the Malays. Because Chinese are the dominant group politically and are at the pinnacle of the social stratification, state policies that target ethnic minorities to improve their socio-economic statuses promote the notion that the Chinese are a different species and culturally superior to other ethnic groups, and all other ethnic groups should emulate the Chinese. Already such a perception has permeated minority groups. There is a widespread feeling among the educated ethnic minorities that they have been treated unfairly, and that social mobility is better if one is Chinese.

In Singapore, all communities are compared with each other in terms of educational achievement, economic status and even reputation as law-abiding citizens. Despite that little attention is given to where the 'Others' stand, that is, those who are neither Chinese, Malay nor Indian, there are still common stereotypes about Europeans, Americans and other *ang mohs* (those who appear to be racially White) as well as migrants and migrant workers from elsewhere in Asia.

Discrimination and disadvantage is not only linked to ethnicity, however, as religion, and Islam in particular, is frequently used as a basis to negatively stereotype people in Singapore, as indeed elsewhere. Given that, as of 2010, 98.7% of the Malay community identified themselves as 'Muslim' (Singapore Department of Statistics 2010), Malay ethnicity and Muslim identity have been conflated (Rahim 2012: 171), so that many of the social issues that are considered especially problematic among the Malay community are viewed to be the result of being Muslim as much as being Malay. This perception can result in some very odd and even contradictory stereotypes. For example, Muslim Singaporeans are often considered to be lazy (Kopnina 2004: 252) as well as predisposed toward drug abuse and delinquency (Vasu 2008: 29; Sin 2002a: 225), yet they are also considered to be more religious than other groups (Mutalib 2012: 43), where being 'religious' is sometimes seen as posing a potential security threat. Muslim Singaporeans are widely considered to be unpatriotic and untrustworthy (Rahim, 2012: 181), and also incapable of 'integration' (Sin 2002b: 1372), which is a bizarre accusation in a state where rigid and artificial racial divisions permeate almost every aspect of social and political life. Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, the highly influential founding Prime Minister of Singapore, expressed this very sentiment in 2010 by bluntly stating, 'I would say, today, we can integrate all religions and races except Islam' (Kwang et al. 2011: 228).

Although Singapore is possibly the first country in the world to declare itself a constitutionally 'multiracial' state (Chua 2003: 60), the Singaporean government is often

spoken of as employing a 'hard multiculturalism', where the rights of minority groups are protected through institutional recognition of cultural difference (Vasu 2008: 22). The two seemingly similar terms have been differentiated by Mutalib (2012: 47), who suggests that multiracialism views ethnic diversity as a liability to cohesive nation-building efforts while multiculturalism celebrates such diversity. Still, whether by way of multiracialism or multiculturalism, the Singaporean government has categorised and managed difference among citizens through the concept of race, used as an administrative apparatus (PuruShotam 1998), from the dawn of national independence to the present time of writing and the government-imposed categories of difference have a profound impact on the way Singaporeans, regardless of religion, view themselves and each other.

Plan for chapters

Singapore and Sydney are both vibrantly multicultural contexts that are rich in complexity. In order to illustrate the unique character of these field sites in as much detail as possible, I focus on one field site per chapter and divide this thesis into three broad areas of inquiry that explore research participants' experiences of sex education, non-heterosexualities, and heterosexual dating. Chapters 2 and 3 contextualise the chapters that follow by demonstrating a diversity of attitudes towards sexuality among research participants as they recall their experiences of sex education. Chapters 4 and 5 provide an insight into the special challenges that face non-heterosexual and/or gender diverse Muslims. Finally, chapters 6 and 7 examine the varied approaches to romance and dating among heterosexual cisgender participants in this study. All chapters document examples of tactics of resistance employed by research participants as they articulate their understandings of Islam and negotiate their belonging within the Muslim communities and wider societies in which they live. As Muslims in both Sydney and Singapore are minority groups that are beleaguered by negative stereotypes, research participants' positive yet

personalised affirmations of their Muslim identities serve as acts of resistance that challenge the binary between pious and impious Muslims and demonstrate the nuanced reality of lived religion.

Chapter 2 documents research participants' recollections of their secondary school experiences of sex education and discusses their attitudes towards what they were taught in Singapore. Instead of interpreting research participants' perspectives in terms of their self-defined levels of piety, this chapter considers specific practices and beliefs with an intention to observe the wide range of influences that inform them among individuals. Drawing inspiration from other studies that explore elements of struggle or ambivalence experienced by some Muslims in their daily lives (Schielke, 2009; Jeldtoft, 2011; Otterbeck, 2016), the focus in this chapter is on exploring a diversity of viewpoints from the proudly pious to the self-defined sinners who are confident in their faith despite their self-perceived moral failings.

Chapter 3 considers the reflections of some young, unmarried Muslims about their past experiences of sex education in Sydney public schools and explores their conceptualisations of sex, gender and values. My data suggests that public schools can be perceived by some as a moralising force that does not allow for alternative moralities and is seen ultimately as being part of a larger secularising and assimilatory strategy of the Australian state. Participants in this study report such perceptions as polarising opinions and creating an environment in which some young Muslims feel as if they must choose between opposing categories of 'Muslim values' and 'Australian values' in articulating their own understandings of sexual ethics and morality.

Chapter 4 focuses on some of the unique challenges that Muslim LGBTQ Singaporeans face. Beginning with a brief discussion of the moral conservatism that Singapore has become known for internationally as well as an overview of Islamic discourses on non-heterosexualities, this chapter explores how many common negative

attitudes towards same-sex attraction have been internalised by some Singaporean non-heterosexual Muslims. As a minority within a minority, non-heterosexual and gender diverse Muslims in Singapore are often vulnerable to several intersecting forms of discrimination from their families, the Malay Muslim community and also the Singaporean state — all of which discipline how they present themselves, how they perceive themselves and also what they perceive to be authentic ways of leading Islamic lives. Yet, despite the challenges they face, some view non-heterosexuality as either being morally neutral or even something to be celebrated. This chapter works towards showcasing the range of Islamic diversity among participants in this study by introducing the ideas of Michel de Certeau and scholarship on resistance to help explore how some non-heterosexual and gender diverse Muslims use small, everyday acts of resistance against local Muslim orthodoxies in order to carve out their own space as Singaporean Muslims.

Chapter 5 discusses the experiences of research participants in Sydney who are non-heterosexual and/or gender diverse. Starting with a discussion about why some were reluctant to participate in local group Muslims Against Homophobia's contribution to the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parade, this chapter explores participants' feelings of ambivalence, perceived obligations to protect family members from shame as well as experiences of disillusionment with mainstream LGBTQ spaces in Sydney. These factors, among others, motivated many research participants to resist assuming gay, lesbian or bisexual identities and this chapter will conclude by discussing how stage models of sexual identity may or may not help in understanding ambivalence or compartmentalisation among some while also exploring how the weaknesses of these models as they apply to research participants may be a rich source of information in their own right.

Chapter 6 begins with a discussion of some of the Singaporean state's efforts to shape demographics through policy and show how these regulatory strategies prove to be disproportionately disciplinary in their impact on the Malay Muslim community.   Drawing

upon Michel de Certeau's framework for understanding the strategies of control by the powerful and the tactics of resistance employed by those subject to it discussed in chapter 5, the chapter then explores the influence of state discourse surrounding what it means to be a 'successful Singaporean' on romantic choices among young Malays and the instances in which young people resist social expectations or strategically comply with them for personal benefit.

Chapter 7 examines the varied ways in which participants in this study pursue and understand romantic relationships against a backdrop of stereotypes that characterise them as belonging to a repressive religion that overwhelms personal will and determines their social relationships and life choices (Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005: 5; Saniotis, 2004: 51). The pressures that negative representations of Muslims place on young Australian Muslims can impact upon self-perceptions, piety (or the public performance thereof) as well as concepts of intimacy, all of which then in turn influence the romantic relationships they pursue. Starting with a brief examination of some concepts of intimacy and the expectations that participants in this study have of intimate relationships, this chapter then discusses examples that illustrate the various ways in which some young heterosexual Sydney Muslims strategically engage with or resist Islamic, ethnically specific, or mainstream Anglo-Australian practices of intimacy.

In the conclusion, I summarise the key themes I have identified within this thesis and identify the theoretical contribution this research potentially makes towards exploring the vibrant diversity of Muslim religiosity and the various forces of both strategy and resistance that make it possible.

Chapter Two

Keeping sins sensible: sex education in Singapore

Young people of almost any community, ethnicity or religion may find themselves in a position where they are expected by their community and/or family to abstain from sexual contact and yet at the same time ardently wish to explore it. Muslim communities are no exception to this and although education about safe sex practices are considered by many educators and health professionals to be the best way of protecting sexual health and preventing unplanned conception (Dyson and Mitchell 2005: 136), plans to deliver it in classroom contexts often meet resistance within Muslim communities, where parents, students themselves, and other community members may fear it undermines the Islamic concept of family life and presents certain religiously-condemned behaviours as acceptable (Halstead 1997: 319). Literature documenting the various concerns among Muslims about sex education tends to present certain conservative Muslim discourses as representing authentic Islamic concepts values (Halstead, 1997; McInerney, Davidson and Suliman, 2000; Orgocka, 2004; Sanjakdar, 2004, 2009a, 2009b). However, the curricula involved in this kind of education can be highly variable in content, and attitudes among Muslims towards sexuality and sex education also vary greatly.   Through experiences collected in this research, this chapter will explore this variety and demonstrate that there is no singular Islamic approach to sex education while also showing the ambiguity of terms such as 'Islamic values'.

This chapter examines research participants' recollections of their secondary school experiences of sex education and discusses their attitudes towards what they were taught in Singapore. Local interpretations of sexual propriety and what may be considered appropriate—or useful—sex education among young Muslims can be shaped by factors

such as pragmatism, socioeconomic aspirations and definitions of what constitutes 'real sex'. Instead of interpreting research participants' perspectives in terms of their self-defined levels of piety, this chapter considers specific practices and beliefs with an intention to observe the wide range of influences that inform them among individuals. In the context-dependent nature of religiosity, drawing rigid distinctions between liberal and conservative Muslims, or even the pious and the irreligious, is misleading. Adopting an approach that is sensitive to non-Muslim influences on Muslim religious ethics yields a more accurate perspective of everyday lived experiences of Islam.

Studying sex in Singapore

The last time I met Razak, he was a 19-year-old student at a local junior college and very much involved in his ambitions to become a counsellor for troubled teens, a choice that reflected his own difficult years which were still fresh in his memory. We knew each other well since we had met 4 years earlier, before I commenced graduate studies, at the Malay-focused youth outreach group Clubilya and we had kept in touch ever since. Once I began my research, Razak became an active research participant through our conversations and also through introducing me to many of his friends who were willing, if sometimes shy, to share their thoughts and experiences.

I had met Razak at the Esplanade park, a waterside tree-lined promenade outside the Esplanade Theatres building, to ask about his memories of public school-based sex education, but he easily asked me as many questions as I asked him. He wanted to know about Australian secondary schools and how, if at all, the information about sex and relationships taught there differed to what he was familiar with in the Singaporean public school system. On this particular quiet and balmy afternoon, in the dappled shade of the

walkway trees, I described as best as I could what comprehensive sex education[3] usually involves and how Australian public schools in recent history have aspired towards a sex-positive[4] approach that presents non-heterosexualities and premarital sex as morally neutral, and accepts oral sex and masturbation as normal and natural aspects of human sexuality (Epstein and Johnson 1998; Farrelly, O'Brien, and Prain 2007).

An elderly couple who had been sitting near us and very likely overheard some of our conversation glared at us disapprovingly and spoke to each other in hushed yet rapid-fire Mandarin Chinese as they rose and walked hurriedly past our bench. I was sorry that our conversation had disturbed their peace on such a beautiful afternoon and smiled meekly at them. Their reaction also caused me to question myself over whether I had successfully managed to remain within the realm of simple explanation without straying into ideological proselytisation, carefully remembering that I am an anthropologist in fieldwork as well as a friend. Lost in thought, Razak did not notice any of this exchange, which in truth was not much of an exchange as my pleading 'I-promise-I'm-not-trying-to-corrupt-him' smile was neither returned nor acknowledged by the couple, who simply strode on without a backwards glance. After a brief moment, Razak replied,

> I always think of myself as being very liberal, but I think that's a bit much. When you are taught things in school, they have a kind of special authority. It's not like reading something in a magazine or seeing it on TV. You expect school to be a source of truth. It's a place where you learn basic information that you need in life but also you learn how to act, what's right and what's not. I'm not

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[3] There are different ideas of how 'comprehensive' comprehensive sex education (CSE) should be. However, as it is commonly understood, CSE seeks to widen the aims of sex education to mean more than simple disease prevention and follows the World Health Organisation's definition of sexual health as being '[...] a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality [...]' (WHO 2006: 5).

[4] Comprehensive sex education in general has changed throughout the years to include an ever-increasing range of topics, yet there are still potentially relevant issues which are being often left out of the curriculum, such as sexual violence (Carmody 2009), pleasure, power and consent (Powel 2010; Allen 2005) as well as the needs of LGBTQ students (Hillier and Mitchell 2008).

perfect. I've had girlfriends and fooled around with all kinds, but that's my

business, my choices, my sins. It's good if it [CSE] can teach you to be

sensible or safe, but I don't think a school should be teaching you that these

kind of things are normal and good. That's too much for me! I wouldn't want my

[future] kids learning that, would you?

Razak's objection to my portrayal of what (in theory) constitutes comprehensive

classroom-based sex education it is far from unique. When the presentation of

comprehensive sex education in public schools attracts criticism from religious groups or

individuals, the reasons often centre around a perceived incompatibility of values (Luker

2006; Irvine 2002). At their core, these objections originate from a rejection of a sex

education approach that is, according to Halstead (1997: 321), 'based on a humanistic

interpretation of the needs and will of the individual rather than on religious foundations'.

Although scholars sometimes frame Muslim objections to this approach in terms of a

rejection of so-called 'Judeo-Christian values' (Sanjakdar 2004), sex education curricula

are often criticised for similar reasons by some among various Christian (Luker 2006;

Irvine 2002) and Jewish (Hartman and Samet 2007) communities as well. Similarly, it

would be wrong to presume that individuals without a religious faith may be more

comfortable with discussing sexual health with young people as awkwardness surrounding

this topic is widespread across many demographics (Diiorio, Pluhar and Belcher, 2003;

Wilson et al., 2010).

In Singapore, a country which is home to a diverse mix of religions and has a strong

reputation for conservatism (Mathews, 2014), the sex education curriculum in all

government primary and secondary schools, as well as junior colleges, is managed by the

Ministry of Education (MOE) to ensure that the content delivered upholds Singaporean

'shared values' as defined by the state (Tan and Chew, 2004)[5]. Subjects such as Biology as well as Character and Citizenship Education also incorporate aspects of the Ministry of Education's Sexuality Education Program and schools are required to use MOE-produced or approved resources with lessons carried out by 'specially-selected and MOE-trained Sexuality Education teachers' who are credited with possessing 'values that are aligned with MOE values in Sexuality Education' (Ministry of Education 2015a). The aims of the MOE Sexuality Education Program are neatly summarised on its website as follows, and public schools within the small city-state are expected to closely comply:

> Abstinence before marriage is the best course of action for teenagers. Sexuality Education teaches students the possible consequences of sexual activity and that *pre-marital sex is not desirable as there are inherent risks*.
>
> To reduce the incidence of STIs/HIV and teenage pregnancies among our young, a practical approach is adopted. Sexuality Education teaches students facts about contraception, *repercussions of casual sex*, and the prevention of diseases from a health perspective. This is in addition to teaching teenagers about building healthy relationships and how to say "no" to sexual advances. Sexuality Education teaches students what homosexuality is, and the current *legal provisions concerning homosexual acts* in Singapore. (Ministry of Education Singapore 2015b, emphasis added)

This approach, which presents sexual activity as inherently risky and underscores existing legal prohibitions against homosexual acts between males (L. J. Chua, 2003; Chen, 2013), explicitly endorses heterosexuality, premarital abstinence, as well as marriage and childbearing as part of the ideal Singaporean cultural life course.

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[5] For a discussion about Singapore's shared values, as well as the broader 'Asian values' political discourse that informs them, please see Peletz (2009: 199-206) as well as chapter 2 of this thesis.

I have found that when compared to the discussions about the content of public school sex education in Western countries, the Singaporean Ministry of Education's approach attracts less criticism from Muslim communities. In contrast to objections from some Muslims about the values underpinning sex education in schools discussed in existing literature from the UK (Halstead, 1997; Halstead and Lewicka, 1998; Halstead and Reiss, 2003), US (Orgocka, 2004) and Australia (Sanjakdar, 2004, 2005, 2009b, 2013), most of my research participants and their families either found little reason for these types of concerns about the content of Singaporean public school sex education and instead were sometimes concerned about how limited it was. To illustrate, Raihana, an 18-year-old Singaporean Malay Muslim woman who defined herself as being both conservative and religiously observant, recalled her experience of sex education in the public secondary school as being mostly unremarkable yet still somewhat awkward. With her secondary school years not yet far behind her, she could remember clearly that topics linked to sexuality, sexual and reproductive health were covered, but they focused on abstinence, sexually transmitted infections and possible negative social repercussions arising from premarital sex. These lessons were sometimes uncomfortable, she believed, because sexuality was perceived by most of her classmates to be a shameful topic and having discussions framed in risk-avoidance terms did not help ease the awkwardness. Although Raihana agreed that sexual intimacy is best experienced only between a heterosexual married couple, the framing of contraceptive use as something healthy and acceptable only as part of family planning within marriage was something that troubled her. Despite Raihana's piety she was well aware at the time that many of the other Muslim students were not similarly practicing and she worried that opportunities for open communication about sexuality and sexual health were not readily available to those of her classmates, both Muslim and non-Muslim, who were sexually active.

Similarly, 20-year-old Azhari, a Singaporean Malay Muslim man, recalled the social consequences of premarital sex being emphasised at the public secondary school he attended. He remembered lessons that presented the possibility of shaming one's family and/or having difficulty attracting or keeping a marriage partner in future as a consequence of engaging in premarital sex while young.   From Azhari's perspective, the sex education he received in school was basic yet satisfactory. In response to my description of what comprehensive sex education often covers overseas, he spoke of appreciating that the lessons he attended in Singapore did not try to normalise premarital sex or same-sex intimacy, both of which he disapproved of, and he understood this approach to sex education to be a morally neutral one. In multicultural Singapore, public schools often have students from many ethnic and religious backgrounds sitting together in the same classroom. Azhari believed that advising students to avoid sexual intimacy of any kind outside of heterosexual marriage to be one point that most Singaporeans could agree on, regardless of their ethnicity or religion, and this is why he described his experience of sex education as being morally neutral. One of the state-defined Singaporean values Azhari took most pride in was the government's emphasis on protecting the family unit and he believed the sex education curriculum in public schools reflected that during his school years.

Azhari was not alone among my research participants in describing the Singapore Ministry of Education's approach to sex education favourably. Indeed, I found that public school sex education in Singapore was considered uncontroversial among most of my Singaporean Muslim research participants for three main reasons. Firstly, the curriculum guidance is based on the premise that abstinence is by far the best choice for young people and that premarital sex is laden with inherent risks, which harmonises with many research participants' understanding that Islam teaches similarly. Secondly, the education about contraception and sexual health is taught from a theoretical as opposed to a

practical 'condoms-on-bananas' approach, which avoids placing sensitive students in classroom situations that they might consider to be confronting. Thirdly and finally, given that oral and anal sex between male same-sex partners is illegal in Singapore (L. J. Chua, 2003; Chen, 2013) and that same-sex relationships are generally stigmatised, students are taught the basics about what non-heterosexuality is without it being endorsed by teachers as being in any way equivalent to heterosexuality[6]. Since the aim of the Ministry of Education is to teach students that premarital sex is risky, abstinence is the only way to be 100% safe, and sexual relationships are only healthy and positive within the context of heterosexual marriages, few research participants perceived any contradiction with their understanding of Islamic religious guidance on proper sexual conduct.

Non-heteronormativity and education in Singapore

While most research participants found little cause for concern with their experiences of public school sex education, with exceptions such as Raihana's desire for a more practical and open approach in the classroom discussed above, some worried that sex education in Singaporean public schools may be changing. Juhairi, for example, a 20-year-old Singaporean Malay Muslim man, suggested an addition to the Health Promotion Board's website in 2014 that provided information about non-heterosexualities was evidence of what he considered to be a worrying change in the Singaporean state's position on homosexuality, and he expected this to eventually be reflected in public school sex education. This was problematic because, as Juhairi explained, 'talking about it [same-sex intimacy] in school might confuse people'. Similar to Razak and others, Juhairi believed that any information presented in a public school curriculum is understood by students to be authoritative and therefore trustworthy. When I asked him about the potential influence

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[6] Although the Ministry of Education includes homosexuality as a topic for discussion within public school sex education, most of my research participants who were former public school students had no recollection of the topic being discussed during their education.

of the Health Promotion Board's changes on school curricula, he elaborated that if lesson plans were amended to provide information about gender diversity and non-heterosexualities as the Health Promotion Board presented it, students might come to consider sexual and gender diversity to be normal and this might confuse their morality. For Juhairi as well as Razak and many others I interviewed in Singapore, public schools have a responsibility to not only provide factually correct information to their students but also to guide them morally towards heteronormativity. The content of the Health Promotion Board's website made Juhairi question whether the Singaporean state would be able to provide what he believed to be a morally upright public school education to students in the future.

The Health Promotion Board is a Singaporean government organisation that was established in 2001 to promote healthy living among citizens through 'evidence-based health information' (Health Promotion Board 2017). In 2014, the Health Promotion Board created a Frequently Asked Questions page about sexuality that covered topics on gender identity, sexual orientation and HIV/AIDS (Health Promotion Board 2017b). The page, which Juhairi refers to, received a lot of media attention and while it was welcomed by some Singaporeans, it provoked outrage among many others (Hoe, 2014; Loh, 2014; Siau, 2014a, 2014b). For example, Dr Thio Su Mien, a 76-year-old Singaporean Christian of Chinese heritage and former Dean of the Faculty of Law at the National University of Singapore, penned an open letter to the Singaporean Minister of Health in which she wrote,

> 'The entire FAQ and Answers are at odds with the Shared Values of our nation. Anyone reading the FAQ on Sexuality and its Answers may reasonably conclude that the materials in the website have the effect of normalising homosexuality. On the FAQ "How different is a same-sex relationship from a heterosexual relationship", the answer is "a same-sex relationship is not too different from a heterosexual

relationship". The effect of this would be to encourage a lobby for same- sex marriage on equality of treatment and human right arguments' (Thio, 2014).

Dr Thio's response reflects the concerns of many Singaporeans, from my Muslim research participants such as Razak and Juhairi to Christian Members of Parliament who have publicly questioned the Ministry of Health about the Health Promotion Board's FAQ (Siau, 2014a). Across ethnic and religious backgrounds, many Singaporeans disapprove of same-sex relationships (Mathews, 2014), and this is observable in resistance against the presentation of same-sex relationships in educational materials as being in any way equal to heterosexual relationships.

Muslims are sometimes presented in scholarship as being particularly likely to be homophobic (Siraj, 2009: 41; 2016: 188; Kelly, 2010: 249; Sarac, 2015: 482-483). In the context of Singapore, the distrust among my research participants of information that normalises homosexuality cannot simply be reduced to their religiosity. Anthropologist Nur Amali Ibrahim (2016: 972) has argued that Singaporean Muslims sometimes reproduce homophobic evangelical Christian discourses which contrasts with a previous general lack of concern with homosexuality. Given that the loyalty of Singaporean Muslims to the state is frequently questioned in both public and political discourse (Chua, 2003; Kopnina, 2004; Vasu, 2008; Mutalib, 2012; Rahim, 2012), Ibrahim suggests that standing in solidarity with Singaporean Christians, who are often middle-class and ethnically Chinese, provides Singaporean Muslims with a means of performing 'good citizenship' as an attempt to overcome their underprivileged and distrusted minority status (2016: 981). My findings support Ibrahim's argument that homophobia among Muslims in Singapore is not rooted in some intrinsic quality of Islam or Malay culture. However, I have observed that only certain Singaporean Malay Muslims appear interested in performing 'good citizenship' and many others instead mock the conservatism that the Singaporean state prides itself on.

Those of my Singaporean Muslim research participants who have described themselves as conservative or pious have understood those terms, as well as others that indicate religiosity, in nuanced and variable ways. Raihana, for example, described herself as conservative and religiously observant, yet she had a deep respect for people who did not adhere to the same principles as her. Her acceptance of difference as well as her belief in the benefits of protecting public health informed her desire for a better quality of sex education that might help keep sexually active students safe. Razak, by contrast, did not define himself as either conservative nor particularly religious, and yet his response to the prospect of educating secondary school students about sexual health precautions and non-heterosexualities was far more conservative than Raihana's point of view. Raihana and Razak's respective responses illustrate only two examples of many among my research participants where a person's self-description is not a useful indicator of their attitudes or beliefs. Conservatism or piety are context dependent and have been understood by many of my research participants in complex ways that belie commonsense definitions. Whether conservative or liberal, pious or irreligious, Muslims may find the Singaporean Ministry of Education's approach to sex education in public schools to be wholesomely protective of family values, in danger of promoting immorality laughably outdated or even harmfully retrograde for reasons that appear to often have little to do with self-defined levels of conservatism or religiosity.

Sex education has been a hot topic in Singapore in recent years. In 2014, a 17 year-old student named Agatha Tan wrote an open letter to the principal of Hwa Chong Institution, the junior college she attended, to draw attention to the content of a sex education workshop run by Focus on the Family Singapore (Lee and Tan, 2014). The workshop was called 'It's Uncomplicated' and it featured a booklet containing adapted excerpts from a Christian publication that purported to offer insight to young women into what men think about and how they approach sex and relationships titled 'For Women

Only' (Feldhahn, 2013). Tan took photographs of a booklet used in the workshop, which made claims that she believed perpetuated harmful gender stereotypes and promoted rape culture, and posted them online where they quickly went viral and provoked the government to carefully consider the feedback (Fang, 2014). The content of the booklet described girls as '"emotional", "wanting security" and needing to "look attractive", while boys "needed respect" and "didn't want a girlfriend that questions their opinions and argues with their decisions all the time"' (Lee and Tan, 2014). Of course, Singapore is not unique in perpetuating gender stereotypes in sex education or in teaching young women to, as Hendricks (2011: 590) phrases it, 'assume primary responsibility for controlling boys' lust for premarital sex and, once safely married, fulfil their husbands' needs for admiration and sex'. Although the aim of the Focus on the Family workshop was on healthy relationships instead of sex education, the incident stimulated public discussion in the Singaporean media as well as online about the nature of current sex education and what should be improved for future generations of students. It also demonstrated, as anthropologist Crystal Abidin has observed, that young Singaporeans use social media to share information, organise themselves and voice opinions that they might not have the opportunity to otherwise discuss (2017: 496). In Singapore, the Internet currently serves as the primary arena for political and social debate (Ibrahim 2016: 961), and such debate is often lively.

Shafinaz, a 24-year-old Singaporean Malay Muslim woman, explained to me that the media coverage of this incident provoked her to reflect on what she was taught as well as what she would like her future children to be taught in school about sex and relationships. She said, 'I think [the Focus on the Family workshop] was quite harmful, really. […] I don't remember much about sex education apart from being taught the basics of how [reproductive] biology works as well as lots of scary pictures [of infected genitals]. I learned about safe sex from friends. We didn't really talk about relationships in school either, and

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that might be a good thing! I wouldn't want my [future] kids taught this way. Especially if they are girls. These kinds of beliefs are used to limit women'. Shafinaz followed the online discussion surrounding the media coverage of the workshop although she did not engage in it herself. 'A lot of my friends were talking about this on Facebook,' she explained, 'but I didn't want to get involved because some people were becoming fierce over it'. The online discussion about the Focus on the Family workshop polarised her friends and highlighted ideological divisions among them that Shafinaz had not noticed before. She lamented, for example, that some of them, both male and female, felt that the concept of feminism was a threat to family life and represented a Western cultural revolt against the so-called natural roles of men and women. To those friends, who were also Muslim, the Focus on the Family workshop was simply a pragmatic approach to teach young men and women to be aware of their differences and to guide them into their respective roles in society, which they saw as something shared between Islam and Christianity as well as other major faith groups in Singapore. Despite her disagreement, Shafinaz felt that entering into discussion online with such friends would be pointless. She was concerned those of her friends who supported the Focus on the Family approach to sex education would not take her opinions seriously because of her lifestyle and might even accuse her of spreading corrupt ideas. According to Shafinaz, her friends could tolerate her moral shortcomings as well as their own only as long as no attempts were made to challenge what they believed to be true Islam.

Shafinaz described herself as a 'lazy Muslim' meaning that although she happily identified as Muslim and saw Islam as a positive aspect of her and her family's lives, she was not someone overly concerned with Islamic practice and she enjoyed pastimes that her more religiously observant family were aware of but chose to ignore, such as going to nightclubs with friends and drinking alcohol. She believed that premarital sex was sinful, yet it was also an important test of compatibility before marriage. While we were

discussing the moral mistakes that young people can make, Shafinaz joked that, 'having sex before marriage is probably much less of a problem than marrying someone who is no use [in bed]'. After enjoying some more years of her youth, Shafinaz planned to marry, bear children and lead a more pious life in the long term. However, she did not foresee that her relaxed attitudes towards premarital sexuality or gender norms would change. Despite her lack of religious observance, Shafinaz valued spirituality and believed that Islamic values centred around creating harmony within communities and between people and the earth. Consensual sexual relationships between heterosexual or homosexual adults did not upset this harmony, according to Shafinaz, so she could not understand why some people were so outraged about that and not similarly outraged about violence, poverty, or environmental degradation for example. While she would never think of removing her future children from a sex education lesson because it covered gender or sexual diversity, she suggested that she would consider removing her children from sex education that followed the Focus on the Family approach.

Parents and families and sex education in Singapore

Parents are free to withdraw their children from sex education lessons (Liew 2014: 707), and some do for a variety of reasons, such as a belief that information about contraception and disease prevention decreases the risks from sexual activity—and thus facilitates it—or a fear that merely speaking about sexuality may arouse potentially immoral curiosities in the minds of students. Parents also do not have to articulate their own reasons for removing children from sex education. For example, the Ministry of Education provides opt-out forms for parents to complete that lists specific reasons that it anticipates may be cause for parents to wish to remove their children. The following list is taken from a letter provided to parents regarding the Empowered Teens (eTeens) programme, which the Health Promotion Board has been conducting for public school students since 1993 and

which aims to raise awareness of various sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS and ways of protecting oneself (Ministry of Education, 2017).

The list reads as follows:

1.) My child is too young;

2.) I would like to personally educate my child;

3.) I am not comfortable with the topics/content to be covered;

4.) Religious reasons;

5.) I have previously taught my child the topics/content to be covered;

6.) I do not think it is necessary for my child to attend;

7.) Others (please state).

None of the research participants in this study who were public school students were removed from any part of the sex education curriculum by a parent or guardian. Very few participants recalled discussing their experience of school-based sex education with a parent or guardian either, and the few who did were all female. A minority of participants in this research attended private Islamic secondary schools and their recollections of sex education were similar to those who attended public secondary schools.

Sex education in Singapore is perceived by some families as entirely optional. Given research indicating that it is very difficult for some Singaporean parents and caregivers to talk openly about sex with young people (Wong et al. 2012; Hu et al. 2012), some young people are left to find their own answers while growing up. As Nurul, a 23-year-old female Singaporean Malay Muslim who graduated from an Islamic secondary school told me, 'My parents thought that there was no need to discuss sex, either what it's about or how safe sex works. They just thought that you'd learn everything you need to know when you get married […] through practice, I guess'. Nurul did receive some basic sex education at the Islamic secondary school she attended, however. In addition to information about human biology and reproduction, Nurul recalls receiving lessons about the importance of

abstinence before marriage and the dangers of sexually transmitted infections. Otherwise, some information about the Islamic rights and responsibilities of spouses was provided, but Nurul was unable to remember any specific details.

Educational outcomes for research participants such as Nurul, who attended Islamic secondary schools, did not appear to differ significantly with regard to sex education from those who attended public schools. Both former students of public and Islamic secondary schools recall being taught similar lessons that focused upon abstinence, the risk of sexually transmitted infections as well as the necessity of heterosexual marriage as the sole means of experiencing a healthy, moral sex life. The national curriculum is not binding upon Islamic schools in Singapore (Ibrahim 2016: 972), yet secular subjects are loosely based on basic benchmarks set by the Ministry of Education (Tan and Hairon 2012: 550). As such, Islamic schools have a lot of freedom to decide what to offer in terms of sexuality and relationships education. Yet given that the sexuality education curricula set by the Ministry of Education roughly matches local Islamic expectations for young people to remain chaste before entering into a heterosexual marriage, research participants' memories of classroom instruction in public and Islamic schools differ in their recollection of the rhetoric used during lessons but not in the fundamental message provided to students.

Outside of Singapore, some Muslims in the UK, concerned about the content of comprehensive sex education as taught in public schools, have suggested that approaches that do not condemn premarital sex encourage Islamically unacceptable behaviour (Khodabakhsh and Patel, 2009). A study of 238 female Muslim inmates from four Malaysian governmental welfare institutions[7], which appeared in the Elselvier journal

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[7] Similar welfare institutions also exist in Singapore for both boys and girls. Two that cater to the needs of young Singaporean Muslims are the PERTAPIS Centre for Women & Girls as well as the Muhammadiyah Welfare Home for boys. They both provide shelter and Islamic moral guidance to young people who are victims of abuse, neglect or homelessness and also to those who are juvenile offenders or categorised as 'beyond parental control'.

Procedia - Social and Behavioural Sciences, suggested that sex education should be provided to prevent premarital sex and linked premarital sexual activity among girls to low self esteem and a lack of self respect (Ghani et al., 2014). The same study went on to advocate the authors' concept of Islamic morality as a solution to premarital sex and claim that the 'effects of premarital sex have led to other alarming tendencies, such as engagement in risky sexual behaviour with multiple partners, increased likelihood of contracting STDs, or increased exposure to homosexuality' (Ghani et al., 2014: 617). Another study that was written to provide an Islamic perspective of sex education, from the *Dhaka University Journal of Islamic Studies*, claimed that, 'Today according to the western concept sex means the act of intimacy between two people of the opposite or same sex, starting with being together leading to foreplay and the sexual act. But according to the Islamic concept sex is the cohabitation of a male with a female for the purpose of reproduction' (Islam and Rahman, 2008: 1-2).

Although these two studies are very upfront about their ideological stances, the existence of this literature together with negative discourses among Muslim communities towards sex education can give the impression that the 'Islamic view' of sex education is narrowly framed around sin and risk. Discourses have immense power in shaping how people consider the world around them (Potter, 1996), and negativity surrounding sex education can have a serious impact upon how young Muslims view the topic. For example, anthropologist Linda Rae Bennett (2007) has found in her research on sexuality and sexual health among young Muslims in Indonesia that many young Muslims are confused about the differences between *zina*, which can be glossed as fornication or adultery, and sex within marriage. She states that, 'They incorrectly translate the stipulations against zina to apply to conjugal sex. Consequently, they suffer from a negative attitude towards human sexuality as a whole' (Bennett, 2007: 375). Fida Sanjakdar, who has written extensively about sex education and Australian Muslim

students, observes similarly in a study of sex education curriculum development among a group of teachers at an Islamic college in Victoria, Australia (2009b). Sanjakdar (2009b: 271) relates the story of an after school conversation between a teacher and a student, where the teacher discovered confusion among some of his students regarding sexual relations in Islam, as it was told to her:

> I was talking to the Year 10s and 11s and they just wanted to talk to me about relationships and having feelings for the opposite sex. X [name of student] actually asked me about zina [fornication]. I said, 'what about it . . . it's forbidden'. And he said, 'I mean sex, Sir'. So in his mind, sex and zina were equal, like counterparts.

Perceptions among young people of zina as being in any way equivalent to sexual expression within heterosexual marriage strikingly contrasts with positive Islamic portrayals of conjugal sexuality and sexual pleasure, which have a long history within Islamic discourses as being an important part of married life (Bouhdiba, 1985; Ali, 2006). Historical records even exist of Muslim women pursuing legal action to assert their Islamic rights to sexual pleasure within marriage (Lutfi, 1991: 101, 109–118).

The suggestion made by Islam and N. Rahman's study (2008) that the Islamic purpose of sex is reproduction is an uncommon one (Dialmy, 2010), yet their opposition of 'western' and 'Islamic' concepts of sex is far from unique. To illustrate, perspectives relating to sex and other aspects of morality that are labelled as 'Western' regularly meet resistance amongst Singaporean Malay Muslim Islamic scholars (Ibrahim, A. 2008; Rahman, N. 2008), and in Australia oppositions between 'Western' and 'Islamic' visions of sexuality are cited by educators and Islamic scholars as reasons for which public school sex education is unsuitable for Muslim students (Sanjakdar, 2005, 2009a, 2009b, 2013). The kinds of beliefs and practices that classify as 'Western' according to various Muslims are varied and contested, yet what constitutes an 'Islamic' view of sexuality is no less so.

Some interpretations of Qur'an and hadiths, for example, create confusion about topics such as a Muslim woman's right to sexual consent as well as pleasure within marriage (Idrus & Bennett, 2003). Other interpretations, by contrast, stress the importance of pleasure and foreplay, which Noibi has euphemistically described as 'pleasant preliminaries', and emphasise mutual respect and kindness (1998: 45).

Some scholars have made the point that there is nothing in Islamic scripture that would indisputably preclude a 'sex-positive approach' per se (Noibi, 1998; Othman, 2000; Sanjakdar, 2005; Bennett, 2007). The only caveat to the above is that sex, to be positive, has to be restricted to a context of heterosexual marriage according to internationally dominant understandings of Islam. In the context of Australia, Sanjakdar (2009: 266) suggests that language addressing sexuality in some secondary school health textbooks[8] can contravene 'Islamic principles', and that the public school curriculum does not meet the 'sexual health education needs of Muslim students' despite attempts to 'recognise and respect the reality, diversity and cultural specificity of student experiences in the classroom' (Sanjakdar 2005: 11). This is a broad claim that represents the perspective of some, but not all, young Muslims. Islamic prohibitions against premarital sex are widely known and even shared with other major religious traditions such as Christianity and Judaism, yet understandings of these prohibitions —or the importance of adhering to them —among individual believers are far from unitary.

Bolehkah bercouple? Managing risks, managing morals

In September 2013, I went to an Islamic bookstore in the Kembangan neighbourhood of eastern Singapore to look for guidance books on romantic relationships that are written for young unmarried Muslims. Most of the literature in the shop was in Malay, a language which I am far from fluent in, and so I approached the shopkeeper, a middle aged Malay

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[8] Sanjakdar lists Davis and Butler (1996) and Wright (1992) as examples of such textbooks.

Fig. 3.): Islamic literature can also be found at traditional Malay medicine shops such as the one pictured.

man, to ask him about a particular book that caught my attention, entitled '*Bolehkah bercouple?: formula pengurusan cinta bersyariat*' (Abdul Kadir 2012), which translates to 'Is it alright to be a couple?: a formula for the management of love according to sharia law'. He very kindly took me through some of the contents of the book before I bought it, explaining lists of prohibitions which included, among other things, some very common pastimes for local Malay Muslim couples, like taking selfies together, chatting online or going to the cinema together un-chaperoned.

'Uncle,' I addressed him, 'who buys and reads this kind of book? Many young Muslims do these things openly here [in Singapore], as well as much more'.

'It's true,' he replied, 'but the intention is good: it's to protect them from going too far before marriage, to keep things as *halal* [religiously permissible] as possible. We know it's difficult, but we try to guide them. These books are for that, though they are maybe a bit unrealistic. You see, young people are young people. We pray for them to be good like we pray for them to be rich: we can hope and try to guide, but it's up to them and they often make mistakes along the way'.

The bookshop uncle's usage of the term 'mistakes' caught my attention as it was recurred in many discussions during my research, where much time was devoted to exploring how research participants identified and then avoided what they considered to be mistakes or managed the risk of engaging in them, as well as how they learned their current strategies. Discussions of the risks young people perceive themselves to take,

especially when relating to sexual relationships, is also relevant to certain discourses in Singapore that, as we have seen in the introduction, stereotype Muslim Malays as being a problematic community among the various ethnic groups.

As I would discover, the definition of what could be considered a 'mistake' was very much dependent on the risks involved in engaging in any given activity. I have not encountered many narratives of guilt over engaging in sexual activity or desiring to during the course of my research; however, some of the exceptions I have recorded have been quite severe. For example, Ismah, a 21-year-old Singaporean Malay Muslim woman, experienced episodes of depression following an intimate relationship she had with a young man during her late teens that lasted about a year. When her partner began two years of obligatory National Service, which limited the amount of time they could spend together, Ismah reflected upon the nature of their relationship as well as her personal relationship to Islam and decided that the two were incompatible. Although she did not cite her experience of public school sex education to be part of her decision, she did echo other female research participants' fear of pregnancy, which were magnified by the messages of risk she received in the classroom. Ismah had hoped that she and her partner had a future together and expected that they would one day marry, yet when Ismah told her partner that they must either cease sexual intimacy or part ways, her partner chose to leave. His decision to abandon the relationship reinforced Ismah's perception that the relationship was illegitimate and sinful and also left her feeling used. She believed that she had been morally weak to engage in a sexual relationship and that this was a serious mistake that she found difficult to forgive herself for.

Ismah saw her previous relationship as a kind of test, which she had failed, and this caused her to worry about punishment in the Hereafter. Although the relationship did not come to the attention of her parents or anyone else who might disapprove, she expressed mixed feelings about 'getting away' with her transgression. She had used condoms while

being intimate with her partner and the preparation involved in obtaining and using prophylactics made Ismah feel as if the deliberate and planned nature of her sins made the nature of her mistake far worse. Ismah saw punishment (which she did not define) as just in her case because, as she explained, 'you can make things right with your parents or with other people, but how do you make things right with Allah when you knew you were doing something wrong at the time and continued anyway?'. I observed that Ismah's judgement of herself was far more severe than her judgement of others who were open about having intimate relationships prior to marriage. The stress arising from the end of her relationship, together with the anger over feeling used by a partner not equally committed to it, led to intermittent periods of depression where Ismah experienced guilt and a longing for some form of earthly consequences for her perceived misdeeds, which she believed would allow her to purify herself and start life afresh.

Ismah's story was the exception rather than the rule. By contrast, both male and female heterosexual participants on average tended to speak of desire (*nafsu*) as being a normal and natural part of being human and not something shameful in and of itself[9]. Narratives of actual sexual explorations, even when involving non-penetrative sex, were often associated with danger where the risks of premarital sexual contact pertain more to consequences in this life than what repercussions may await in the Hereafter. As we shall see in the below account of Azizah, a 21-year-old Singaporean Malay university student, young people may use their secondary school experience of sex education to make informed choices about their sexual lives that are contrary to community, family, or the Ministry of Education's expectations of their morality and then use religion in personalised, and perhaps unconventional, ways to support such choices.

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[9] I explore discourses of non-heterosexual desire among Singaporean Malay Muslims in Chapter 4.

Case study: Azizah's solutions

Azizah came from a lower-middle class family that had fought and saved very hard to achieve the modest comfort they enjoyed, and which was maintained by the steady success of Mr Rahim's retail business. Mr Rahim, Azizah's father, had high expectations for his daughter and strongly advised her against distracting herself with having a boyfriend until her studies were complete. With that advice came an unambiguous understanding that, unlike many of her friends who had been dating relatively openly since their late teens, she would not be able to have romantic relationships with the blessing of her parents for some time. Although Mr Rahim was not an overbearing man by any means, his suggestion to stay single carried the authority and weight of an unchallengeable order because, according to Azizah, it came from a desire to see his only daughter graduate with a university degree – something which all four of Azizah's older brothers had failed to do before her, but which she herself was passionate about accomplishing. She told me once that she was looking forward to being the first in her family to earn a degree and that her family's expectations, instead of feeling at all oppressive, were more of an encouraging compliment to her because it meant that they believed in her abilities. She also loved her parents immensely and wanted them both to feel proud of her.

Azizah explained that she did her best to avoid disappointing her parents, or worse bringing shame to her family, but that she could not tolerate what she described as the 'awkward loneliness' of being single. The fact that most of her friends were romantically attached, with or without the knowledge of their own parents, made her feel even worse about it. Having her friends bring boyfriends along when they met together made Azizah feel left out, and as she lamented, 'nobody likes to be the odd one out in a roomful of couples'. Her single status was not the only reason why Azizah felt out of place within her Muslim Malay friend group during her years at a public secondary school. As the daughter

of a business owner, she enjoyed a degree of financial stability that contrasted to the family backgrounds of many of her friends. Azizah remembers also being the only one among her friend group at school who had aspirations to go to university.

When she entered junior college at 17, she remembered contemplating that the 6 years that she would need to complete her studies was an unrealistically long time to stay single and so she set about devising a solution. As a middle way between single living and having what she defined as 'a serious boyfriend', which she understood as being a fiancé, Azizah decided that she would set careful personal boundaries so that if she met a suitable man, she could enjoy a casual relationship with minimal risk. Although she believed that premarital sexual contact was sinful, Azizah also believed that the vast majority, if not all, of her male and female friends would engage in some form of it at some point and this made her feel less afraid from a spiritual perspective. Of all the various ways that people can engage in sexual activity, Azizah saw premarital genital-penetrative sex as being the only kind of sex that had the potential to seriously endanger her future and severely disappoint her parents, so she resisted engaging in it. She was not opposed to expressing her sexuality in other ways and had done so over the years. While she believed that non penetrative sexual contact was less sinful, she did not want her relatives to suspect her of engaging in it but took comfort in the fact that if they ever did, it would be seen as a less shameful mistake. In this respect, Azizah's resistance against Muslim community norms as well as her parents expectations was very much carefully measured. Furthermore, Azizah's assessment of the level of risk involved was influenced by both worldly consequences as well as spiritual ones.

Azizah understood her father's advice against dating boys to be primarily a way of avoiding premarital pregnancy and/or early marriage. Her reasoning came from the fact that one of her close friends, who was also Malay and Muslim, became pregnant at 17 years old. Although the young mother soon married her child's father in a religious

ceremony, the couple divorced within a year and Azizah believed that her friend's experience was severely detrimental in terms of her educational and socioeconomic expectations as well as her future marriage prospects. Since Azizah's friend was well known to her family, her father witnessed these events as they unfolded within the young woman's life. Mr Rahim was very disappointed in Azizah's friend, and very sympathetic to the severe reaction of her friend's family who pressured their daughter into marriage after discovering the pregnancy, which worried Azizah.   Although Mr Rahim did not prohibit Azizah's friend from visiting, or directly suggest that she may be a bad influence, Azizah believed that the situation did make her father more protective of her, forcing her to occasionally lie about her whereabouts to avoid arousing his concern.

The experience that Azizah's young friend had with pregnancy and being consequently pressured into marriage in is far from unique.   Despite widespread condemnation of premarital sex within the Singaporean Muslim community, teenage Malay Muslims do become parents and a common solution proposed by families is marriage, something which has led to underage married being considered very much a 'Malay problem' (Rahman, 2009). The frequency of early marriages (as well as high divorce rates) among Singaporean Malay Muslims has been commented on repeatedly in the popular press and political discourse[10], which in turn has helped to perpetuate stereotypes. Azizah's commitment to avoiding her friend's situation was explained to me in terms of both avoiding causing shame to her family as well as resisting exactly these kinds of stereotypes. She was adamant that her life choices would not be recorded among the many unfortunate statistics that political leaders and the press often cite as evidence of the Malay Muslim community's underachievement.

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[10] For a summary of some recent news items in the Singaporean media about these issues, including coverage of political commentary about the Malay community, please see Mutalib (2012b: 43-63). Furthermore, for an in depth discussion of early marriage among Malay Muslims in Singapore, please see Rahman (2009).

I once met Azizah at a cafe in the Tampines neighbourhood of Singapore in 2014 with the same intention of discussing memories of school-based sex education that I had when I met Razak at the Esplanade Park earlier. On this particular meeting, which took place late on a warm July evening, I was curious to understand how, or indeed if at all, the lectures and workshops she had attended, particularly throughout secondary school and junior college, were of any practical benefit to her. Azizah recalled the 'mass talks', or lectures, as occasions to contemplate the fact that sex can be a dangerous experience with many risks involved. Although she was grateful for the information provided at school as well as the opportunity to consider her choices and their possible consequences, she claimed that the presentation of some of the lessons were overly dramatic and focused on danger. When I asked her what she believed the dangers of premarital sex to be, she replied, 'It's like that [dangerous] because of so many reasons – there are the typical risks [pregnancy and infections], but also the risk of hurt feelings. I think they told us about condoms and pills to stop pregnancy, but they can fail, right? In this way, 'safe sex' can be maybe not as bad, but not really 100% [risk free]'. I observed with interest that Azizah's statement that safe sex was not ever truly safe was a message repeated often within Ministry of Education sex education materials as well as repeated to me by many research participants in both Singapore and Australia. In Azizah's case, her understanding of the potential failure of popular methods of contraception was a strong motivating factor in her decision to abstain from genital-penetrative sex, yet it was not the only reason.

Azizah spoke of Islam as a source of protection from the risks of premarital sex that has benefitted her from her teen years until the present. Although she had been open in our conversations about engaging in non-penetrative sexual acts with male partners over the years, she described herself as being a virgin. Azizah explained,

> Most of my Muslim friends don't feel like being religious yet. None of us wear
> *tudung* [a *hijab*, or headscarf], and though I don't think I'm as serious as my

parents, Islam definitely helped me decide to stay a virgin. Some of my friends have sex. We sometimes talk about it. I don't judge them. […] But Islam is there to protect us, and when I think of what can go wrong [with sex], like what happened to my friend [who became pregnant], I want that protection. My parents want it for me too. [...] It's just hard enough to succeed as it is.

Azizah's comment that it is hard to succeed alluded to her disadvantaged position as a Malay woman in Singapore. While Azizah understood the act of engaging in any kind of non-penetrative premarital sexual contact as risky, it posed less of a threat than penetrative heterosexual intercourse from her perspective because of the increased possibility of pregnancy. Were Azizah to conceive a child, either as a teenager or at present, she believed her position of disadvantage would be compounded by single motherhood or being pressured to marry before feeling ready. She did not consider either abortion or adoption to be an option because she viewed both as acts of cowardice. Although Azizah did not define herself as being particularly religious, she believed that Islam served as a protection by giving her a spiritual reason to feel good about maintaining her virginity.

Earlier Azizah and I had come to a definition of sexual intercourse as being the act of vaginal penetration by a penis. Sexual acts other than this she considered less weighty, less dangerous though not entirely risk free, less sinful in a religious sense (with the exception of anal penetration by a penis, and particularly when the passive partner is also male), and not *real* sex. Instead, she felt non penetrative sex play was more accurately described as a sensually pleasurable means of expressing affection. Azizah considered penetrative vaginal intercourse as being sacred in a sense because it was the most direct way to create life. Virginity, by extension from Azizah's perspective, was the state of never having experienced this kind of intercourse. With this understanding, Azizah could retain a lot of freedom to express her sexuality with a partner while saving her virginity for her

future husband, the expected father of her children. Throughout our conversations, and especially on this particular evening, I came to understand that Azizah's commitment to abstinence was both religiously framed as a means of saving her virginity as a gift for a future spouse and also reinforced by her recollection of the dangers associated with premarital sex as well as a fear of pregnancy based on the experiences of her friend.

In a country where Malay Muslims are often stereotyped as being more religiously observant than members of other faith groups, there exists simultaneously a contradictory stereotype of young Malay Muslim women as also being more sexually promiscuous than other Singaporean women. The 'problem' of teen marriages among Malays in Singapore is commonly considered to be a result of sexual promiscuity, youthful irresponsibility and the unplanned pregnancies that sometimes follow (Rahman 2009: 740). Azizah was sensitive to this stereotype and it made her anxious about other people's opinion of her.   As a result, Azizah lamented that she was shy to ask about specific issues in secondary school and often feigned a lack of interest during the sex education lessons she attended. Looking back on her memories of sex education, she said, 'I wish there was more room to talk about our concerns. I mean, they sometimes allowed questions at the end but I'm shy [to ask] about things like how easy is it to catch something without going all the way [penetrative vaginal sex]'. Most of her information about these specific issues, such as the particulars of disease prevention, came from occasional discussions with friends and searches on the Internet, with some movies and television programs offering a degree of insight into this topic also. Sex was an absolutely off-limits topic for discussion in Azizah's home, so she sought information where she could while growing up. When I asked whether she thought her friends may have similar beliefs regarding sex, pregnancy and marriage, she replied that, 'they might, but most of them also have less to lose since their

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plans are not so complicated like mine. The ones already in love will probably marry soon anyway, as soon as the boys can come up with the *hantaran* (bride price)'.[11]

Contextual conservatism and everyday Islam

Attitudes towards sexuality and what is or is not permissible or responsible behaviour among Muslim young people is often shaped by very practical factors, which may or may not be religiously informed. As Islam lacks a central religious body and the religious authority of Islamic schools of jurisprudence (*madhahib*) as well as of traditional figures such as the sheikh and local imam is shifting, there is a lot of room for the individualisation of faith (Peter 2006). Even a religiously protective and sheltering environment, such as an Islamic secondary school, is not enough to shield young Muslims from absorbing what may be considered 'Western' or 'unIslamic' opinions and attitudes about sex (Sanjakdar 2009: 268). In terms of simple practicality, choosing to conform to a particular Muslim community's expectations can bring great benefits such as increased personal reputation (Bennett 2005a, 2005b) as well as better marriage prospects and a strong sense of personal satisfaction with believing that one is living a morally upright life (Buitelaar 2002). However, it can also bring incredible frustrations as well (Hussein and Imtoual 2009), and this is likely a reason why some make choices to bend rules without outright breaking them, such as Azizah's decision to have intimate relationships while placing limits on sexual contact. Maintaining careful sexual boundaries with partners, as well as boundaries of privacy with others, ensured that Azizah could enjoy the benefits of having a good reputation while also feeling personal satisfaction in maintaining her virginity.

Despite the fact that she engages in practices which she herself defines as unIslamic, Azizah has a positive relationship with Islam and views it as an important

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[11] The term *duit hantaran* refers to the amount of money that a groom traditionally offers to a bride on their wedding day. Although this money was customarily offered to the bride's parents, it is now usually offered to the bride with the amount expected differing depending on factors such as the bride's social class and level of educational attainment among others (Hamzah 2012).

source of protection in her life. Similarly, Shafinaz defies the label of 'irreligious' even though she defined herself as a 'lazy Muslim'. Shafinaz's self-definition is partly the result of the fact that she lives with her family who quietly disapprove of many of her choices and partly a response to wider Muslim community discourses that set boundaries for the conduct of young Muslim women that she is not interested in respecting. During the course of my research, I have observed that piety and/or conservatism are context dependent and have been understood by many of my research participants in complex ways that belie commonsense definitions. Drawing distinctions between liberal and conservative Muslims, the pious and the irreligious, could be misleading as the comparison between Raihana and Razak's viewpoint discussed above can illustrate. Furthermore, a person's self-defined level of piety can shift with age or circumstance, as Ismah's did after her partner departed for National Service. Similarly, Shafinaz plans to become more pious as she gets older, which was a common intention among participants in Singapore and Sydney and has also been observed in other research (Debevec, 2012).

   In short, religious people do not always behave or even believe in typically religious ways and this often does not create problems for them. Azizah and Shafinaz both engaged in practices they perceived to be sinful yet also set limits for themselves and aspired to lead a more religiously observant life in future, for example. Azizah committed to saving her virginity prior to marriage and Shafinaz specified that she would never dare challenge what she saw as the teachings of Islam or try to downplay her own moral shortcomings beyond humbly acknowledging that she was trusting in the mercy and forgiveness of God. Mercy was a common theme in discussions with many research participants. Raihana, for example, defined herself as being pious and displayed outward appearances of piety typical in the Singaporean Malay community, such as keeping regular prayers, being mindful of the company she keeps and wearing a headscarf and long sleeves even in 35C tropical heat. Yet, despite her religious views which condemned

premarital sex, she was very understanding in her attitudes towards other Muslims who were not, in her opinion, yet ready to fully embrace Islamic practice. Raihana perceived an emphasis on mercy in Islam and as a result believed that there was nothing unIslamic about recommending comprehensive sex education for young Muslims, which may help ensure their safety, instead of insisting upon their premarital abstinence from sex. Interestingly, Juhairi also emphasised the 'mercy of Islam' in our conversations yet his understanding of it appeared to lean towards more of a 'tough love' approach that favoured caning punishments for premarital sex similar to that existing in neighbouring Malaysia. In Juhairi's opinion, which aligned with Ismah's, punishment for misdeeds in this life can improve one's chances in the Hereafter.

Instead of focusing on the interpretations of Islam among irreligious or pious Muslims, this chapter, as indeed the rest of this thesis, instead explores specific practices and beliefs with an intention to observe the influences that inform them among individuals. Such approach involves exploring religion as it is lived in everyday contexts. Scholarly interest in the ordinary or everyday ethics of individuals has been lively for some time (Goffman, 1959; Hall, 1997; Highmore, 2002; Sheringham, 2008; Das, 2010; Lambek, 2010), and Fadil and Fernando (2015: 61) have argued that within the anthropology of Islam this interest has been rendered into the idea of 'everyday Islam', which was discussed in the Introduction. Building upon other studies that explore elements of struggle or ambivalence experienced by some Muslims in their daily lives (Schielke, 2009; Jeldtoft, 2011; Otterbeck, 2016), the focus here has been on including a rich variety of viewpoints that is inclusive of all points of view from the proudly pious to the self-defined sinners who are confident in their faith despite their moral failings.

Chapter Three

Teaching and learning halal sex: sex education in Sydney

The greater Sydney area[12] is a vibrantly multicultural and multi-religious region with a population of just under 4.8 million, of whom 5.3% identify themselves as Muslim (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017). Muslim communities in Sydney are ethnically, politically, as well as theologically diverse and they also have more young adults than the wider population (Hassan and Lester 2015: 23) These communities are heterogeneous, and thus aspects of Muslim practice or belief are unsurprisingly varied. Yet certain widely-held values do exist and a commitment to the prohibition of, and abstention from, premarital and extramarital sex is a good example of such. Although this ideal may exist as an abstract value, there is a lot of space for discussion and variation in interpretations of what constitutes sex, how marriage may be defined, as well as whether or not any mitigating circumstances could exist that might make sexual transgressions more tolerable (or less avoidable) and so on.

This chapter considers the reflections of some young, unmarried Muslims about their past experiences of sex education in Sydney public schools and explores their conceptualisations of sex, gender and values. Sex education in public schools can be perceived by some as a moralising force that does not allow for alternative moralities and is seen ultimately as being part of a larger secularising and assimilatory strategy of the Australian state. Such perceptions can polarise opinions among young Muslims make some feel as if they must choose between opposing categories of 'Muslim values' and 'Australian values' in articulating their own understandings of sexual ethics and morality.

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[12] The greater Sydney area is here defined according to the boundaries used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017).

This tension is then compounded by certain political and media discourses that stereotype Australian Muslims as being somehow unable to fully adapt to an equally stereotyped 'mainstream Australian culture'. In response to these pressures, many among my research participants have perceived a need to choose – at the very least performatively – between opposing categories of 'Muslim values' and 'Australian values'.

Inclusive of Muslims of various degrees of self-defined religiosity, theological stances, sexualities and gender identities, this chapter shows the fragility of the us/them dichotomy that may be constructed between communities. Taking the often controversial topic of the presentation of sexuality education in schools as an illustration, I demonstrate that individuals engage with and manipulate discourses according to their needs as individuals first, and community members second.

Undressing assumptions: exploring the purpose and scope of sexuality education
Despite having spent many warm and happy summer afternoons strolling along central Sydney streets that host discreet yet noticeable shops with names such as 'Club X' and 'Pleasure Chest', Dani claimed to have been curious yet never quite brave enough to investigate what may lay behind the suggestive yet ambiguous shopfronts. 'In my home', she told me over a potent Turkish coffee in the Sydney suburb of Auburn, 'sexuality was never spoken about. If we [my family and I] passed a sex shop on the street, we wouldn't skip a beat but somehow I remember always knowing not to look at them because they were bad. I don't remember anyone ever telling me about them, or why they were bad, but I didn't ask either! I used to even think that even wondering about them was bad'.

At the time of our coffee date, Dani was a 22-year-old Australian Muslim student at a local university. Although she was born and raised in Bankstown, Dani's parents were both migrants to Australia from Lebanon and they raised her and her two sisters to adhere to what Dani described as a highly conservative interpretation of Sunni Islam. According

Fig. 4.): Pleasure Chest on George Street, a main thoroughfare in Sydney's central business district.

to Dani, her parents believed the values she was raised with were traditionally and unambiguously Islamic and commonplace in her parents' respective Lebanese hometowns. Dani disagreed with this and noted that on family holidays to visit relatives in Lebanon, she'd found her extended family to be far more relaxed about religion in some ways. It stood out to her, for example, that her aunts and cousins in Lebanon were a lot more open about topics related to sexuality than her parents. While describing topics she wished there were more freedom to discuss, she drew a parallel between her parents' attitudes and that of many others among local Sydney Muslim communities and told me,

> I am interested in sex and seduction, which would be weird to cover in school but even weirder to talk about at home. I recently visited some relatives in Lebanon and they seemed a lot more open about this kind of topic than we are here in Sydney. [...] My [married female] cousins aren't shy to talk! It is like there everyone's a bit more relaxed. So, they aren't so afraid to talk and joke about things – not about their own husbands of course, but in general, you know. […] Here [in Sydney] sex is everywhere, in a really in-your-face kind of way. There's even a *Honey Birdette*[13] in Bankstown. I think it makes people paranoid, afraid – almost like it's a disease you can catch, and if you catch it, you just drift off. My parents are paranoid. They never spoke to us about sex –

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[13] *Honey Birdette* is a retailer of lingerie and sex toys.

at least beyond making clear it's something that only concerns married couples, but we also would never dream of asking.

Dani was convinced that the experience of moving to Sydney had an impact upon her parents as well as some other Muslim migrant families. She strongly believed that her parents were paranoid about the influence of visible sex shops as well as permissive attitudes towards premarital sex and this contributed to both their inability to discuss any topic related to sexuality openly and their level of religious conservatism, which she saw as inextricably linked.

Dani's perception of her parents is far from unique. In Sydney, a majority of both young men and young women who participated in this research have claimed to have difficulties discussing sex or sexuality with their parents while growing up. That discussions between parents and children about sexuality are difficult is not unusual and much has been written about the awkwardness of such intergenerational communication (Diiorio, Kelley and Hockenberry-Eaton, 1999; Walker, 2001; Diiorio, Pluhar and Belcher, 2003; Regnerus, 2005; Wilson et al., 2010).   What is noteworthy, however, is that many research participants born in Australia to Muslim parents born overseas, such as Dani, characterised parental reticence to

Fig. 5.): A child peruses a poster advertising sex toys for sale at Club X Adult Boutique, George St, Sydney.

discuss sex with their children as a direct result of their being both Muslim and migrants.

Participants perceived Islam as a tactic of resistance deployed by older generations as a defence against the sometimes confronting nature of displays of premarital and non-heterosexual sexuality in Sydney, which they themselves often felt somewhat desensitised to. Sociologist Lori Peek has suggested that religion may acquire an increased importance for Muslim migrants who move from a context in which they were part of the religious majority to a new setting in which they become a religious minority (2005: 218). Maliepaard, Lubbers, and Gijsberts (2010), by contrast, found no such increase in declared religiosity in a study of first- and second-generation Moroccan and Turkish Muslim migrants in the Netherlands. In Sydney, like Singapore as was discussed previously, sociopolitical context shapes religiosity as well as attitudes towards sexuality and sex education and the varied approaches of research participants and their families make broad categorisations difficult.

Despite that a majority of young men and women included in this study reported that their parents were either unable to have conversations about sex or unwilling to engage in discussions about it that moved past the absolute necessity for abstinence, there were exceptions. For example, Murtaza, a 22-year-old Australian Muslim of mixed Pakistani-Arab heritage, claimed that his parents were both practicing Muslims and relatively open about matters pertaining to sexuality when compared to the Muslim parents of some of his friends. Murtaza did not recall having many conversations about sexuality with his parents, but he did remember his father giving him advice about girls while driving him to school where he explained that it was natural to experience sexual feelings. In Murtaza's words, 'He said that they [sexual desires] were normal but it is important to be careful with girls because what starts as fun can end up causing a lot of trouble for everyone […] Although he didn't directly say it, he made it sound like it was better to, well, you know [masturbate]'.* Murtaza also received suggestions from his father that physical exercise was a good way of ridding himself of 'energy' that might otherwise lead him to

have improper relationships with young women or otherwise get him in trouble. Although Murtaza remembered the conversations as feeling a little awkward, he appreciated his father's efforts to dispense advice and he felt that the time spent alone with him during those early morning car journeys was good for their relationship as father and son.

Murtaza's father was an Australian-born medical professional of Egyptian heritage and his mother was a Pakistani-born primary school teacher. Between them, they raised their son in a comfortably middle class home alongside a younger brother. He recalls that in addition to the advice his father would sometimes offer on weekday rides to school, his mother would sometimes provide him with practical advice for his presumed future as a married man when they were alone at home or out shopping. One of Murtaza's favourite memories of such moments with his mother involved a shopping trip to Myer, a popular department store in Sydney. There his mother lightheartedly mentioned that while he should always wear nice fragrances to entice his future wife and keep her interested in him, the non-alcoholic Arab perfume oils are much nicer than the colognes for sale at Myer, whose fragrance she likened to toilet cleaner. Murtaza perceived his mother's advice to be unusual because, among his friends, mothers would advise daughters but not sons about married life. In Murtaza's own analysis, the fact that both his parents are educated professionals made discussing sexuality and marriage a far less taboo, if still somewhat awkward, topic for discussion.

In discussions about the role of family in sex education, I have collected mixed opinions about whether or not dialogue with parents or other relatives about topics related to sexuality is desirable or not. Most agreed that parents and family should bear the brunt of responsibility for educating young people about sex and sexuality in principle, but very few expressed a wish to be part of that hypothetical conversation, either as a parent in the future or as a son or daughter at present. Others, like Dani, welcomed opportunities to explore questions, such as that which her visit to extended family in Lebanon provided.

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Dani had expressed an interest in seduction in particular because, as she told me, she felt that the heterosexual relationships portrayed in films and on TV were either overly dramatised or Islamically improper, so among other topics, she was curious about what a Muslim wife could do to keep the romance alive in marriage that was sexy but also *halal*, or permissible. Although she had generally positive memories of her experience of sex education at school, she felt a lot of it was not relevant to her. Dani remembered her secondary school sex education lessons as including reproductive biology and family planning but also as being very much focused on the prevention of sexually transmitted infections. While she recognised some aspects of it as providing useful information, she believed she would never be at risk of contracting a sexually transmitted infection because she had no intention of engaging in sexual contact of any kind outside of marriage. Dani had, and currently has, questions about sexuality and she perceives gaps in her understanding that she would like to fill. However, she believed she could not openly seek answers for these questions in Sydney, either before as an adolescent or today as a young adult ready for marriage, without running the risk of attracting suspicion from her family and friends about why she is so curious.

Sexuality can be a delicate topic of discussion for many and as a topic of education, both inside and outside the classroom, it is unavoidably coloured by the context and values within which the teaching and learning takes place. In Muslim communities, widely accepted prohibitions against premarital and extramarital sex mean that sex education is generally considered to be ideally linked to marriage and to various related assumptions, such as heterosexuality, fidelity and age of marriageability (Tabatabaie 2015). These associations inform the nature of sex education that is offered to young people by parents, Islamic schools or through other Muslim community organisations, so that, for example, the information provided may sometimes be limited to the biology of reproduction, basic family planning, and perhaps Islamic exhortations for kindness and consideration in the

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marital bedroom. Since there is no expectation for the needs of a young Muslims to surpass such topics, they are the basics considered necessary for adults to know in order to enjoy a healthy and enjoyable conjugal life.

Since perceptions of what sex education should include are heavily shaped by embedded cultural understandings of propriety and necessity, certain topics are likely to be considered irrelevant for discussion, except perhaps by way of threat, such as the risk of sexually transmitted infections (Beck et al. 2005). The presumed risk-laden nature of premarital sex has caused some research participants, in both Singapore and Australia, to doubt the existence of 'safe' sex. In Sydney, to illustrate, Naida, a 20-year-old Muslim woman of mixed Palestinian-Lebanese heritage and close friend of Dani's, told me, 'Not having sex until marriage is the best protection there is [against both STIs and pregnancy]. There is no other 100% way to be safe'*. Similar arguments suggesting that abstinence is the only way to guarantee 'safety' from unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease were commonly made by research participants in both field sites. I observed that the repeated use, and opposition, of the concepts of safety and danger in relation to sexuality produced a certainty among some that infections that are commonly spoken of as being 'sexually transmitted' can only be transmitted sexually. Such perceptions persist despite being vigorously challenged by recent information initiatives managed by Inner West Sydney Medicare Local (IWSML) in partnership with local organisations. For example, IWSML collaborates with local Muslim organisations, such as the Lebanese Muslim Association, as well as the Sydney Local Health District and Hepatitis NSW to promote awareness of Hepatitis C among young Muslim men in the Canterbury Local Government Area because of concerns about the risk of needle-sharing among steroid users in gyms (Medicare Local 2014). Myths and misinformation surrounding sexually transmitted infections are also independently challenged by Muslim groups such as

Mission of Hope[14], which periodically runs educational workshops for Muslim men and women in Sydney.

There exist some beliefs, and not just among Muslim communities (Hirst 2012: 4; Hendricks and Howerton 2011: 593), that educating young people before marriage about how to minimise the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections or avoid unwanted pregnancies encourages premarital sex (Orgocka 2004: 262; Halstead 1997: 319; Sarwar 1996). Additionally, local discourses exist that suggest Muslim sexual modesty requires not only chastity, but also the suppression of private desire and fantasy (Khoei, Whelan, and Cohen 2008), which I have found may be understood by young people such as Dani to mean suppressing curiosity too. As Dani explained to me, 'I can't remember ever hearing anything positive about sex [among Muslims in Sydney]. It's dangerous [before marriage], so it's not something you're even supposed to think about [...] even my [local female] friends don't really bring it up'. This reluctance to talk about any aspect of sexuality disappointed Dani, who expected to find a young man to marry in the near future and did not want to appear childlike or ignorant on her wedding night. Despite her concerns, however, she kept her questions to herself for the most part because she feared that trying to initiate discussion with her married friends or with her mother would make her look bad. Dani believed that part of protecting one's modesty was protecting one's thoughts from dwelling on impure topics. Being that Dani was not yet married, she worried that those around her would perceive sexuality as an impure topic for her to be curious about. Her experience with her relatives in Lebanon had made her question this point of view and led her to instead believe that aversion to discussing such a basic element of married life was unreasonable and paranoid.

Other informants have provided different reasons for avoiding the topic. Jamel, a 28-year-old Muslim shop assistant of Lebanese-Tunisian heritage, explained to me that

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[14] Mission of Hope regularly posts details of their events and workshops on their website, which can be found at http://www.missionofhope.org.au/ (last accessed 17 December 2017).

not only is marriage supposed to 'educate' young couples, but also there are some topics men are not expected to be interested in.

> Everyone's supposed to wait until marriage and explore together, learn together, but there is an understanding that after a certain age men will have some experience. So if you get to my age and you show that you don't, girls might think you're sweet but everyone else will think you're stupid. […] Also, sex isn't everything. If I want to know about pregnancy or about women's biology, I'd get laughed at. [These things are covered in school] but there are important Islamic things that you never hear about - like when does a baby have a soul or how long does it take a woman to clean herself from menses? You can always Google it, but you can't really ask. That would be too weird. It's women's stuff. It's like it's none of my business [as a man].

There are many reasons why some young people do suppress their curiosity for fear of appearing laughable, immodest or even arousing the suspicions of others, and of those most notably parents (Sanjakdar 2009a: 268; Orgocka 2004: 265).   In Dani's case, she believed that others might see sexuality as being not her 'business' while Jamel worried that women's biology or pregnancy was not his. In both cases, as well as some others I came across during the course of my research, I observed that there are certain types of knowledge that individuals are thought to legitimately access according to their life-stage or sex. However, while I came across several examples of research participants who feared that they might be judged for attempting to access information that they believed they were not entitled to, I did not encounter anyone who was prepared to judge others for doing the same.

Merely asking or seeking information can be understood as a sign of immodesty or impropriety for young Muslim women and an indicator of unseemly interest in matters of the opposite sex for young Muslim men. In the stories of both Dani and Jamel, multiple

taboos intersect and together create both a complex of ignorance about sexuality as well as anxiety about sex education. Different taboos affect people differently, however, and factors such as age, gender, educational level and the relationship between the person seeking information and the source of advice all impact upon embarrassment levels and perceptions of whether or not the topics explored are Islamically inappropriate. While it may appear that discourse among Sydney Muslim communities is wary of, or hostile to, sex information sharing, the experiences of my research participants take different forms in different contexts. The situation remains, however, that there are certain questions many young, unmarried Muslims may not easily ask and resources they may not access. One way that some participants, such as Jamel, overcome this is to seek answers on the Internet. Online information seeking about sexuality and sexual health topics among young people is well documented (Holstrom, 2015), and the Internet is a valuable resource for those who feel they cannot approach others (Barman-Adhikari and Rice, 2011; Magee et al., 2012; Mitchell et al., 2014). In this respect, the young Muslim participants in this study are no exception.

Gender and values: a focus group discussion

Similarly to other communities (Fine 1988; Allen and Carmody 2012; Hendricks and Howerton 2011), consequences for transgressions against dominant discourses of sexual propriety, both in speech and in action, are often heavily gendered for young Muslims. For example, propriety and modesty, especially for women such as in Dani's case, can be understood to apply to thought and speech as well as appearance and manners. It may come as no surprise then that education about sexuality tends to be tailored to the expected gender roles and culturally postulated proclivities of each sex, something that again is true for many communities in a general sense and not necessarily related to any particular cultural or religious belief (Hendricks and Howerton 2011). In the context of

Sydney Muslim communities, I have observed that this topic can become a flashpoint in discussions as I have collected some very strong views from several different conceptual positions on the 'natural' role and function of men and women in Muslim families. During a focus group discussion, to illustrate, that was kindly hosted by Mahmood, a 28-year-old Australian Muslim of Bengali heritage, in his Parramatta apartment, he explained to all of us in attendance that,

> Men and women are just naturally different and there's no getting around that. All religions recognise this and now we've even got science to prove it! Men are designed to be competitive and outgoing while women are designed to be nurturing and more reserved. This is just how we are. And yes, this affects our relationships. Men have [sexual] needs that are stronger than women's, and so we give in more easily to [sexual] temptation. This is why we must teach our girls well. Women have the upper hand in this, always. But we also have to make sure women are safe because some men are weak in a bad way. This is what modesty is for, and also why free-mixing [of men and women] is dangerous sometimes.

Mahmood's comments provoked a flurry of increasingly impassioned responses, some of which supported him and others that accused him of sexism and placing an unfair amount of moral responsibility on young women.

Among the six others in the room besides Mahmood and myself, there were two young men and four young women, all of whom were Australian-born Muslims of varying ethnicities and most of whom had completed or were currently enrolled in some form of tertiary education. I perceived Mahmood's point to originate in his belief in an inescapable, divinely ordained difference between the sexes and he is far from unique in his perspective. The perception of women as both sexual gatekeepers as well as potential victims of male sexuality who are in need of protection is commonplace both within Muslim

communities (Hanassab, 1998; Cooke, 2007; Mir, 2007; Khoei, Whelan and Cohen, 2008; Eşsizoğlu et al., 2011), as well as outside of them (Milausen and Herold, 1999; Crawford and Popp, 2003; Jozkowski and Peterson, 2013; Hlavka, 2014). His viewpoint could, with few modifications, be represented as easily within certain public school comprehensive sex education curriculums as it could within a weekend Islamic centre workshop on the correct behavioural etiquette between the sexes.

Michelle Fine (1988), who offered a critique of the content of sexuality education in American public schools almost three decades ago and has since noted that not enough has changed (Fine and McClelland 2006), identified discourses of adolescent sexuality that positioned girls as sexual gatekeepers and as potential victims of male heterosexuality. Fine laments of public school education in the United States at the time, '[It] may actually disable young women in their negotiations as sexual subjects. Trained through and into positions of passivity and victimisation, young women are currently educated away from positions of sexual self-interest' (1988: 33). Not all examples of women being 'trained through and into positions of passivity and victimisation' through school-based sex education are as extreme as what research participants remembered being taught in Singapore. Yet, despite mounting evidence that the promotion of pleasure in sex education is likely to encourage safer, more egalitarian forms of sexuality (Beasley, 2008: 160), sex education in many countries tends to be risk focused and perpetuate harmful stereotypes about gender identities and gendered dynamics between individuals (Hendricks and Howerton, 2011; Hirst, 2012). For Mahmood, as many others, a deep behavioural divide between the sexes is commonsense knowledge. From such perspective, stereotypes reflect a reality where passivity is an authentically female disposition instead of something that is learned and the best way to prevent the victimisation of women is to acknowledge 'natural' sexual difference and protect women

accordingly. While such views were not uncommon among research participants in Sydney, they did not go unchallenged.

In response to Mahmood's comments, Mariam, a 24-year-old Australian Muslim of Malay heritage, suggested that among Muslim families and communities,

> I think the whole thing gets used as an excuse. We're [as young women] taught to not tempt men because they can't control themselves. Yeah, as if just being around is a total turn on [for them]. When we get married, we're taught to put their [sexual] needs ahead of ours because they *need* it, to be available even when we don't want it – because if we don't, they'll just take off for the next one. Clearly not everybody works like that. If it was a male thing, then it would be all or most men. No offence, but I really think it's an excuse thing because I've never had anyone explain to me how this is Islamic.

Mariam's comments facilitated a shift in the conversation towards a broader discussion of the naturalness of gender roles as well as the emotional needs and capacity of men and women. The existence of Islamic provisions for polygyny was understood by some research participants, including within the focus group on this particular occasion, to be evidence of a fundamental difference in romantic emotional attachment between men and women. Mariam argued against this position and instead believed that scriptures and hadith literature were both sometimes invoked by emotionally immature men as excuses for their failures as romantic partners. She also understood Muslim community norms that position women as ideally financially dependent on their husbands or families as an explanation for women's often relatively less powerful status, which she felt was magnified by the capitalist nature of Australian society. In her words, 'Money is so important. Who has money usually has the power, and here [in Sydney] it's almost always the man [in a married couple]'. Many of Mariam's female Muslim friends and relatives saw being a mother and a wife as an ideal life course. To Mariam, however, it was a risky one and she

worried that the level of financial dependence implied in it could cause women to feel they must put up with bad behaviour from their husbands out of a fear that 'they'll just take off for the next one' should they complain.

Mariam's comments also stimulated discussion about the issue of sexual consent in marriage. When I asked the group whether or not it would be useful to include discussion of consent in Muslim community-based sex and relationships education, such as that provided by Mission of Hope, most everyone present agreed it would be. Most of the group saw it as a topic especially important to address with newlyweds and those recently engaged. However, Mahmood believed that discussion surrounding sexual consent was a currently fashionable yet empty trend and initially rejected it as unnecessary since, as he explained, 'no one in his right mind would force himself on his wife'. Mahmood saw raising awareness about sexual consent among young Muslim couples to be superfluous since he believed Islam already teaches spouses to be kind and gentle with each other. While Mahmood is not wrong (Bouhdiba, 1985), there exist in Sydney, as elsewhere (Abraham 1999; Wehbi 2002; Idrus and Bennett 2003; Bennett 2007), perceptions among some Muslims of sex as being a duty wives should ideally perform for husbands upon request unless there are *legitimate* reasons for refusal[15], such as menstruation or illness. For some, including Mahmood, it is not only sex that must be halal but refusals also. Mahmood did not consider the possibility of psychological pressure as being a way that a husband might 'force himself' upon his wife sexually and instead agreed that a wife does have a responsibility to look after the sexual 'needs' of her husband, which are presumed to be greater than her own. During the discussion, this line of reasoning invited the conclusion, which was condemned by all present including Mahmood, that marital rape is

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[15] Kecia Ali (2006: xviii) notes that the perceived marital subordination of Muslim women to their husbands is often highlighted in Western criticisms of Islam and Muslims, yet very similar requirements for obedience – both inside and outside the conjugal bed – existed, and indeed still exist, in some Christian and Jewish traditions. Moreover, on the topic of marital rape specifically, laws in many Western countries have only recently been amended. In the United States, for example, it was not until 5 July 1993 that all states had legislation that criminalised marital rape (E. Martin, Taft, and Resick 2007).

impossible. Although some Muslims believe that a woman's acceptance of the marriage contract implies consent to perform 'wifely duties' or that enthusiastic sexual consent on the part of a Muslim wife is desirable but ultimately optional (Shannahan 2009), participants in the focus group discussion rejected this standpoint. In Mahmood's case, a different phrasing of the same sexual dynamic between spouses that described a wife's submission to unwanted sexual intercourse as 'rape' instead of 'duty' led him to question his conclusion regarding the need for awareness about sexual consent by the end of the focus group. Throughout the course of the discussion, he appeared to align his position more closely with the others and accept that sexual coercion need not involve physical violence.

The topic of sexual consent in marriage led to wider discussion about sexual autonomy in general. Ali, a 26-year-old man of Lebanese heritage, raised the issue of there being also a need to help keep young women free from the influences of so-called 'Aussie values', one of which he believed to be promiscuity euphemistically rebranded as 'sexual liberation'. When I asked him why women were more in need of protection from this than men, he replied that the survival of the Muslim community depends on Muslim women more than men, and while in his opinion women were harder to corrupt, they were also harder to save once they had strayed from Islamic moral standards. Aisyah, who happened to be Ali's 22-year-old younger sister, agreed with his position and elaborated,

> As *muhajabat*[16] especially, we need to be careful not to slip because we're visible, people see us. [...] We also have to be aware of mainstream trends that are aimed at women, and not only at things like our appearance but also our attitudes, so we have to think carefully about where our priorities are as well as the image we put out. There's a responsibility there. How can I follow Aussie

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[16] The term muhajabat refers to Muslim women who wear a headscarf for reasons of modesty.

values when they are so obsessed with selfish freedom and following your own

desires? I want to follow what Allah *subhana wa ta'ala*[17] desires and then I

follow what my family desire. As a Muslim, this means nothing [no dating, no

kissing, no touching the opposite sex etc.] until I get married. [...] Christians are

supposed to do the same and nobody is telling them that they can't integrate.

Aisyah perceived a great deal of hypocrisy in discourses that criticised Australian Muslim

communities for being sexually repressed when many Australian Christians adhered to

similar codes of conduct without comment. She understood this double standard to be

clear evidence of discrimination.

     Despite the impossibility of achieving consensus, the discussion was generally

respectful, which was likely aided by the fact that all of us in the room that day knew each

other well and were connected in various additional ways either through mutual friendships

or kinship. Men and women, to summarise the main three arguments made by research

participants within this lively focus group discussion, were fundamentally different but

equal in terms of spiritual worth albeit with unequal emotional needs and sexual desires,

as Mahmood, Ali and his sister Aisyah believed; unequal in this world in a practical sense

because of human shortcomings and male privilege, as Mariam claimed; and finally equal

but made to seem less so by modern feminist discourses that devalue the traditional (and

most natural) gender roles of women. This last position is best illustrated by Maha, a 19-

year-old woman of Iraqi heritage, who complained,

There's nothing wrong with being a wife and mother. That's not being

unemployed: it's just unrecognised work. They [non-Muslim Australians] often

say Islam has oppressive rules, and that they're all about doing your own thing,

but you only really get to do certain things or else you get singled out. They

even pick on their own stay-at-home mums – telling us [in school] that we've got

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[17] This phrase is used in context to mean 'the most glorified, most high'.

to get education and jobs to achieve! [...] There's nothing wrong about accepting that women are different from men either. Feminism wants us to be like men and have the expectations and be *liberated* [sarcasm], but that's not realistic. That brings competition between sexes, and then between spouses, and that brings *fitna* (chaos).

Similar to Aisyah, Maha also believed that Australian mainstream discourses that pitied Muslim women as being subordinate to Muslim men were hypocritical and accused Western feminism, which she saw as a united ideology, of creating confusion and disharmony within families.

Throughout this discussion there was a repeated emphasis by many that women have a special ability, and thus responsibility, for upholding and enforcing standards of morality within 'the Muslim community', which was more often than not referred to in the singular, and they should be educated accordingly. Indeed, despite all the freely acknowledged divisions among local Muslims, an overwhelming majority of all my Sydney participants offered their insights relating to a unitary Muslim community, sometimes referred to as the global *ummah*[18], on the basis that Sydney Muslims – as indeed all Muslims – are more similar than they are different and together they face the same pressures from the non-Muslim communities they live among[19]. This unity-in-struggle becomes especially relevant as far as gender is concerned when one considers remarks such as those made by Aisyah and Maha above. For women especially, being part of this unity does not come without rules. There are widely understood codes of modesty for behavioural etiquette, dress style and even speech that signify belonging, where

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[18] The Arabic term *ummah*, which is not limited in its meaning of 'community' to apply only to Muslims or even to human beings, in this context denotes a community of believers. For an analysis of how the concept has been used, and continues to be used among Muslims, please see Van Nieuwenhuijze (1959) and chapter 7 of Marranci (2008) respectively.

[19] My sample of participants included Muslims who identified as Sunni, Shi'a, as well as those who made a point of identifying as neither. Sydney is not immune from sectarian divisions (Dunn 2004: 341-348), and there are tensions between Sunni and Shi'a especially, yet sectarian conflict is beyond the scope of my research as it did not feature significantly in the data I collected.

transgressions can arguably sometimes be understood more as violations of a political nature than of a religious one. In a context where Islamophobia permeates both popular media and political discourse, concepts such as the ill-defined yet often discussed 'Aussie values' are both morally and ideologically loaded and Muslims are frequently judged by both Muslim and non-Muslim Australians according to how they interpret and embody such values. In simple terms, the essential – and essentialising – question is: are you one of 'Them' or one of 'Us'?

Informative or prescriptive: sex education as secular proselytism?

Education about sex and sexuality, which by definition seeks to inform some of the most intimate decisions a person will make, is underpinned by certain assumptions and as such cannot be neutral (Lamb 1997). In Australia, public schools offer comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), where the value of abstinence as well as contraceptive and harm prevention measures are ideally taught, that is intended to provide students with developmentally appropriate information that encourages safe behaviours (Duffy et al. 2013: 186). Australian public schools have significant freedom in terms of the content of CSE (Dyson and Mitchell 2005: 138). Given that there is no national curriculum statement in Australia that guides the teaching of sex education, and that teacher training largely overlooks the topic, its place in Australian schools continues to be debated (Allen and Rasmussen, 2017: 11). Despite this, Australian public schools generally approach topics such as premarital intercourse or non-heterosexualities as morally neutral and portray acts such as oral sex and masturbation as ordinary aspects of human sexuality (Epstein and Johnson 1998; Farrelly, O'Brien, and Prain 2007). However, although sexuality education in general has changed throughout the years to include an ever increasing range of topics, there are still important issues which are being often left out of the curriculum, such as

sexual violence (Carmody 2009), pleasure, power and consent (Powel 2010; Allen 2005) as well as the needs of LGBTQ students (Hillier and Mitchell 2008).

In practice, the supposedly morally neutral presentation of sexual behaviours and gender or sexual diversity can be considered by many to be quite ideologically loaded at best or morally proselytising at worst. As Salma, a 20-year-old Australian Muslim woman of Jordanian heritage, explained to me,

> I remember feeling embarrassed [in school]. Not feeling comfortable with [casual] sex or dating made me feel like I was a bit old fashioned. Not loving the idea of gay relationships made me feel really bad. I don't hate people who hook up or experiment, but I still think it's not the healthiest way to live. [...] They showed us nasty photos [of diseased genitals] and said, 'if you want to avoid this, use protection'. Ha! How about the other kinds of protection out there too? But no, that's oppressive! Am I right? I remember there being a big push [in school] for everyone to talk openly – but if I had raised my hand and said, 'I think God provides the best guidance of all', people would laugh or feel sorry for me. They did try to make space for religious people, but I always felt a bit pitied and as if they were trying to gently educate us [religious people] out of it.

Salma's suggestion that following what she understood to be Islamic regulations of sexual conduct provided the 'best guidance of all' echoes multiple other research participants' claims that abstinence is the only way to ensure both spiritual and physical safety. CSE often meets resistance within Muslim communities because of fears that it undermines local understandings of the Islamic concept of family life and presents certain religiously condemned behaviours as acceptable (Halstead 1997: 319). Sanjakdar has observed that although there is a wide agreement among Australian Muslims that young people do need some form of guidance in understanding their developing sexuality, there is much

debate about what should be taught, how it should be taught, and who should be teaching it (Sanjakdar 2009b: 261).

Mark Halstead has written extensively[20] on the topic of values, sexuality education and Muslim communities. He believes that an understanding of beliefs and behaviour that do not align with local Islamic norms will assist Muslim students in engaging with the wider multicultural societies in which they live (Halstead 1997: 325). Any education designed to develop such understanding will of course involve venturing into the realm of private values and Halstead suggests that, in a classroom context, the best course of action is to instruct students in a wide variety of viewpoints without promoting one moral or philosophical perspective over the other (Halstead 1999: 276), something which many proponents of CSE would argue is already an objective (Jeffries et al. 2010). However, true neutrality is impossible and even the refusal to condemn or promote certain values over others can be interpreted as potentially threatening to various perceptions of moral order. An example of this would include the portrayal of non-heterosexualities within the classroom. Halstead has identified the teaching of LGBTQ topics to be a particular point of tension with Muslim students, yet he insists that they are essential nonetheless (Halstead and Lewicka 1998: 62). It is of great importance, for Halstead, to avoid attempting to convert Muslim students to an acceptance of what he refers to as 'contemporary western attitudes to homosexuality' and this may be achieved by

> alternative approaches to teaching about homosexuality in the secondary
>
> school which minority faith communities are likely to find much more helpful.
>
> One possibility is to teach the topic as a controversial issue, in the same way
>
> that the topic of nuclear power might be taught, for example, with children being
>
> introduced sensitively to a range of different perspectives and no attempt being

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[20] Please see, for example, Halstead and Reiss 2003; Halstead and Lewicka 1998; and Halstead 1999, 1997, and 1995.

made to indoctrinate them into one particular view. (Halstead and Lewicka 1998: 62).

Michael Merry has criticised Halstead's suggestions on the basis that he overlooks the variety of interpretations within Islam, neglects the needs (and indeed existence) of Muslim LGBTQ students, and ultimately discourages genuine discussion between lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender individuals and Muslims who feel uncomfortable with non-heterosexualities (Merry 2005: 22). In addition to these problematic points, I would add that Halstead's usage of the category 'contemporary western attitudes to homosexuality' is a hypothetical ideal that serves as a heuristic tool instead of being observable reality. It is unclear where the boundaries of 'the West' lie and there are also often conspicuous exceptions within countries that are indisputably Western, such as the United States, as the existence of exceptionally homophobic organisations such as the Westboro Baptist Church shows (Baker, Bader, and Hirsch 2015). I have also observed that distinctions between 'Western attitudes' and 'Muslim attitudes', as they might apply in my own research, gloss over the nuanced reality of many of my informants who feel pressured to express a particular viewpoint —or remain silent about their own— simply because they think it is what others expect of them.

During a conversation about stereotypes of Australian and Muslim values, Yasmin, a 23-year-old Muslim woman of Egyptian heritage, remarked, 'between *Team Aussie* and *Team Mozzie*, I've got to be *Team Mozzie'.* The term 'mozzie' is Australian slang for both mosquito and Muslim. Although the latter has some pejorative connotations, it has been appropriated by some Muslims to refer to themselves in a similar way to how some within LGBT communities have appropriated the word 'queer'. 'Team Aussie', in this instance, is a reference to former Prime Minister Tony Abbott's much publicised comments that all

migrants must join 'Team Australia' in August 2014.[21] When I asked her in which situations she felts as if she must choose between the two 'teams', she replied,

> Yasmin: 'Only all the time in every day of my life. With this [hijab], I'm like a walking billboard. If I become too Western, I'll get called a 'house Muslim'. But it's not that I hate Aussie values. I don't.

> Lisa: 'What about in school [as regards sex education]?'

> Yasmin: [Despite not veiling back then], I still felt the need to choose. People knew I was Muslim and so supporting or doing the wrong things would get noticed: Muslims would gossip and everyone else would get the wrong idea about what we're about. Besides, if I stood up and said something like gays can't help it and so God won't punish them, that would bring me too much attention. Also, non-Muslims might get whatever I say as a kind of *Islamic opinion*, and that's not my place. So I chose to keep quiet, and I stuck with that.

Yasmin mentioned the term 'house Muslim' as a synonym for 'liberal Muslim' and both terms can sometimes be heard used with the intention to either insult or to educate by way of threat. The term 'liberal Muslim' is used similarly within Muslim communities in both Sydney and Singapore to refer to Muslims who are non-practicing or very secular in their viewpoints. I have observed the term 'House Muslim', on the other hand, to be unique to Sydney in this research. It comes from a speech Malcolm X gave at Michigan State University in 1963 where he described the differences between 'house Negroes', who identify closely with White society, and 'field Negroes' who do not[22]. These terms have been modified to 'house Muslim' and 'field Muslim' and used among some Sydney

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[21] For media coverage of the context, please see 'Tony Abbott says new migrants must be on 'Team Australia' as he steps up war on home-grown jihadists' (18 Aug 2014), News.com.au. Available at: http://www.news.com.au/national/tony-abbott-says-new-migrants-must-be-on-team-australia-as-he-steps-up-war-on-homegrown-jihadists/story-fncynjr2-1227027870342 (last accessed 8 January 2018).

[22] For a transcription of the speech Malcolm X gave, please see Columbia University's website 'The Autobiography of Malcolm X: Speeches and Interviews' at http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/mmt/mxp/speeches/mxa17.html (last accessed: 1 June 2015).

Fig. 6.): The Sydney suburb of Auburn is home to a large Turkish Muslim community which is reflected in the Ottoman-style of Gallipoli Mosque.

Muslims to communicate a deep sense of alienation from, and frustration with, wider Australian society as well as to 'out' and admonish Muslims who are perceived to assimilate Australian values to the point of transgressing against their own community norms. Yasmin believed that expressing her belief that sexual orientation was not a choice would attract attention from non-Muslims because of the various stereotypes that exist of Muslims in Australia. Instead of being just a person with an opinion, she expected to become the *Muslim voice* on the topic to her non-Muslim classmates, most of whom had limited contact with Muslims, and she feared that whatever she may say might be used against another Muslim with differing views. Alternately, she was also concerned about attracting the disapproval of her Muslim peers and being forced to defend her position. Not wanting that responsibility and also keenly aware of local Muslim condemnations of homosexuality as a morally deviant 'lifestyle choice', Yasmin instead decided to remain silent and unobserved. As Fatima Mernissi keenly observed, 'when the enemy satellites are keeping watch, it is not the moment to wallow in one's individuality' (Mernissi 1992: 91).

During the course of this research I have also had the occasion to meet Muslims of varied sexual orientations and gender identities who have expressed varying degrees of

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appreciation for school-based initiatives, such as 'Wear it Purple Day'[23], that foster the acceptance and normalisation of gender and sexual diversity. For example, Lila, who is a 25-year-old Australian Muslim woman of Lebanese heritage, lamented during an interview that she wished there were more opportunities to learn about non-heterosexualities when she was a secondary school student, not only because it was something personally relevant to her as a young queer Muslim woman, but also because she considered many of her mostly non-Muslim classmates at the time to be woefully ignorant. On the topic of sexually transmitted infections, Aydin, a 23-year-old Australian Muslim man of Turkish heritage, suggested that educating all students in the basics of safe sex for both heterosexual and homosexual intimacy was essential for safeguarding public health in general. As he explained,

> If you open Grindr[24] in Auburn, there is no shortage of Muslims! Many of these guys are married with kids too. The wives and families usually have no idea. You might even see them on Friday [at the mosque]. So yeah, everyone has to know at least the basics and know that 'it won't happen to me' is one of the biggest lies out there. It's even worse if they go home and pass something to their wives because they didn't take care of themselves or wouldn't admit to themselves that they had to.

Although Aydin was sexually attracted to other men for as long as he can remember, he did not identify himself as gay until the year before I spoke to him. He explained that he suspected many of the men he saw on Grindr were likely to also not identify as gay despite engaging in sex with other men. Not identifying as 'gay', according to Aydin, made it less likely that such men would seek health information relevant to gay sex. While many

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[23] Wear it Purple Day, which enjoys the support of both federal and NSW Ministers for Education, falls on the last Friday in August of every year.   The objective of it is to empower LGBTQ students and create an inclusive, accepting environment in schools. For more information, please see http://wearitpurple.org/ (last accessed 8 January 2018)

[24] Grindr is a location-based social networking application that is aimed towards gay, bisexual and bi-curious men.

might be aware of sexually transmitted infections in a general sense, they might not be aware of the increased risk of certain infrequently discussed conditions for men who have sex with men, such as *shigellosis* which is a bacterial infection spread through faecal-oral transmission. Information about such conditions is not commonly included in sex education curricula in Australia (Hillier and Mitchell 2008) and is instead shared by sexual health organisations that target LGBTQ communities, such as ACON in Sydney.[25] If a person participates in same-sex intimacy and yet does not identify as LGBTQ, they will be less likely to access resources that could help them remain safe.

Teaching or preaching?: comprehensive sex education as a moralising discourse

Halstead's (1997, 1999) research resonates with my data, which demonstrate that many Muslim Australians feel alienated by the moral stance toward sex that underpins sex education in schools. Some research participants complained that they remembered school-based sex education, as well as some loosely related activities, to be unacceptably morally prescriptive. For example, Mona, a 20-year-old Lebanese woman, explained to me that she deeply resented being told 'not to judge' and to be accepting of gender and sexual diversity. She felt stereotyped by both classmates and teachers for any disagreement she might express with classroom content. Mona felt disengaged and frustrated as a result of this and she described some of her lessons as containing 'propaganda'.

> I remember that there was some pro-gay propaganda. I mean, I accept them [non-heterosexuals] but I don't need to be told that they are normal. They're not. […] I think my beliefs and right to disagree should be respected without me being made to feel like I'm *yet another* angry Muslim*.

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[25] For example, ACON, which was incorporated in 1985 as the AIDS Council of NSW, issued a press release about a shigellosis outbreak in New South Wales in July, 2016. It is available at: https://www.acon.org.au/about-acon/latest-news/media-releases/page/6/#concern-rises-over-worsening-shigella-outbreak (last accessed 8 January 2018).

Mona perceived a strong element of discrimination within the resistance her views were met with. Instead of being perceived as simply old fashioned, conservative or even homophobic, Mona believed that she was seen as an 'angry Muslim' whose outdated conservatism and homophobia was implied by her Muslim faith. Mona recalled feeling unfairly singled out not only in ways that Anglo-Australian Christian classmates who held similar views were not but also in ways that defied the values of pluralism and openness that she felt were being extended to issues of gender and sexual diversity in the classroom.

Mona would not be alone in her experience of classroom discrimination. Mansouri and Kamp (2007: 100-101) have documented examples of racism and social exclusion targeting Arab Australian students that, in their words, 'cannot be dismissed as over-sensitivity'. Dunn and colleagues have argued that 'old racism' in Australia that was based on ethnicity has been replaced by a new 'cultural racism' that discriminates on the basis of cultural difference (2004, pp. 410-11). The presumed cultural difference between Australian Muslims and non-Muslims is immense and ongoing (Jakubowicz, 2007; Hopkins, 2011; Woodlock, 2011; Akbarzadeh, 2016). Mikola, Colic-Peisker and Dekker have observed that debates surrounding immigration and integration reinforce hierarchies where '[t]he positions of those who have the right to speak and to make and implement rules, and of those who need to obey them, are clearly set out' (2016: 328). While Mikola, Colic-Peisker and Dekker are referring to Australian society as a whole, the same 'rules' apply to the classroom in many cases. Mona's position that homosexuality was not 'normal' was something she shared with some of her other Anglo-Australian, Christian classmates. In Mona's recollection of the particular classroom incident that caused her to feel discriminated against, she and some of her female Christian classmates were discussing in a small work group the ethics of adoption by same-sex couples as well as their belief in the need of children to have both a father and mother. Although she was not

the most vocal of the group, she remembers an Asian Australian teacher directing her specifically to be more accepting and 'not to judge'. Mona believed that her religion, made visible by the headscarf she wore, marked her views as being especially problematic despite that they were not unique. In light of the fact that Australia did not legalise marriage equality until 2017 and educational programs focussing on the needs of LGBTQ students have provoked moral panic within many sections of Australian society (Rodwell, 2016), Mona's assertion that she believed homosexuality was not 'normal' was neither un-Australian nor unusual. However, against a backdrop of stereotypes that portray Muslims as especially prone to dangerous intolerance (Dunn, Klocker and Salabay, 2007), it is likely that her claim was considered symptomatic of deeper, more worrying ideological inclinations resulting from her faith. In this sense, it appears that it was Mona's religiosity that transgressed the 'rules' of the classroom more than any particular statement she made.

Anthropologist Ghassan Hage has described 'the gaze of White paranoia' as moving towards Australian Muslim communities after the first Gulf War and intensifying after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 (2003: 66-67). Under this gaze, Muslims are portrayed in public discourse as a threat that Australia must be protected from despite its multicultural mix of a populace (Hage, 1998). Drawing a contrast with the White Australia policy, under which migrants were unambiguously regarded as outsiders, Hage claims that multiculturalism discourse in Australia is now 'about fully accepting [migrants] as Australians' (1998: 102). A large part of this acceptance, according to Hage, hinges on an idealised notion of tolerance that is highly conditional and presumes the supremacy of Anglo-Australian culture (1998: 79). Hage's analysis helps explain why Australians who are the Muslim children of migrants, such as Mona, are not considered co-constructors of 'Australian values' but are instead measured by their compliance with what those views are imagined to be at any given time by the majority. Despite being Australian-born and

raised, Mona may only seek acceptance instead of being able to fully participate in discourses about the rules of what is acceptable. The 'acceptor' in Australian society, according to Hage, is an Anglo-Australian one (1998: 102), yet the rules set by such 'acceptors' may be enforced by Australians from other ethnic communities, such as Mona's teacher. In such an environment, objections about some Muslim religious views of sexuality can function as a displaced language for expressing discrimination that is not solely used by Anglo Australians.

While many Muslim Australians feel alienated by the moral stance toward sex that underpins sex education in schools, many others do not. Common secular comprehensive sex education approaches do not alienate all young Muslims nor polarise all opinions. According to Fida Sankjakdar, '[m]any understandings of sexual health and constructs of sexuality held by Muslims are informed by cultural underpinnings rather than Islamic perspectives' (2009: 261). It is certainly true that cultural background shapes a person's approach to sexuality and sexual health. However, separating 'cultural underpinnings' from 'Islamic perspectives,' as Sanjakdar does, implies that the two are divisible when I would argue based on my data that they are not. It is impossible to, for example, identify which of my research participants have the most 'Islamic' perspective on sexuality and sexual health because what is considered authentically Islamic is itself the product of culturally-shaped and contested discourse. Following anthropologist Talal Asad's (1986:14) understanding of Islam as a 'tradition' that consists of 'discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice […]', it is possible to identify several different examples of such discourses represented by research participants discussed in this study, both in Singapore and in Australia. However, it is also possible to identify examples of Muslims whose spirituality or behaviour is not primarily motivated nor shaped by the 'correct form' of Islamic practice as understood by the Muslims around them. Yasmin, to illustrate, reported feeling pressured to perform certain

attitudes while she was a secondary school student to avoid attracting the criticism of her

Muslim peers or the attention of non-Muslim classmates. Using the example of her

acceptance of homosexuality as being neither a lifestyle choice nor sinful, Yasmin recalled

keeping her opinions to herself out of fear that her viewpoint could be used by non

Muslims against other Muslims who were less accepting or, alternately, used by other

Muslims against her. Her refusal to speak out as an ally of LGBTQ people was not

motivated by a belief that it was spiritually wrong to do so. Instead, she was sensitive to

the stereotypes that exist of Muslims and did not want to say anything that might attract

attention to her and position her as an outlier among Muslims.

Although often idealised, the secular is neither stable nor singular (Asad 2003: 25).

Commonly taken for granted associations between secularism and freedom, individualism

and sexual liberation have been discussed by Joan Scott (Scott 2009: 1), who coined the

term 'sexularism' to describe the assumption that 'secularism encourages the free

expression of sexuality and it thereby ends the oppression of women because it removes

transcendence as the foundation for social norms and treats people as autonomous

individuals, agents capable of crafting their own destiny'. Transcendence in this instance

refers to religion, which has been often understood in the social sciences as giving way to

secular modernity through various varieties of the secularisation thesis (Casanova, 2009:

1050). Scott questions such well-worn oppositions between 'modern' and 'traditional' as

well as 'secular' and 'religious' among others, arguing that the equality promised by

secularism is, and has always been, troubled by sexual difference (2009: 3). Recognising

that such dichotomies are problematic adds to arguments that CSE is just one moralising

discourse among many and, as (Rasmussen 2012: 471-2) has noticed, some scholars

tend to avoid engaging with the complexities of competing rights discourses and moral

claims in CSE because of their own ideological leanings. In the context of Australia, both

my own fieldwork and the work of scholars such as Fida Sanjakdar (Sanjakdar 2004;

Sanjakdar 2005; Sanjakdar 2009b; Sanjakdar 2011; Sanjakdar 2013) and Maria Pallota-Chiarolli (M. Pallotta-Chiarolli 1996; Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli 1999) suggest that it is not only scholars who do this.   Even well meaning attempts to make space for religious students in the classroom, as Salma above suggested, can still be perceived as condescending or preachy.

Chapter Four

Prayers at Pink Dot: queer Muslim experiences in Singapore

During the month of Ramadan in Singapore, the mostly Malay Muslim enclave of Geylang shines with a bright and colourful variety of beautiful decorations and light displays. After dusk, a short stroll down Sims Avenue towards the Geylang Serai markets brings into view a vibrant, bustling tent-city of temporary stalls that are set up especially for this holiday period. The evenings are an important part of Ramadan as Muslims who observe it as a period of fasting permit themselves to eat only after dusk and before dawn. Being that dining together is an important part of socialising for Singaporeans of all religions, this means that the markets and food stalls spring to life after the *maghrib* prayers that sunset brings. In one section of the markets, food hawkers, confectioners, and dealers in all kinds of deliciousness occupy every single available inch of space and compete with one another for customers. In another section, catering to those who had already had their evening fill, women peruse row after row of beautiful fabrics, trinkets and delicately embroidered headscarves, which are known locally as *tudung*, and nearby an elderly lady offers to etch out floral designs in dark brown henna on one hand for $10 SGD or two for $15. The atmosphere in the markets during Ramadan evenings is a jovial contrast to the more sombre environment of the many surrounding prayer halls, where people go to reflect as well as perform special *tarawih* prayers late into the night[26].

It was in the midst of this festive scene that I met Mehreen. At 28, she was the youngest daughter of a Pakistani family who had migrated to Singapore and taken up citizenship when she was a child. Mehreen was very attached to her adopted home and

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[26] Tarawih prayers are optional prayers which are performed by Sunni Muslims after the last of the five prayers, which is known as *isha* in Arabic, during the month of Ramadan.

Sufism, a mystical interpretation of Islam that continues to thrive (van Bruinessen and Howel 2007), was a warm, empowering influence in her life. I was told that Mehreen's mother was especially fond of the poetry of famous Sufi figures such as Yunus Emre and Muhammad Jalal ud-din Rumi, and she believed this had shaped the Islam that was practiced in the family home. To Mehreen, Islam was inseparable from love. She often spoke of 'loving all others for the sake of Allah' and generously presumed that difficult people deserved patience and warmth because the bad or cruel behaviour of others originates in their unhappiness. Being Muslim, then, meant cultivating this love as a divine commandment and then reflecting it on to others as a mirror reflects light. In practice this involved volunteering her time and expertise in business to various development projects around Southeast Asia as well as being careful to acknowledge and meet the needs of those closer to home where possible. Loving all people, however, is understandably not without its challenges.

It was early July when Mehreen and I agreed to meet and have a chat over dinner about some recent controversies that had emerged following Pink Dot, a recently established annual celebration of LGBTQ identities in Singapore that campaigns for, in its organisers' words, 'the freedom to love'. The date that organisers had chosen to hold Pink Dot had caused some considerable concern because, being held on 28 June 2014, it nearly coincided with the first day of Ramadan on the following day. A mutual acquaintance of ours who taught Islamic religious classes at a local private consultancy business, Ustaz Noor Deros[27], had launched a social media initiative to challenge the normalisation of LGBTQ identities in Singapore and even invited the collaboration of local Christian pastor Lawrence Khoong (Andanari and Ng, 2015)[28]. He called this online

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[27] Mr Noor Dero's name has not been disguised, despite his being an acquaintance of myself and many of my informants, because he has campaigned and written about his views extensively and also I did not have the opportunity to interview him personally. Therefore, any information presented here about him or his views is available in the public domain.

[28] Pastor Khoong went on to lead the Wear White protest the following year (R. Lee, 2016).

campaign 'Wear White', described it as a grassroots movement to remind Muslims that they should neither participate in nor support Pink Dot, and invited all Muslims to wear white for the first night of tarawih prayers on the eve of Ramadan, or June 28th. According to the press statement posted on the Wear White website,

> The movement's genesis was from our observations of the growing normalisation of LGBT in Singapore. However, we recognise the conduct and it's [sic] support among Muslims is due to the lack of understanding and connection with Islam and our fitrah. We thus came together initially with the expressed purpose of reminding Muslims not to participate in the LGBT event on 28th June.
>
> The movement encourages a return to the values as guided by Islam. These values include prioritising the family and marriage, responsibility and justice and fair dealings.
>
> The initial campaign emphasises a return to natural relationships as found in Islam. Given the clarity in Islam on the nature and conduct of family relationships, marriage between a man and a woman forms the basis of the family.[29]

What began with a website and social media presence on Facebook[30] soon had many people discussing — and often heatedly — the issues raised by Deros' campaign both online and offline, and this had threatened friendships in social circles Mehreen and I both belonged to. It had also made some mutual friends feel vulnerable and anxious. Noor Deros was a man who challenged Mehreen's commitment to loving others for the sake of Allah.

Ever the optimist, Mehreen described her efforts to see the bright side. She thought

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[29] Available at: http://www.wearwhite.sg/ (last accessed 21 December 2017)

[30] Available at: https://www.facebook.com/wearwhitesg/ (last accessed 21 December 2017)

that Deros' intentions were good, but she lamented that he, and the followers he attracted, treated same-sex attraction and gender dysphoria as if they were a choice. She was also disappointed that the new movement was polarising people into two very opposed camps. As she explained,

> I would like to see the good in his project [Wear White]. It's a good thing to invite people to think about their spiritual welfare, and I would like to see the benefit it might bring. But, I can't see past all the fighting. If this is all about celebrating [heteronormative] families, and bringing people back to *fitrah* [nature], then why is he causing so much *fitna* [chaos]? Some of his little fans have told Hazrizal [a mutual friend of ours] that he will go to hell because his Mum won't forgive him [for being gay].

At this point I asked Mehreen what Hazrizal's mother had to do with this and she replied, 'Apparently, since *Jannah* (paradise) is under your mother's feet, you're out of luck if your Mum is angry with you'.

Hazrizal was a 23 year-old Malay Muslim Singaporean gay man who felt isolated from his friends and family members after telling them about his sexuality. Since he was going through an understandably difficult time, Mehreen and I were both worried about his welfare during this period. Reflecting on the conversations she had been part of about Pink Dot and Wear White as well as the media reports she had read, Mehreen lamented that,

> Things wouldn't be so bad if it were just Noor and his heroes, but he's inspired armies of trolls online who mistake religion as an excuse [to be offensive]. I think he's [Hazrizal] ok, but it can't be easy. Everyone's just so whipped up and defensive and it's putting a spotlight on these issues, but not in a good way! And Noor's thing [the Wear White campaign] has just encouraged people to take sides. You either wore pink or you wore white. You're either for family and

morality or you're against it. Very black and white. You are going to jannah or

you're going to hell. Charming.

Mehreen cared deeply about the emotional and spiritual welfare of LGBTQ

Muslims. She identifies as a cis-gendered heterosexual ally, meaning that while she is not

same-sex attracted, transgender or gender queer, she supports the rights and wellbeing of

those who are. Her position on LGBTQ issues was greatly shaped by a close friendship

she formed in her high school years with a male classmate who felt compelled to hide his

sexuality from friends and family out of a fear of ostracism. Mehreen's classmate was

Chinese and from a non-religious family, and although the threat of rejection was as real

for him as it was for Hazrizal, she believed that Hazrizal would inevitably struggle more

because of his Malay ethnicity and Muslim identity. Hazrizal's non-heterosexuality made

him a marginalised minority within a marginalised minority in Singapore.   This

intersectionality poses some very unique challenges for non-heterosexual Malay Muslim

Singaporeans.

Sociologist of religion Linda Woodhead has observed that, 'The most powerful

groups in society are also those whose life experience is most fully articulated,

represented, celebrated and thus amplified' (Woodhead, 2016: 9). The Malay community

in Singapore is underprivileged when compared to other Singaporean communities in

many respects (Rahim, 1998, 2012; Mutalib, 2012), yet heterosexual Malay Muslims have

opportunities to perform 'good citizenship' through joining more powerful communities in

the denunciation of non-heterosexualities and gender diversity as a means of overcoming

this position of disadvantage (Ibrahim, 2016). Non-heterosexual Muslims, by contrast, find

themselves on the fringes of not only the Muslim community but also Singaporean society

as a whole. This chapter focuses on research I carried out in Singapore and will discuss

some of the unique challenges that Muslim LGBTQ Singaporeans face. Beginning with a

brief discussion of the moral conservatism that Singapore has become known for

internationally as well as an overview of Islamic discourses on non-heterosexualities, this chapter explores how many common negative attitudes towards same-sex attraction have been internalised by some Singaporean non-heterosexual Muslims. As a minority within a minority, non-heterosexual and gender diverse Muslims in Singapore are often vulnerable to several intersecting forms of discrimination from their families, the Malay Muslim community and also the Singaporean state — all of which discipline how they present themselves, how they perceive themselves and also what they perceive to be authentic ways of leading Islamic lives. However, among my research participants there are also those who see non-heterosexuality as either being morally neutral or even something to be celebrated. Among such people are those of various sexual orientations and gender identities who see Pink Dot as an important step in the struggle for LGBTQ rights in Singapore.

One of the main purposes of this thesis is to emphasise the individualised nature of my Muslim research participants' experience of their own religion and to avoid doing so in isolation to the context within which they live and the power structures in which they navigate. This chapter works towards this aim by introducing the ideas of Michel de Certeau and scholarship on resistance to help explore how some non-heterosexual and gender diverse Muslims use small, everyday acts of resistance against local Muslim orthodoxies in order to carve out their own space as Singaporean Muslims. Exploring the dynamics behind research participants' decisions to resist or comply with various local Muslim community norms, while also considering the position of spiritual uncertainty that many non-heterosexual and gender diverse Muslims occupy, opens up an opportunity to observe the vast range of ways in which they navigate their Islamic identities and engage with local structures of orthodoxy. Both this chapter and the next, which focuses on non-heterosexual and gender diverse Muslims in Sydney, illustrate the various kinds of authority structures, political and legal systems, dominant orthodoxies, and cultural norms

that shape these possibilities for Muslim diversity as well as the forces that seek to constrain them.

Moral Conservatism and the status of LGBTQ Singaporeans

Singapore has an international reputation for being a socially conservative society.   Before moving there in 2008, I knew little of the small city-state apart from a handful of stereotypes and widely circulated news stories about Singapore outlawing the sale of chewing gum and caning tourists found guilty in court of vandalism, which is a punishment often reported as unreasonably harsh[31] from the outside but presented as fair and to be expected from within[32].   Beyond media reports, academic research has suggested a widespread sympathy among Singaporeans towards moral conservatism across a wide range of values (Kuah-Pearce 1997; Leong 2012; Mathews 2009). More recently in 2014, the Institute of Policy Studies published the results of a survey that posed questions on race, religion and language to more than 4000 Singaporeans of various ethnic and religious backgrounds (Mathews 2014). Amongst other questions that probed issues of ethnic and religious identity, participants were instructed to indicate their feelings on a wide range of social issues by selecting from the three options of 'not wrong most of the time/ not wrong at all', 'only wrong sometimes' or 'always wrong/almost always wrong'. It contained some telling findings that support Singapore's reputation for moral conservatism such as the fact that 56.4% of respondents believed that heterosexual intercourse before marriage was unacceptable and 78.2% of respondents believed that sexual intercourse between two same-sex partners was 'always or almost always wrong' (Mathews 2014:

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[31] A recent example of this was the case of Andreas Von Knorre and Elton Hintz, both from Germany, who were sentenced to three strokes of a cane and nine months in prison for trespassing and vandalism in 2015. A story about this incident is available via Al Jazeera at: http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/3/5/two-germans-to-be-caned-jailed-for-singapore-train-graffiti.html (last accessed 6 February 2018).

[32] Some examples of recent vandalism cases as reported by the Singaporean Straits Times are available at: http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/from-the-straits-times-archives-vandalism-cases-in-singapore (last accessed 6 February 2018).

42-43).

Widespread negative attitudes towards homosexuality among Singaporeans have been noted elsewhere. In a study conducted by Detenber and colleagues in 2005 at Nanyang Technological University, 68.6% of a randomised sample of 1004 respondents expressed negative views towards 'homosexuals' (Detenber et al. 2007: 371). An earlier government-funded study in 2002 of 1,481 Singaporeans found that 85% of participants considered homosexuality to be unacceptable (Chen 2013). Homophobic attitudes are not uncommon either in Asian contexts (Wong and Tang 2004) or in European ones (Steffens and Wagner 2004); however, this particularly significant negativity could in part be explained by a tendency of local media to frame non-heterosexualities as contrary to Asian values and unwholesome (Goh 2008) as well as by a general lack of visible positive LGBTQ figures. Both television and print media are banned from carrying material that portrays LGBTQ 'lifestyles' if such content 'promotes', 'justifies', or 'glamorises' 'homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexualism, transsexualism, [and] transvestism' (L. Chua 2014: 39). The line between promotion or glamorising and merely depicting LGBTQ individuals as ordinary people appears to be thin (Leong 2005; Detenber et al. 2012), despite the fact that laws have been relaxed somewhat in recent years and the Censorship Review Committee has claimed to aspire to become more flexible in its approach to material portraying homosexuality (Censorship Review Committee 2003). For example, on 23 February 2016, President Obama's comments on The Ellen Degeneres Show, where he praised the openly lesbian talk show host for her role in advocating gay rights, were edited out prior to its broadcast on Singapore's Mediacorp Channel 5 (W. Y. Yip 2016).

In public life, there were no openly LGBTQ politicians before the Singapore Democratic Party's openly gay candidate Dr Vincent Wijeysingha's participation in the 2011 elections. In 2003, the then-Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong announced that the civil

service would be open to LGBTQ Singaporeans by stating, 'In the past, if we know you're gay, we would not employ you. But we just changed this quietly' (C. K. K. Tan, 2009a: 317). This was met with mixed reactions and some angry letters to The Straits Times warning of Singapore's impending moral doom (C. K. K. Tan 2009b: 134). Other openly LGBTQ public figures who are visible tend to work in the creative arts and the government's aspirations to become a 'global city for the arts' (Chang 2000; Chang and Lee 2003) has caused a softening of previous policies about what kind of art is or is not considered acceptable. However, some have suggested that the 'global city' project remains very much a heteronormative one with only very carefully curated allowances made for sexual diversity in public space (Peterson 2003; K. P. Tan and Lee 2007; Oswin 2012). It is yet to be seen how much the establishment, and growing popularity of the annual Pink Dot celebration, will soften public opinion towards non-heterosexualities. What can be said with certainty is that Singapore is undergoing changes and challenges to the traditionally held philosophy of 'Asian values' are increasingly common.

Definitions of precisely what 'Asian values' are vary. The term has associations with Confucian ethics and has been variously deployed by political leaders, such as Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore and Mahathir Mohamed in Malaysia among others, to exalt commonalities among different Asian ethnicities and invite people to carefully retain their cultural values and reject Western influences with the promise of economic prosperity and social stability as a result (de Bary 1998). Appeals to 'Asian values' are also used to justify authoritarian styles of government and provide an 'antidote' of sorts to social ills that are associated with Westernisation, such as crime, high divorce rates and general instability of family life (Thompson 2004: 1085-1086). The moral basis of Asian values also includes a fairly rigid definition of what a 'family' is, how it should be built and some rather patriarchal notions of how it should be managed. The family unit in Singapore, for example, is understood to mean to the union of one man and one woman (and their respective

families) for the purpose of companionship and reproduction. It is not unusual for a typical family home to include some extended family, such as grandparents, but family structures that are considered unusual can be viewed with suspicion or pity, such as situations where an adult son lives with his parents without intention to marry. Same-sex families are generally not considered to be 'families' and as such lack equal access to government benefits such as subsidised housing.

More than 80% of the population live in housing estates developed by the government's Housing Development Board (HDB), an example of which is pictured below, and these homes are sold directly to Singaporean citizens at a controlled price. Resale HDB flats sold at market prices in land-scarce Singapore, or privately developed properties, would cost buyers significantly more than purchasing a new home directly from HDB. In order to enjoy the privilege of buying an affordable new home from HDB, an applicant must be at least 21 years old and plan to form a 'nuclear' family within the property, which may include only close relatives or a spouse of the opposite sex[33]. This results in many same-sex couples, or indeed simply couples who do not intend to marry, not being able to afford to buy a home together. The government will only lend its

Fig. 7.): In HDB blocks, wet laundry is suspended on bamboo poles that attach to specially designed holders on windowsills. Photograph taken from my 15th floor apartment in Ghim Moh, Singapore.

support to families that align with its ideal of Asian values (Sun 2011; B. H. Chua 1997)

[33] For details about eligibility, please see the Housing Development Board's website at http://www.hdb.gov.sg/cs/infoweb/residential/buying-a-flat/new/hdb-flat (last accessed 3 Feb 2018).

and the privileging of heterosexual relationships extends to matters of healthcare access, taxation, inheritance, immigration and domestic violence protection (Chua 2014: 38).

The Singaporean state continues to moderate public morality though censorship, public school education syllabi, and also careful control over which non-governmental organisations are allowed to operate and how. For example, Singapore has had an active feminist NGO since the founding of the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) in 1985. However, AWARE has always been forced to keep within state-sanctioned definitions of what constitutes appropriate feminism and so remains limited to providing support resources to women in abusive relationships, running anti-sexism media campaigns and other endeavours that, while certainly helpful, represent cis-gendered heterosexual interests exclusively (Lyons 2004: 114). There was a possibility for change in 2008 when public schools were allowed to outsource their sexuality education programs and AWARE developed and implemented a program that acknowledged non-heterosexualities in a number of schools. The program that AWARE developed, however, attracted complaints and criticism of it became particularly fierce after a group of Anglican Pentecostal women attempted to stage a

Fig. 8.): Despite measures to uphold Asian values, the Singaporean government's conservatism does not interfere with the existence of sex shops beside retailers of children's toys in popular shopping centres, such as this photograph of Singapore's Junction 8 strip mall illustrates.

takeover of the group's executive council in protest of the leadership's perceived pro-homosexual agenda (Chong 2011: 567). This event, now dubbed the 'AWARE saga', and the surrounding controversy attracted the attention of the Ministry of Education, which issued a statement claiming that the content of AWARE's program conveyed 'messages which could promote homosexuality' and, after suspending all external sexuality education programs for a period, now closely monitors all external programs to ensure their compliance with an official sex education framework (Liew 2014: 708). This action avoided a public conversation about the material being taught and, as such, buried the moral panic without engaging with it.

Open conflict tends to be frowned upon by Singaporeans and the Singaporean government. The government has led many initiatives to foster tolerance and harmony because of fears that racial and religious differences in particular could potentially become a flashpoint for trouble. These initiatives can take many forms. In schools, for example, school students are encouraged to acknowledge Racial Harmony Day on July 21st every year (Han 2000) and it is not uncommon for the residents of Housing Development Board flats to receive pamphlets and newsletters that celebrate neighbourhood diversity in some way. Political discourse often refers to the Maria Hertogh Riots in 1950, the Prophet Muhammad Birthday Riots in 1964 (which Racial Harmony Day commemorates annually) and the May 13 Riots in 1969 as being examples of why maintaining good relations between different ethnic and religious groups is in everyone's best interest. However, as Rahim (2012: 174) has noticed, the perception of Singapore as being a country easily destabilised by religious and ethnic conflict has led to draconian administrative policies being justified by the PAP government in the name of security or public order. Indeed, Lee (2010: 137) has described the PAP government as having 'little tolerance for free and open discourse' and accuses it of limiting freedom of speech in any politically sensitive

matter. Limits on freedom of speech in this case would not be limited solely to matters of race and religion as there is much in Singapore that is potentially politically sensitive.

The prohibited legal status of penetrative male homosexual intercourse, as well as the widespread negative views towards homosexuality of any kind in Singapore, creates an environment in which discussion about LGBTQ issues in general have become 'politically sensitive' depending on what is said and how. Legal reforms decriminalised consensual anal and oral sex between heterosexual couples in 2007 and these acts are now exclusively chargeable under Section 377a of the penal code between men but this is seldom enforced (C. K. K. Tan 2009b: 137). Whether or not consensual sex between men is actively prosecuted or not does not change the fact that it is illegal and this only adds to the stigma surrounding homosexual relationships. According to the now infamous Section 377a of the Singapore Penal Code,

> Section 377A (Outrages on Decency): Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or abets the commission of, or procures or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to 2 years.[34] (Leong 2008: 281-282)

Despite draconian laws, harsh public opinion and the many structural discriminations that do exist, however, LGBTQ Singaporeans do generally live without fear of violence, persecution and in general the government does allow people to live their private lives without too much interference (Weiss 2007: 169)[35].

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[34] Section 377a can be found in Chapter 224 of the Singaporean penal code.

[35] Exceptions to this include rights to adopt children. One striking example of this involves a Singaporean gay man who fathered a son to a surrogate mother overseas and then was unable to legally adopt his child in Singapore. For details around the context of the case, which involved debates about the ethics of commercial surrogacy as well as 'planned and deliberate parenthood by singles', please see 'Deliberate parenthood by singles at odds with Singapore's stand: MSF on gay man's bid to adopt child', which was published by *The Straits Times* on 28 December 2017 and is available at: http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/deliberate-parenthood-by-singles-at-odds-with-singapores-stand-msf (last accessed 25 January 2018).

As we will explore shortly, this is something that is also true of my Muslim LGBTQ research participants. Some outspoken religious teachers, such as Noor Deros, do openly condemn LGBTQ Muslims as being misled and having fallen prey to an un-Islamic lifestyle choice and they inspire others to speak out (especially on social media) against the normalisation of LGBTQ sexualities that they perceive to be taking place in Singapore. I have also come across instances of domestic violence, involving both physical and psychological abuse, arising from mistaken beliefs that a non-heterosexual family member may be disciplined out of his or her sexuality or gender identity. However, unlike in my research in Sydney, I have never met anyone in Singapore who felt that their life may be in serious danger because of their sexuality. Non-heterosexual Muslims do experience significant levels of discrimination within the Singaporean Muslim community; however, generally this appears to be mostly limited to social exclusion and exhortations for them to 'return to fitrah' in order to be welcomed back into community, as Noor Deros encourages in his Wear White campaign.

Experiences of rejection and family violence

Hazrizal, whom we met earlier in this chapter, put me in touch with some of his friends so that we could meet all together for an informal focus group discussion to be held at a *Kopitiam* foodcourt in the Pasir Ris neighbourhood of Eastern Singapore. My research topic intrigued Hazrizal and he was quite keen to hear how this group of his friends, which was comprised of two gay and one bisexual Malay Muslim men and one lesbian Malay Muslim woman between the ages of 19 and 23, would respond to the questions I had previously asked him. We had decided to meet for lunch and bought various nasi padang, or mixed rice, dishes to share around a large table that seated all six of us. Conversation during lunch remained quite light-hearted and we discussed Noor Deros' Wear White movement and the surrounding controversy. We also spoke about some of their own

specific concerns as young Malay Singaporeans, such as the stereotyped expectations they often face. Among other concerns, the young men Nizam, Alfie and Amran were annoyed that they would be expected to marry soon and have large families. The young woman, Asmida, complained that she would be pressured even more to marry than her male peers while also having less freedom than them. She also felt particularly incensed when Islamic explanations that women were 'created from a crooked rib'[36] were provided as justification for their perceived weaknesses and need for male protection first from family members and then from a male spouse after marriage.

After lunch we swapped the noisy crowded food court for the serene silence of a stroll along the picturesque wooden pathways through the nearby mangrove swamp. The change of atmosphere set in motion a shift in mood. It was mid afternoon at this point and the tall, leafy api-api trees provided welcome shade from the sun. We came across one of the many huts that line the wooden walkways and sat down to enjoy both the fresh air and our lush surroundings. Male mudskippers fought each other over territory and mates below us while bright yellow orioles sang to each other above. None of us had any plans that afternoon and we found ourselves alone except for a pair of fishermen casting lines safely outside of earshot. We settled in to talk about homophobia in Singapore and what challenges group members faced as gay and lesbian Malay Muslims and as the hours passed, the conversation drifted towards recollections of violence and longing for safety within the intimate spaces of the family environments in which they were raised.

Hazrizal drew a distinction between violence and safety, claiming that while no one within his family had never beat him, he still did not feel safe in their company after he told them that he was gay. He had expected that his revelation would meet anger as well as disappointment from his family. However, he expected that they would eventually be able to make peace with his revelation because he had no intention of arguing against the

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[36] For the source of this saying, please see hadith number 5184 and 5186 in Bukhari's collection.

heteronormative Islamic norms he was raised with and he hoped that the good relationship he previously had with his parents and other relatives would enable communication. Hazrizal only chose to come out because he was weary with hiding and wanted to live openly as many of his non-Muslim gay friends did. He described himself as not naive enough to expect that his family would accept a male partner for him, but he no longer wanted to live in fear of his sexuality being discovered. He believed that all people have weaknesses and he saw homosexuality as his own moral weakness. His parents did not directly disown him, yet they no longer treat him as they once did and Hazrizal now feels unwanted in his parents' home. Hazrizal believes that his parents, as well as most of his immediate family, are waiting for him to 'repent' and come to his 'senses', and cannot accept that his sexual orientation is not something that he chose. As he explained, 'They don't understand that this is the way I am. I knew it would be difficult for them, but I still thought it was possible. Instead, now they treat me almost like I became a *murtad* [apostate]'. Some of Hazrizal's family members, who accept that he could not help being gay, blamed him for bringing sadness and stress to his parents by coming out to them. Regardless of whether or not his sexuality is seen as a choice he could control, Hazrizal is perceived as being selfish and unfilial. Moreover, he believes his relatives view his coming out as gay as reflecting badly upon his parents and the way in which he was raised. His family's combined disapproval makes Hazrizal feel like an outcast and neither welcome nor safe in their presence. The lack of discussion about how his sexual orientation impacts upon his family, upon life or upon his relationship to Islam led Hazrizal to the conclusion that there is no possibility for reconciliation that does not involve his suppressing his sexuality, which he is not prepared to do. Hazrizal's relatives appear to only tolerate him as long as he does not raise the topic of his sexuality or make it known to others, and he perceives this as worse than his previous experience of concealing his sexual orientation altogether. Instead of fearing harsh words or physical violence from his

family, Hazrizal fears their silence.

Nizam has a similar, yet somewhat warmer, relationship to his family despite never actually telling them that he is bisexual and rejects Malay Muslim norms of masculinity. Through a combination of his mannerisms and interests that are perceived by his family as effeminate, Nizam concluded that his relatives have figured out that he is not heterosexual and simply chose to ignore it. However, in doing so, they have ended up ignoring him also, in his opinion. As a result, Nizam feels that he has become a black sheep among his siblings and while he is grateful that no one is overtly unkind to him, he still feels excluded in ways that he found difficult to articulate. Nizam believes that they will be relieved, and his relationship with them will improve, once he marries, and as the years go by Nizam sees marriage to a woman as an inevitability that he feels ambivalent about. Neither willing to shame his family by openly engaging in homosexual relationships nor live his life alone, Nizam views marriage as a solution to both his own loneliness as well as his family's concerns about his masculinity and sexuality. However, as a solution, marriage is potentially problematic for Nizam because he worries that he may feel constrained as well as forced to hide not only his sexual orientation but also the friendships he has formed within the Singaporean gay community from his future wife. Furthermore, he resents the fact that, were he to choose not to marry and instead find a male life-partner, he would feel responsible for causing his family pain and heartache. As Nizam explained, 'My family love me and only want what is best. They would be hurt if I decided to be gay'. He also fears spiritual consequences, both from causing pain to his family as well as from engaging in same-sex relationships, and believes that the only way he can live life as a 'good Muslim' is to eventually settle down in marriage with a female spouse. Similar to other research participants, regardless of sexual orientation, he intends to become more pious with age but does not currently feel ready to commit himself to Islamic practice or to heterosexual marriage.

Alfie and Amran, the two exclusively gay men in the group aside from Hazrizal, had very different experiences with their respective families. Alfie, for example, believes that no one in his family has any idea that he is gay. Although he does not go out of his way to conceal his sexual orientation, Alfie reported being also careful not to advertise it through publicly coming out or bringing same-sex partners to the family home, even under the pretext that they are just 'friends'. He is also careful to keep his support for Pink Dot to himself because it would threaten his relationship with his loving yet conservatively religious immediate family, whose piety he emphasised contrasted with his own nominal religiosity. Amran also had a very conservatively religious family. Unlike Alfie, however, Amran had a very bad relationship with his father, who had a history of physically abusing him. Amran's father took issue with some aspects of Amran's character that he considered to be effeminate and subjected him to verbal bullying and occasional physical violence in order to 'toughen' him. Amran was also verbally bullied during his school years by classmates who teased him about the same mannerisms that angered his father. The context that surrounded the physical violence that Amran described involved his father punishing him with slaps or with his belt for crying or otherwise having an emotional response to the mistreatment he suffered during his mid to late teen years. As a result of this violence, Amran eventually moved in with his maternal aunt, a single mother who lived nearby, on the advice of his mother and under the pretext that he could not 'get along' with his father. Amran has never discussed the fact that he is gay, nor discussed any topic related to sexuality, with any member of his family, though he believes his father senses it and hates him for it and his mother simply feels sorry for him. He maintains a relationship with his mother from a distance because he fears his father might mistreat his mother for talking to him or spending time with him. Amran also maintains a relationship to Islam and, unlike the others in the group, practices regular prayers as well as other rituals such as

fasting during Ramadan. He is not overly worried about claims that Islam condemns homosexuality because, for Amran, divine mercy is limitless.

Asmida, the only young woman in the group besides myself, spoke of being subjected to physical violence as a child that resulted from her lack of conformity with feminine gender norms. Describing herself as a 'tomboy', Asmida recalled enjoying the company of boys more than girls and engaging in rough-and-tumble games that were perceived by her family as being typically male. Asmida's parents tolerated this until she was about 11-12 years old, when she believes that her parents started to worry about the fact that she was not 'maturing properly'. In an effort to correct their child's perceived deviant behaviour and interests, Asmida's parents would hit her on the thighs with a cane for disobeying their orders to stop playing with her friends, the neighbourhood boys, because it was no longer appropriate in their opinion. The offence of doing so was doubled as she was resisting both her parents' wishes as well as their ideas of what proper conduct should be for a girl going through puberty. The punishment reflected this two-fold nature to her defiance because while she was caned for doing this, she was not caned for other misbehaviours such as not completing homework or failure to perform chores at home. Asmida did not end the friendships she had enjoyed with the boys she grew up with in her HDB estate, but the restrictions of her parents did end up isolating her from them to a degree. As Asmida limited her friendships with the boys to talking after school only, the canings stopped. Suffering loneliness and boredom, Asmida eventually tried to establish friendships with girls her own age and although she was ultimately successful, it was around this period of her life that she discovered her sexual orientation. Asmida was certain that her parents would be horrified if they came to know that she found some of her new female friends sexually attractive and so was very careful to suppress such desires. Worried that something might be wrong with her, Asmida put a lot of effort as a teenager into praying for control of her desires as well as performing femininity in an

attempt to pass as 'normal' and not attract either violence or disapproval from her family who were already worried about the kind of woman she was growing up to be. As an adult, she no longer prays for help in suppressing her sexual orientation, yet she still conforms loosely to Malay norms of femininity. Living at home, Asmida has found that continuing to perform femininity through clothing choices (with the exception of a headscarf) and demure mannerisms has earned her parents' trust and with that trust comes a degree of freedom she would not otherwise possess.

Among this group of five, all either risk or experience negative reactions from family members on the basis of their sexual orientation and/or presentation of gender identity. Despite not necessarily identifying as queer or otherwise gender diverse, simply not conforming to Malay Muslim norms of masculinity or femininity were enough to attract harsh responses from the families of Amran, Nizam and Asmida in particular. Among Malay Muslim communities in Malaysia, people who diverge from heterosexuality or acceptable gendered standards of behaviour are often considered a threat to both the social order as well as to Islam (Basarudin, 2016). In such a context, nonconformity with heteronormative community standards bears a heavy stigma and the same is true in Singapore, as the families of Hazrizal, Nizam, Amran and Asmida illustrate. In his classic work on stigma, Erving Goffman has observed that, for a person who experiences stigma, 'the issue is not of managing tension generated during social contacts but rather of managing information about his failing. To display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when, and where' (Goffman, 1963: 57). In this instance, Hazrizal and his friends believed that their families as well as the wider Malay Muslim community would link their 'failings' in sexuality or gender identity to their adherence to Islam. Coming out and adopting an openly gay, lesbian or bisexual identity could be read by relatives and other Singaporean Malay

Muslims as a rejection of family, of community or even of Islam, particularly after the controversy surrounding Pink Dot (Ibrahim, 2016).

All of the group had experience with 'managing information' about their respective 'failings' and weighed up potential consequences very carefully before disclosing their sexual orientations to friends and, where applicable, family. An additional way in which Hazrizal and his friends, as well as other research participants, managed information about their sexual orientations or gender non-conformity involved how they presented their relationship to Islam to others. Islam, in this sense, may be used tactically as a means of protecting oneself or protecting relationships with others. Hazrizal, for example, despite coming out to his family made a point of clarifying to them that he would not make any argument to claim that homosexuality was permissible in Islam, and instead likened his sexual orientation to a moral weakness that was beyond his control. In Nizam's case, although he was not yet ready to lead what he envisioned to be a pious life, he soothed fears about his relationship with his family as well as his own spiritual fate with a commitment to eventually marry and live as a 'good Muslim'. Amran, by contrast, was already practicing Islam and felt it was a source of strength and stability in his life despite his sexuality. He believed that same-sex intimacy was sinful in the same way that premarital sex was sinful, but he perceived God to be merciful and trusted that he would not be judged harshly for sins that, in his own words, 'caused no one to cry'. His mistrust of religious scholars informed his refusal to blame 'Islam' for Muslim homophobia. Asmida, though not religious like Amran, did not forsake Islam even though she did not agree with many aspects of what she was taught about it. Asmida decided to conform to Malay Muslim expectations of femininity in order to escape violence and criticism while living with her parents. Despite resenting gendered double standards as well as some elements of Islamic practice, such as prayer and fasting, she chose to embrace them because they

made life for her easier while at home. In this sense, she tactically used outward Islamic practice to escape the disciplinary gaze of her parents and her community.

Islam and homosexuality

Many works that discuss the experiences of non-heterosexual Muslims contain a section that discusses 'Islam and homosexuality', 'traditional Islamic stances' or simply 'Islam and sexuality' in a general sense[37]. Although contextualising local expressions of sexuality within wider scholarly discussions of Islamic norms and values is certainly helpful, care must be taken to avoid essentialising Islam or the significance attached to the various sexualities of Muslims. As anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod warns, Islam and constructions of sexuality are best understood purely in their local contexts and not as having transhistorical and intrinsic meanings (Abu-Lughod 1997: 248). This of course does not mean that local meanings or discourses are not informed by prevalent Islamic norms or orthodoxies. There is an abundant field of research on transnational Islam and the global movement of Islamic norms across Muslim communities (Ahmed and Donnan, 1994; Roy, 2004; Mandaville, 2007, 2009), which includes topics as diverse as Muslim youth culture (Kibria, 2008; Jacobson, 2015; Kamaludeen, 2016), the influence of technology (Mandaville, 1999, Bunt, 2000, 2003; Hirschkind, 2006; Inhorn, 2007), as well as the impact of an increasingly globalised Islamophobia (Larsson, 2005; Abbas, 2012; Werbner, 2013; Morgan and Poynting, 2016). Some aspects of transnational Islam give the appearance of a developing orthodoxy and similarities between various Muslim communities in terms of religious practice and belief are often encouraged by politically-charged appeals for unity among Muslims (Haddad, Esposito and Voll, 1991). Barth has observed that orthodoxy offers 'a structure of ideas and practices that penetrates but does not encompass the lives of its practitioners' (1993: 177), which highlights the subjective

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[37] For some examples, please see A. K. Yip 2004, Bereket and Adam 2008, Siraj 2009, Jaspal and Cinnirella 2012, Eidhamar 2014.

nature of religiosity and the interpretive diversity that can surround even widespread and frequently taken-for-granted Islamic precepts. An example of such Islamic precept is the condemnation of homosexuality.

Classical Islamic scholarly discourse portrays men as women as occupying complementary gender roles and the traditional Islamic ideal of the family is a procreative unity of the sexes (Bouhdiba, 1985; Ahmed, 1992). Heterosexual marriage, then, enjoys hegemonic status and any deviation from this framework is viewed by many Muslims as a violation of nature (Duran 1993: 183; Schmidt 1995: 85). As such, Muslims often consider same-sex intimacy to be a grave sin (Dunne 1990; Schild 1992), which some may even consider to merit the death penalty (AbuKhalil 1997).   El-Rouayheb has noticed that some Sunni jurists considered the severity of transgression to depend very much upon whether or not intimacy involved phallic penetration of a vagina or anus, with acts such as kissing and caressing not being considered to be major sins in and of themselves (2005: 137-138). The Qur'an, however, appears to be ambivalent about the punishment for performing male homosexual acts (Siraj 2009: 44),[38] and there is no agreement over whether or not the Qur'an even mentions female same-sex sexuality (Ali 2006: 81). The various opinions existing about punishment in this respect come mostly from hadith literature[39] and the ensuing judgements of various schools of Shari'ah law (Bouhdiba 1985). Such literature is far from without criticism, however, both in terms of interpretation and in many cases authenticity too. Islamic scholar Ziauddin Sardar, for example, believes that claims that the Prophet punished homosexuality are completely unfounded because there is no direct evidence of such and the hadith literature that does address

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[38] For some examples of Qur'anic passages that are commonly understood to pertain to the issue of homosexuality, please see the following verses: 7:80-84; 26:165-166.

[39] Hadith literature records sayings of the Prophet Muhammad into various volumes that serve, together with the Qur'an, as a basis for the various schools of Shari'ah law. For some examples of passages that have been understood to prohibit homosexuality or describe punishment for it, please see the following: Bukhari (72:774); Abu Dawud (4462 and 4448); and al-Tirmidhi (1:152).

homosexuality is of dubious authenticity at best and completely fabricated at worst (Sardar 2011: 326-327).

There is no traditional school of Islamic jurisprudence, in either Shi'a or Sunni thought, that permits same-sex sexual intercourse. New alternative theological interpretations are growing, but they remain relatively limited and they are frequently dismissed by Muslim religious leaders and communities alike as being heretical or at least severely misled (Kelly 2010: 250). The Qur'anic account of the People of Lut is central to many Islamic condemnations of same-sex sexuality yet there are ambiguities in Islamic jurisprudence about what precisely is forbidden (Zanghellini 2010: 275). According to the Qur'an, the Prophet Lut ('Lot' in the Bible) hosted guests who attracted the lustful desires of his neighbours. These guests were messengers of God, and when Lut's warnings against committing sexual transgression fell on deaf ears, a shower of brimstone killed most of the population. A succinct summary of the story can be found at Qur'an 7: 80–84, where Muhammad Asad's translation of it reads:

> AND [remember] Lot, when he said unto his people: "Will you commit abominations such as none in all the world has ever done before you? Verily, with lust you approach men instead of women: nay, but you are people given to excesses!" But his people's only answer was this: "Expel them from your land! Verily, they are folk who make themselves out to be pure! Thereupon We saved him and his household except his wife, who was among those that stayed behind the while We rained a rain [of destruction] upon the others: and behold what happened in the end to those people lost in sin!

The Prophet Lut is referenced in 14 chapters of the Qur'an and this story is widely considered to provide an unquestionable basis for the prohibition of same-sex sexuality in Islam (Yahya 2000; Zafeeruddin 1996).

Attempts to reconsider the significance of this story to Islamic practice and belief

often focus on the question of consent, violence or oppression rather than same-sex intimacy in itself, as being the core message of the account. Zanghellini, for example, argues that the story of Lut demonstrates a Qur'anic condemnation of 'nonegalitarian sexual activity — whether consensual or nonconsensual — and illustrates this condemnation through the case of same-sex anal penetration, which at that time was widely and predominantly intelligible as a practice of subordination […]' (2010: 288). Scott Kugle, an American convert and scholar of Islam whose approach may be compared to reformist thinkers such as Amina Wadud, Khaled Abou El-Fadl, Farid Esack, and Fazlur Rahman, describes the Lut story as being 'about infidelity through inhospitality and greed, rather than about sex acts in general or sexuality of any variation in particular [...] It is a story as a condemnation of greed, miserliness, sexual oppression, and a rejection of the prophet's ethics of care' (Kugle 2003: 213–214). This was a perspective I encountered during my research also. I was told on more than one occasion by LGBTQ Muslim research participants in both Sydney and Singapore that the universe is orderly and logical because God is, and since there is no sound argument to justify the condemnation of same-sex sexuality, then such prohibitions cannot be divine. This assumption leads to the conclusion that the Islamic sources that *forbid* same-sex sexuality must be read differently, as Zanghellini and Kugle have done.

Islamic jurisprudence from all schools of thought is built upon interpretation. Although each school has various methodologies of producing Islamic law, and legal theory or *usul al-fiqh* guides interpretations, a jurist's legal reasoning, known as *ijtihad*, is a subjective process. A distinction can be, and often is, made between ijtihad and 'divine' or 'prophetic' law (Kamali 2003: 468-499), yet this perspective tends not to recognise that all legislation, regardless of whether or not any given law may be considered self-evident, is the result of juridical analysis (Zollner 2010: 197, n. 13). This is a relevant point because some Islamic scholars speak very confidently about the condemnation of same-sex

sexuality, as well as the punishments for those who engage in it, as being the unquestionable will of God (Hekma, 2002). This moral certainty is something which Zollner perceives as being symptomatic of a scholarly authoritarianism that underlies much current Islamic legal discourse and does not allow space for the process of interpretation or for the open discussion of legal proof (2010: 198). This moral certainty is also a relatively recent phenomenon. Much has been written about non-heterosexuality within Muslim communities throughout history and it appears that male same-sex intimacy was relatively openly practiced from the seventh up until the twentieth century (Murray, 1997; Abdulhadi, 2010; Sharlet, 2010). Najmabadi's *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (2005), for example, describes major changes in sexual attitudes in Iran from the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries. It has only been in relatively recent generations that tolerance has shifted significantly, so the origins of homophobia among Muslim communities are not solely rooted in religious interpretation.

Adding to existing literature that suggests religiosity has a negative impact upon attitudes towards homosexual men and women when compared to people who state no religious preference (Bernstein 2004; Herek 1994), Siraj claims that Islam explicitly condemns homosexuality and that a 'theologically-based homophobia' fosters intolerance of homosexuals among Muslims (2009: 41). She is not alone as other scholars have similarly implied that there is something inherent *in Islam* that is homophobic (Kelly, 2010: 249; Sarac, 2015: 482-483)**.** The claim that 'homosexuality is sinful in Islam' is very imprecise because it is unclear who has the authority to speak for 'Islam' and whether it is same-sex intercourse or a non-heterosexual identity that is considered sinful. There have been scholarly theological discussions about this, but in common discourse (even among trained religious scholars such as Noor Deros and those who support Wear White) there are still many assumptions that go unchallenged and questions that remain unanswered.

For example, a homosexual identity is not only a relatively recent phenomenon (Halperin, 1990), but also it is entirely possible for a person to identify as such without being sexually active. Conversely, there are some who engage in same-sex intercourse without identifying as homosexual. There is also the question of gender diverse identities and what the acceptable limits of gender identity might look like in practice within Muslim communities across cultures. In South Sulawesi, there exist groups of Bugis Muslims who are very devout and yet they traditionally recognise the existence of 5 genders instead of 2 (Davies 2004). There are also growing groups of Muslims around the world who interpret Islam to be inclusive of sexual and gender diversity (Rouhani 2007). Does their minority perspective on gender make them any less 'real' or 'orthodox' Muslims? Are the voices of their religious leaders somehow less 'Islamic' than those who maintain more heteronormative views?

There are various ways of understanding what exactly Islam is: Marranci (2006: 31-52) suggests that Islam is an emotional commitment expressed through simply 'feeling to be' Muslim; and perhaps most famously, Talal Asad has understood Islam as a 'tradition' that consists of 'discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice [. . .]' (Asad 1986: 14). These conceptualisations of Islam may differ significantly from one another, but they have one thing in common: a focus on Muslims and Muslim discourse rather than theological abstractions. For this reason, I question claims that are made about Islam as an abstract entity, or to use Varisco's phrasing 'Islam with a capital "I"' (2005:146), for it simply cannot exist beyond the local practices and beliefs of those who identify themselves as Muslim.   Yet, Islam 'with a capital "I"' still has immense power as an idea. It is what structures the disapproval and stigma that Hazrizal and his young friends described facing from their respective families at the beginning of this section. In their resistance against dominant perceptions of Islam

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as a singular orthodoxy, Hazrizal and his friends' interpretation of Islam is shaped by the very ideas they contend against.

Pink Dot and the 'freedom to love'

Beginning as a non-profit movement with the purpose of bringing LGBTQ Singaporeans greater acceptance within their families and country, Pink Dot has held annual celebrations of gender and sexual diversity and the freedom to love in Singapore's Hong Lim Park since 2009. The annual Pink Dot events began with an attendance of 2,500 (Leyl, 2009) and have since continued to draw an increasing — and increasingly mixed — crowd, which numbered 20,000 attendees in 2017 (Zhang, 2017). The event has attracted significant corporate sponsorship as well. In 2015, for example, the local entertainment leader Cathay Organisation joined the global social media platform Twitter and business and financial news giant Bloomberg in supporting Pink Dot

Fig. 9.): Many people bring their children to the Pink Dot festivities.

alongside returning sponsors that include Google, Barclays, J. P. Morgan, Goldman Sachs, and BP. The following year, however, the Ministry of Home Affairs decided that foreign sponsorship of the event would be prohibited and stated, 'The Government's general position has always been that foreign entities should not interfere in our domestic

issues, especially political issues or controversial social issues with political overtones. These are political, social or moral choices for Singaporeans to decide for ourselves. LGBT issues are one such example' (Sin, 2016). The government's decision to prohibit foreign sponsorship created fears that Pink Dot would not be able to attract sufficient support from local companies, yet 120 Singaporean businesses allayed such fears by pledging ample funds by the end of the fundraising campaign (Kok, 2017).

Public demonstrations of any kind are closely regulated in Singapore and the Speakers' Corner at Hong Lim Park is the only venue where such events may be legally held. When I last attended Pink Dot in 2014, I was told by a volunteer that the fact that the government continues to grant permission for Pink Dot to be held is a significant indication of changing attitudes in and of itself. Volunteers also described Pink Dot, and the non-traditional relationships and family structures that it has come to represent, as being seen as a subversion of Asian values by many Singaporeans. It would be a mistake to presume that my research participants, because of their willingness to speak to me about their experiences of same sex desire and relationships, were uncritically accepting of the establishment of the annual Pink Dot celebration. The family centric rhetoric of Asian values, as popularised by the Lee government, is both persuasive and pervasive. It was not uncommon for my non-heterosexual research participants to explain to me that, although they certainly agreed that they should not experience discrimination on the basis of their sexual preferences, they did understand the support for 'public morality' initiatives such as Wear White and ultimately they supported that message too. Hazrizal spoke of what he thought of as the basis of objections to Pink Dot when he told me,

> These are not bad people. They are just worried. They are right in what they say about families, really. It's bad enough when a child has only one parent. They miss out. The kids need a mum and a dad, but nobody ever plans to be a single parent, right? We know that's not the best way, but sometimes it just

happens like that. So why would anyone want to plan a family with two men? Who would be the mother? People see the children who come [to Pink Dot] and they're horrified. That's what gets them mad.

Hazrizal's views reflect the Islamic gender-normative assumptions about the abilities and purposes of men and women that he was raised with. While Hazrizal rejects Malay Muslim masculine norms for himself, he still believes that it is optimal for a child to be raised with within a heteronormative family framework. Such belief crosses community boundaries in Singapore and is widespread. Part of the appeal of 'Asian values' discourse is, as mentioned above, the fact that it is widely shared across religious and cultural boundaries.

During the course of my research I have met with members of LGBTQ organisations who presume that gay and lesbian Muslims will identify as 'progressive' or 'liberal' by default and be supportive of LGBTQ rights causes such as Pink Dot because not only do they suffer the same discrimination as other non-heterosexual Singaporeans but also because they are perceived to endure additional pressures coming from their religious communities and/or families. The assumption stems from a belief that the additional challenges LGBTQ Muslims are thought to have should make them even more committed to the struggle for equal rights and respect. Although this is certainly true for some, there are many exceptions. Being that some participants considered their own sexual orientation to be something sinful, they did not see it as something to encourage or see Pink Dot as a cause to advocate for. To illustrate, Hisham, a 24-year-old Malay Muslim man who is a student at a local university, explained to me,

Attending Pink Dot would make me feel like an activist and for what? I think what I do is sin in the same way that men who go to Geylang [a neighbourhood with a reputation for being a place to purchase sex] sin. Nobody wants to campaign for their 'freedom to love' right? I think women are great but I don't

really desire them that much [sexually], but then a lot of men don't like having married sex and instead look elsewhere. Is there really that much of a difference? I will get married one day and I might be the same, but I'll try not to be. […] [Pink Dot] isn't right, so I'm not going to campaign for it anymore than I campaign for Geylang. Yes, people should be free but it doesn't offend me when people get very angry about it [Pink Dot]. I do understand.

In our conversations it became clear that he saw Pink Dot's aim as being little different in moral terms than a campaign for an avoidable and condemnable vice. He also viewed homosexual sex as being roughly equivalent to any kind of extramarital sex[40], or *zina*, which he saw as being prohibited in Islam in all forms without one necessarily being worse than the other. Although Hisham defined himself as being primarily (yet not exclusively) same-sex attracted, he kept his sexuality very private and spoke of it as a phase he could indulge in before he sought and found a wife to settle down with and, as he hoped, have children together with. He did not view his sexuality, in other words, as a core part of his identity and explicitly stated so when he told me,

My sexual life is not the most important part of me. It's nobody's business what I'm into. Pink Dot is all based on sex, right? They say it's about love [Pink Dot's slogan is 'celebrating the freedom to love'] and then there's all the family stuff. But the purpose of family is raising children. Gay parents cannot be a real family, or at least not a natural one.

Hisham had on many occasions mentioned his desire for a family, which he did not believe was a practical option within a same-sex partnership. When I asked him about what part he saw love playing in a relationship, he separated companionate love from erotic love and implied that erotic love is by definition short-lived and so unnecessary in marriage.

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[40] Please see Shahrur (2009: 204-206) for a brief discussion on how some same-sex practices may be seen as equivalent to extramarital heterosexual practices within some spheres of Islamic theological discourse.

While Hisham was not alone in his expectation to marry, he was the only research participant I spoke to who was cynical about the place of love in long-term relationships regardless of whether they were same-sex partnerships or not. He spoke of marriage as being the fundamental basis of families, an Islamic religious requirement that is good for society as a whole, and a partnership between two people of the opposite sex where loyalty entails safeguarding each other's best interests and the interests of any children resulting from the union. The idea of sharing a lifetime with a same-sex partner was something that did not occur to Hisham as a practical, or even desirable, option.

Marriage was a common topic of conversation in discussions about Pink Dot, both in my own research and also in the wider public sphere, because of widespread speculations that LGBTQ advocacy groups would soon start lobbying for equal rights to marry. The 'protection' of marriage and family life was also the cornerstone of the Wear White message. I have come across many LGBTQ Muslim Singaporeans who believe strongly that secular marriage, or at least some form of equivalent civil partnership, should be an equal right for all. However, of the 31 individuals whom I had the privilege of discussing this topic with over the past 5 years, I have recorded only 3 to have indicated that they would desire a marriage/civil partnership for themselves and their

Fig. 10.): The pink t-shirt on the right reads, 'The death of dogma is the birth of morality'. This is a quotation attributed to the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (Taber, 1897: 86).

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partners were it legally possible and assuming that all other aspects of their lives remained the same. There are several reasons for this reluctance, as Kat, a 20 year-old female lesbian Malay Muslim Singaporean, explains below. According to her, reasons for reluctance to publicly register a same-sex relationship through marriage or civil partnership are complex and intersect with gender norms, financial practicalities, family responsibilities, and relationships with relatives.

> In the past, you just got married [to a heterosexual partner], and even though everyone knew you were a bit funny, you were still respectable and you were stable. This [stability] would help other parts of your life too. […] You could have a long term lover, who was also married [and so similarly stable], and because your time was limited [together] it was always never taken for granted and there would be few reasons to end it, especially if it was a kind of open secret. Now, if you get caught, or when you make your gay lover your primary partner, there is all kinds of mess that happens that didn't happen before. Suddenly you've got your family and their family to deal with, and their disappointment. You won't get any [government] help either, and all of this creates stress that strains the relationship. It makes it hard to set up home, so it's easy to break up. But worse than that, now it's easy just to never get too attached in the first place. In Singapore, it's easy to hook up but it's hard to find love, and even harder to find love that can survive. So this is another reason why keeping your mouth shut [about your sexuality] and just settling down with a man can look good.
>
> Basically, you get to have children, you're not alone, and your family loves you.

Kat compares a past, where it was possible to enjoy heterosexual marriages as well as same-sex relationships, to a present in which openly having a same-sex partner is a viable —yet difficult—option. What she presents as an option of the past, however, is very much a current reality for many. In industrialised, cosmopolitan societies, there is an emerging

prominence of individualism and a democratisation of emotions (Giddens 1992), where people make choices about their intimate emotional lives based on personal preferences and reflexivity rather than on conformity to community expectations or social values. Although the concept of 'individualism' in Singapore holds a negative connotation among some as being a Western attribute that is the opposite of more filial Asian values, many Singaporeans do embrace their increasing freedom to express themselves and their desires and Pink Dot is certainly evidence of this cultural shift. Yet the stability that comes with establishing a heterosexual family life, and the loving approval of relatives that may often follow, is a strong draw for some non-heterosexual participants to marry an opposite-sex partner who may or may not be aware of their spouse's sexuality. Alternatively, remaining single and engaging in discreet same-sex relationships can be another option for some who wish to avoid disrupting their relationships with their relatives. However, pressures to marry from family and friends increase with age and can feel very oppressive according to some participants in this study.

The reluctance of a majority of Singaporean non-heterosexual participants to engage in a civil same-sex partnership/marriage (if granted the legal opportunity) did not indicate a lack of support for having the choice to do so. Indeed, I encountered a lot of support for marriage equality as well as for the repealing of Section 377a. The fact that Singapore not only had no intentions to legally recognise same-sex unions but also showed no signs of moving towards a decriminalisation of oral and anal intercourse among men was a source of embarrassment to some. Kartini, a 22 year-old Indonesian-born Singaporean Muslim who identifies as gender queer, described to me what she perceives as a paradox between Singapore's hyper-modern image and the existence of outdated colonial-era legislation on its statute books.

> We go on and on about being a first world country, yet we keep some very third
>
> world prejudices and even laws. [...] It just doesn't make sense that we live in

one of the most modern places on earth and yet we are slow to catch up with the rest of the world in some ways. I think Pink Dot will be useful for finally getting rid of 377A, in particular. It has to go. Maybe marriage equality will come next, but definitely 377A will go first. It doesn't make sense. We're a gay hub of Asia, so it's silly and embarrassing.

Kartini was not alone in her disappointment. Others spoke of the place of human rights in Singapore's aspirations to become a 'global city'. According to some participants, the right to enjoy the protections that come with civil partnerships as well as removing the law's potential to interfere in private intimacy between consenting adults were two aspects of basic human rights that were glaringly absent from Singapore's purportedly 'forward-thinking' political plans. Of those I interviewed, there was widespread hope that the growing popularity of Pink Dot might attract enough attention to hasten change in this respect. To illustrate, speaking about the difficulties that can come with same-sex dating among Muslims, Anwar, a 27 year-old Malay Muslim Singaporean, describes how he believes Pink Dot may be a means to campaign for practical rights and resist the Singaporean state's anachronistic definition of family.

There is a lot of shame that goes with it [making a same-sex relationship public], so that makes it hard, and also there's no family to put pressure on you to work it out if you fight. (Friend interjects: 'Didn't you know why Malays spend so much on weddings? It's an insurance policy!' [Laughter]). But maybe I'll find someone special and if I do, I want to qualify as a couple for HDB. I shouldn't be punished by the government [for not being heterosexual]. I didn't do anything wrong and I can't help who I like. So I see Pink Dot as a way to campaign for practical things [rights].*

During the course of my research, both in Sydney and Singapore, I have never encountered a person who claimed that his or her sexuality was a 'lifestyle choice' in any

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way. Like Anwar above, and regardless of sexual orientation, research participants in this study have reported that they cannot change who they are attracted to. In the case of same-sex attracted Singaporean Muslims, this fact means that calls from local religious leaders to resist homosexuality, such as Noor Deros' entreaty for Muslims to 'return to natural relationships as found in Islam', may cause a significant amount of hurt and confusion for those who seek to reconcile their sexuality with their religious beliefs. It also potentially complicates relationships with families by giving the impression that sexual attraction can be a choice. For my research participants, there is no possibility of a 'return to nature' because they have never strayed away from what felt natural to them. Unlike Hisham, who viewed same-sex sexuality as sinful and preferred to find a life partner of the opposite sex, some have found acceptance of their same-sex attraction to be a source of great personal peace and committed themselves to striving for rights and recognition as both non-heterosexual Singaporean citizens and Muslims.

Fig. 11.): Two Muslim women wearing headscarves purchase flowers to wear during the Pink Dot festivities.

I discussed the ways in which same-sex attraction may be reconciled with practicing Islam with Ashraf, a 25-year-old Malay Muslim Singaporean man who has been in a long-term relationship with his Malay Muslim boyfriend for 4 years. A common concern among non-heterosexual Muslims I have spoken to both in Sydney and Singapore is the

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possibility that their actions are sinful, as indeed Hisham believed. On the day of Pink Dot itself, as the sun began to cast long shadows on Singapore's Hong Lim Park, I took the opportunity that the quiet late afternoon offered to speak to Ashraf about his views on sin, religion and love before the much-anticipated evening speeches began. Ashraf explained to me that,

> […] I think sin can only be about choice. I can't help who I love, and love is one of the purest, most sacred emotions there is. Sex is only an expression of that in a physical way, yeah? That's why it's called 'making love!' Qur'an tells us to use reason. People talk about the Sodom and Gomorrah story [the story of Lut, as a reason for why it is forbidden], but that was about violence, not love. God wouldn't forbid love that doesn't hurt anyone. So this is why I will fight for the freedom to love!

Freedom often comes at a price and in Singapore not everyone struggles equally for the 'freedom to love'. It comes at considerably higher a cost for some than for others. In this respect, the experiences of Malay LGBTQ Muslims, who are subjected to multiple forms of discrimination (Rahim, 1998; Sin, 2003; Saito, 2006; Mutalib, 2012), is very different from the experience of ethnically Chinese LGBTQ Singaporeans, who will still enjoy a degree of privilege regardless of their religious backgrounds. Accounting for roughly 75% of the population, Chinese Singaporeans as a community maintain a hegemonic position despite being internally very diverse in terms of religion and ethnic heritage. In LGBTQ circles, they are also a majority and some of the stereotypes that Chinese Singaporeans have of the other ethnic communities persist in these spaces (Phillips 2012: 189). Such stereotyping, or even the anticipation of it by other ethnicities, can greatly affect minority access to the resources and support networks available to the LGBTQ community.

Shame and stigma: the tactical use of Islam against the strategies of the powerful

Inspired by the work of Michel Foucault (1972, 1980) and Michel de Certeau (1984), research on 'everyday forms of resistance' focuses upon small acts that demonstrate an individual's defiance of the status quo but are not part of an organised social movement to effect change (Seymour, 2006: 303-304). Developed in response to a need to describe resistance that is not as observable or spectacular as revolutions, riots or rebellions, the theoretical concept of 'everyday resistance' was popularised by anthropologist James Scott in his exploration of class conflict in a Malaysian village, *Weapons of the Weak* (1985). Since then, Scott has inspired many other studies that explore resistance in the context of individuals' everyday lives (Sivaramakrishnan, 2005). Anthropologists such as Raheja and Gold, for example, have studied the 'hidden transcripts' within songs and speech of North Indian women in two rural villages and how they are used to 'communicate their resistance' (1994: 1-2). Abu-Lughod, in her study of everyday life among Egyptian Bedouins, explores how poetry can be used to resist norms of propriety and serve as a form of communication for sentiments that would otherwise remain unspoken (Abu-Lughod, 1986, 1990). Other empirical studies, building upon a theoretical foundation set by Scott and others (Scott, 1985, 1990; Colburn, 1989), include explorations of everyday resistance in queer or gay spaces (Myslik, 1996; Campbell, 2004), as well as among stigmatised groups such as white supremacist activists (Simi and Futurell, 2009) and African American women living with HIV (Buseh and Stevens, 2007).

In the context of this study, Michel de Certeau's (1984: 200) emphasis on the significance of how seemingly mundane practices may be turned into 'a silent and common, almost sheeplike subversion' is useful for understanding the coping tactics of research participants when confronting tensions in their relationships to the context in which they live as well as to Islam and Muslim community orthodoxy in both Sydney and

Singapore. As Vinthagen and Johansson (2013: 16-17) have observed, de Certeau considers unconventional practices or acts that 'somehow are not using existing systems according to the imposed way' as resistance regardless of whether or not such acts have the potential to affect public power relations. The outcome is not a priority because resistance by definition affects power relations, whether it is observable or not. Resistance demonstrates that the individual is not an automaton at the mercy of the structures of power within which they live. De Certeau illustrated this through the example of the culture imposed upon 'Indians', meaning First Nations peoples of the Americas, by Spanish colonisers:

> Submissive, and even consenting to their subjection, the Indians nevertheless often made of the rituals, representations, and laws imposed on them something quite different from what their conquerors had in mind; they subverted them not by rejecting or altering them, but by using them with respect to ends and references foreign to the system they had no choice but to accept. They were other within the very colonization that outwardly assimilated them; their use of the dominant social order deflected its power, which they lacked the means to challenge; *they escaped it without leaving it*. The strength of their difference lay in procedures of "consumption." To a lesser degree, a similar ambiguity creeps into our societies through the use made by the "common people" of the culture disseminated and imposed by the "elites" producing the language. (De Certeau, 1984: xiii, emphasis added)

Looking at nonconformist patterns of cultural 'consumption' allows us to identify the ways in which people individualise the social spheres in which they live through small acts of resistance. In the case of participants in this study, there are several clear examples of how young Muslims have 'escaped' local Muslim community orthodoxies without 'leaving'

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the Muslim community both discussed in previous chapters as well as in chapters yet to come.

De Certeau refers to these small acts of resistance as 'tactics' that are employed against a 'strategy', which he understands as being hegemonic structures of regulation and discipline. As he explains, a strategy is 'the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an "environment." A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper (propre) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, "clienteles," "targets," or "objects" of research)' (De Certeau, 1984: xix). The sources of strategy that an individual faces are multiple. Participants of this study, for example, are subject to the strategies of their national governments, their employers, and even religious leadership both within their Muslim communities as well as transnationally. Otterbeck (2016: 121) summarises de Certeau's notion of strategies as being spatial and seeking to impose a 'prescribed order on certain settings, transforming them into regulated spaces'. In the context of Singapore, a strategy of the Singaporean government to limit the visibility of Islam in public space was a regulation of mosques sounding the *adhan*, or Muslim call to prayer (Musa, 2016)[41]. Strategic religion, according to Woodhead (2016: 18), often pursues alliances within politically or socially powerful circles despite it costing their independence. The Islamic Religious Council of Singapore, known in Malay as *Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura* (MUIS) is an overt example of this because it is an actual government-controlled statutory board. Woodhead further observes that 'strategy and tactics form and shape one another dialectically. The strategist cannot merely impose, for the tactical will find ways over, under,

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[41] The limits imposed on mosques sounding the adhan were intended to protect public peace and not disturb nearby non-Muslim residents. From my experience of living in a Singaporean HDB block for 4 years, I have observed that similar noise disturbances, such as that coming from Chinese funerals which are held in residential estates and can continue late into the night for several days in a row, pass without comment from the government.

through and around strategic plans, targets, rewards and sanctions' (2016: 16). While

strategy is spatial and seeks control, tactics have no such ambitions. Tactics, for de

Certeau, are opportunistic means for 'the weak' to 'continually turn to their own ends

forces alien to them' (De Certeau, 1984: xix) yet they may also simply involve

appropriations of practices or resources in ways that challenge authority. De Certeau's

division between the 'official (the proper) and the everyday (the popular)' has been

critiqued (Napolitano and Pratten, 2007: 8). In the context of Islam, dividing strategic

religion from the so-called everyday practices of Muslims is somewhat reminiscent of the

distinction drawn between the scripture-based 'great traditions' and syncretic 'little

traditions' of anthropologist Robert Redfield (Redfield, 1956: 69-77). However, unlike

Redfield's opposition of the 'great tradition of the reflective few' and the 'little tradition of

the largely unreflective many', tactical, everyday Islam and strategic, orthodox Islam are

both reflective and syncretic. For example, the choices of participants to defy local Islamic

orthodoxy discussed so far in this thesis are often carefully thought out and the opinions of

local Islamic orthodox figures, such as Ibrahim (2016) has discovered in Singapore, can be

significantly shaped by the political context in which they live.

Chapter Five

The complexities of visibility: queer Muslim experiences in Sydney

The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras has grown from its turbulent beginnings in the late 1970s to be an internationally-known and well-loved festival that annually brings together thousands of people from many different walks of life (Markwell and Waitt, 2009). Mardi Gras includes many activities and events in addition to the public parade from Oxford Street to Flinders Street, such as the Fair Day picnic in Victoria Park, film screenings, and parties among others. For many, however, the parade is the centrepiece of the celebrations and it can be both a joyous and emotional time for both participants as well as those who cheer from the sidelines along the parade route. Colourfully decorated floats blast music as they edge their way down Oxford Street surrounded by dancers in bright costumes who blow kisses to supportive crowds. Yet, although the streets are filled with smiles and laughter, for some — especially LGBTQ Muslims — this experience can be bittersweet as the acceptance they enjoy during the festivities is all too short lived. The struggle for equal rights for same-sex attracted people in Australia, where marriage equality has only very recently been achieved, is far from over and experiences of homophobia, as well as Islamophobia, are unfortunately widespread.

In March 2016, a small assemblage of 25 attracted an unusual amount of attention among the other floats, performances and marching groups of the Mardi Gras parade. The group carried a banner in front that read 'Muslims Against Homophobia' and a banner in the rear that read 'Progressive Muslims of Australia' and was organised by Alice Aslan,[42] who is a board member of the Sydney chapter of Muslims for Progressive Values Australia

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[42] In this chapter, Alice Aslan is the only person identified by name due to her consent and outspoken contributions to the media. All other participants have had their identities anonymised through pseudonyms as well as the editing and/or omission of small personal details.

and founder in 2011 of the group Muslims Against Homophobia. The purpose of Muslims Against Homophobia, according to Alice, was to challenge the stigma surrounding homosexuality among Sydney Muslim communities and increase both awareness and acceptance of the sexual diversity of local Muslims. Informal private networks and social media groups serve to bring LGBTQ Muslims together and allow a safe space for mutual support and friendship, and many who marched between those two banners in the Mardi Gras parade, including myself, were recruited by Alice through a small but rapidly growing local group called Sydney Queer Muslims, which began as a secret invitation-only Facebook group but is now a fully-fledged incorporated community support group.

Mardi Gras was a celebration of visibility, love and pride for most of those who marched that day regardless of their religion or cultural backgrounds. Many participants in the parade held signs, or wore clothing bearing slogans, that suggested their sexuality was a key part of their public identity and that they were 'out and proud'. Those who marched with Muslims Against Homophobia did not appear out of place as some of the members of our group did dress in flamboyant and colourful clothes that fit in with the occasion and all of us marvelled with delight at the freedom of expression afforded to everyone. Our marching at Mardi Gras was a very public challenge to homophobia within Sydney Muslim communities. Alice was interviewed by journalists and documentary makers and, as a group, we had our photo taken many times, with one group photo appearing in the Huffington Post[43].

Even before the parade, the fact that Muslims Against Homophobia would take part attracted the attention of the press (Piotrowski, 2016; Power, 2016). The carefully chosen name 'Muslims Against Homophobia' together with our mix of heterosexual allies and non-heterosexual Muslims would have afforded any one of our group precious ambiguity should they wish to keep their sexuality private. Unfortunately, however, inaccurate

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[43] http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/2016/03/07/muslims-at-mardi-gras-sending-a-message-of-acceptance/ (last accessed: 1 December 2017).

reporting prior to the parade denied that carefully crafted ambiguity and made some of our

members very uncomfortable. To illustrate, on 3 March 2016, Benedict Brooke of news.com.au published a story titled 'Gay Muslims, out

Fig. 12.): Muslims Against Homophobia at Mardi Gras 2016. Photo credit: Muslims Against Homophobia.

Olympians, pirate drag queens and lots of Ruby Rose lookalikes — welcome to Mardi

Gras' that claimed, 'This Saturday, Ms Aslan and 25 other gay and lesbian Muslims will

march through Sydney's streets for their third Mardi Gras' (Brooke, 2016). Although the

presumption that our group was entirely gay and lesbian might be an easy mistake to

make, it was an unnerving one for three participants in particular who feared that they

might be judged harshly by friends and family as a consequence. Participating in the

parade as an ally carries an entirely different meaning to participating as a non-

heterosexual person and some of our group members were concerned that errors such as

the above might cause embarrassment to loved ones even if their heterosexuality was

known and uncontested.

The press coverage that our marching group received prompted discussions about

visibility and its various consequences. As I would discover, and contrary to Alice's goal in

organising our marching group, the increased visibility of the existence of non-

heterosexual Muslims is something that many same-sex attracted Muslims would like to

avoid. Three main themes emerged among the reasons offered for this reluctance to step

out of the shadows. Some of my research participants experience ambivalent feelings

towards their own sexuality, believing that while it is not something that they can change, it is still not something that they should feel proud of nor make public knowledge because it is ultimately against the natural order decided by God. Others focused on perceived obligations that a person has to their family and community and felt that celebrating something that might imply their non-heterosexuality, and thus likely bring pain and distress to loved ones, would be inappropriate. Finally, some felt unrepresented by Mardi Gras and disillusioned with mainstream LGBTQ spaces in Sydney and feared that increasing visibility would simply attract patronising pity from supporters and hatred from opponents. There were also security concerns and fears that bringing attention to the existence of non-heterosexual Muslims may actually increase homophobia within the Muslim community and perhaps even incite violence. These factors motivated many research participants to resist assuming gay, lesbian or bisexual identities publicly. This chapter will conclude by discussing how stage models of sexual identity may or may not help in understanding ambivalence or compartmentalisation among some while also exploring how the weaknesses of these models as they apply to research participants may be a rich source of information in their own right.

Ambivalence

When Hana tearfully confided in me that she felt like she was born 'damaged', my first instinct was to comfort her with a perhaps naive, 'No, you're not! Don't think that!'

Hana, who is in her early-20s and had migrated to Sydney from Malaysia in her teens, explained to me later that she believed she was born with a 'broken' sexuality and that it was not fair to contradict her on that anymore than it would be fair to tell someone with a substance abuse problem that they were not 'sick'. I apologised for my choice of words and any hurt I may have caused and that day, back in mid-2015, inspired me to explore the ambivalent feelings that led some to be outspoken critics of homophobia and

yet at the same time believe that acting on same-sex attraction was a grave sin. For Hana, same-sex attraction is a pathology that can only be managed through self-discipline and not cured. Although I met Hana through the Sydney Queer Muslims Facebook group, and she briefly considered marching with Muslims Against Homophobia at Mardi Gras, she was one of a few Muslims I came to know who viewed their same-sex attraction as a kind of special test from God that must be resisted. As she explains,

> I'm totally behind the idea of Muslims Against Homophobia, but I don't want to be a part of Mardi Gras which is basically a celebration of gayness. Nobody should be bullied for something they can't change, but just because you can't change it doesn't mean it's right and you should be doing it. Feelings aren't sinful, especially if you can't help having them, but pretending that there's nothing wrong with gay relationships is. I can't celebrate that.

Hana reached out to Sydney Queer Muslims during a difficult period in her personal life that began in her late teens. She had developed a very intense friendship with a non-Muslim female schoolmate at the co-ed high school she attended in Sydney's Western suburbs, Ann Maree, and was beginning to feel attracted to her sexually. The pair were inseparable to the point that they went together to their Year 12 Formal dance, even though Ann Maree would have been freely allowed (and perhaps even expected) by her family to bring a male date with her instead. Indeed, Hana would joke later that her parents were very happy about the friendship she and Ann Maree shared because they believed it would help prevent her from being alone with boys her own age. Inseparable as they were, Hana never told Ann Maree about her feelings and Ann Maree never showed any signs of romantic interest in Hana. The friendship between the two gradually fizzled out once graduation came and the pair went off to study at different local universities.

The experience of same-sex attraction had left Hana bewildered and searching for answers, however, and she reached out to Sydney Queer Muslims for information and support. At the time of writing, no one outside of the Sydney Queer Muslims group knows about her struggle with same-sex attraction. This period began a long process of introspection and study as Hana sought to better understand what kind of relationship she wanted to have with her religion as well as whether or not she wanted to engage in same-sex relationships. She described a part of this process in detail when she told me,

> I have never considered getting into a relationship with a Muslim girl. I realised that it would be too weird. We would both know what we were doing was wrong and every time I looked at her I would feel guilty. I wouldn't be able to forget. I wouldn't be able to escape it – especially if we got serious. Every visit to our families, every Eid, would be a reminder. […] So this got me to think about why I feel this way, and it occurred to me that I can't outrun my conscience. It would just be wrong, and yet I can't exclude the possibility that I might meet someone and have a [lesbian] relationship. I am not always a good Muslim and that just might be my shortcoming. Other people have theirs.
>
> […]
>
> They [Sydney Queer Muslims] try hard and they do a lot like that Qur'an reading group with Nur Warsame[44] over in Melbourne. They do lots to connect people back to faith, but I don't think it's in a good way. I followed them for a while but think they miss the point. Every religion condemns homosexuality and yet they try to explain it away saying it's about interpretation. How can that make sense? It's clear how nature works, and being in a gay relationship just isn't natural. It's not the most

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[44] Somali-born Imam Nur Warsame was a well-respected figure in the Muslim community before he revealed publicly that he was gay. He established a support group for LGBTQ Muslims called 'Marhaba' (which is Arabic for 'welcome') and has held meetings in various community centres around Melbourne for 5 years at the time of writing.

horrible sin out there either though, and people should never be hated for not being

perfect.

The Sydney Queer Muslim group was indeed not what Hana was expecting. Instead of

finding a group of like-minded Muslims who struggle against same-sex desires in a similar

way to how alcoholics at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting might support each other

against the temptations of alcohol addiction, she found a group whose members had for

the most part accepted their sexuality and found religious grounds to accommodate same-

sex partnerships. Although Hana clearly rejects interpretations of Islam that view same-

sex intimacy as morally neutral, she maintains a loose relationship with some members of

the group and occasionally attends their social events. Since the primary focus of the

group is on mutual support and socialising with others from similar backgrounds and

experience, and not on religion despite religious activities being on offer, Hana does not

perceive the group as a threat to her religious identity.

Similar to Hana, Adnan, in his early 20s and born to a Jordanian family in Western

Sydney, is an outspoken critic of homophobia and believes that same-sex attracted

Muslims should receive compassion from the Muslim community as well as recognition for

the weight of the struggles they face in respecting heteronormative religious requirements.

A former student of Malek Fahd Islamic school in Greenacre, Adnan felt different to the

other boys and although he claims to have not been bullied beyond mild teasing, this

caused him to isolate himself and he believes he suffered from depression for a period as

a result. As he grew older, he understood that his gay sexual orientation and atypical

gender identity were at the root of his difference. While he did not wish to be female, he

did not wish to be male in the way his father, two brothers and classmates were either.

I enjoyed a lot of things people think are feminine. At school the gender segregation

was not as strict as you might expect [for an Islamic school] and so I definitely

gravitated towards friendships with girls more than with boys. We just had more in

common. I don't think there's anything necessarily wrong with that, even though I

was made to feel bad for it, and I don't think it's got anything to do with my sexual

orientation. I just didn't like macho man culture.   And with my [effeminate]

mannerisms, which I could never quite control well enough, it became too much for

my Mum and Dad to ignore eventually and I got sent to [a Muslim Psychologist].

Adnan's family were worried for his psychological and spiritual welfare. Like Hana, they

believed that non-heterosexuality was a kind of pathology and they feared that Adnan may

be at risk. I have found that this is not an uncommon assumption among Muslim

communities in Western Sydney, and the literature suggests that similar beliefs are found

in other Muslim communities as well (Boellstorff, 2005; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010, 2014;

Yip, 2004).

Among both the experiences of some research participants as well as reports in

local media, I have come across several accounts of Muslim families sending young

people who somehow fail to meet cultural heteronormative expectations of behaviour for

various types of 'corrective' treatment (Hussein & Imtoual, 2016; Khalik, 2016; Marr, 2012).

The treatment options can include conversion therapies that seek to redirect non-

heterosexual impulses though processes such as covert sensitisation, which involves

conditioning the 'patient' to pair his or her sexual desire with an unpleasant image in order

to eliminate it (Cautela, 1967). There is currently much research that suggests such so

called 'reparative therapies' are extremely harmful (Ford, 2002; Halderman, 1991, 2008;

Shidlo & Schroeder, 2002) and as such the Australian Psychological Society (APS)

vehemently rejects them (APS, 2007), yet they are still employed by certain Muslim

registered psychologists in Sydney's Western suburbs who often pair them with informal

recommendations for prayer and additional fasting in order to eliminate unwanted

temptations.

There have been some very public denials of the practice of conversion therapies by Muslim psychologists in Sydney yet it is relatively easy to find a registered psychologist to assist Muslims who wish to voluntarily submit themselves to these therapies. For example, Hanan Dover, a clinical and forensic psychologist currently completing a PhD at Western Sydney University's School of Medicine who is well-known among Sydney Muslim communities, wrote an opinion piece for ABC news to counter claims in the media that she not only supported but practiced conversion therapy herself (Dover, 2016). Despite publicly rejecting conversion therapies and claiming that that she does not know any Australian psychologist who endorses or engages in them, many of my same-sex attracted informants have spoken of their families either sending, or threatening to send, them to registered psychologists in Sydney's Western suburbs during their adolescent years to seek help for suspected non-heterosexuality. When I sought clarification from a Muslim registered psychologist, Osman, about these practices, he explained to me that they do exist but they are described in different terms and presented as a culturally sensitive means of supporting patients from Muslim backgrounds whose sexual inclinations were a cause of personal distress. He did not see this as unethical nor in opposition to APS protocols of practice as long as the desire to redirect sexual impulses came from the patient, there was no coercion or family violence involved in the patient's decision to seek help, and there was no trauma inflicted during therapy. When pressed to describe in more detail how it could be determined whether or not a therapy inflicted trauma on a patient, Osman became vague and evasive and declined to comment further.

It is not uncommon for a person's desire to undergo conversion therapy to be closely linked with a religious belief that does not permit same-sex relationships (Ford, 2002; Tozer & Hayes, 2004). Although Adnan was curious about the potential for psychological treatments to help him in his struggle against same-sex attraction, he was reluctant to assume the sick role that would have accompanied submitting himself to

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therapy. As he explained to me, 'If people see me going to PsychCentral[45], they'll figure out why and think I'm diseased. Some might think so already, but I don't want it confirmed'. Indeed, he did not attend appointments with this psychologist for long though his discontinuing the visits was hastened by another factor. There were tensions at home between his parents and the then-17-year-old Adnan decided he did not want to add to their stress. He did his best to satisfy his psychologist that he was simply odd and not gay, and like Hana, set off on a course of self-reflection and study to figure out who he was and how he wanted to live his life. It was a quest for self-discovery that led him to the Sydney Queer Muslims group just as it did Hana before him.

> I was hoping that I might meet some people with answers there who might be able to help me cope with my own little personal hell. I'm not sure I had any idea what those answers would look like, but what I found didn't really sit well with me because it was too much like re-writing the Qur'an. […] [Same-sex intimacy] is not what Allah intended for us. [...] I really just want to be true to my faith and this is the only way I know how. I do volunteer work and I try really hard. I would like to get married, but I need to sort this out first. I really just wish I could get my head straight about this.

Although Adnan does not agree with the theological stances of many members of the Sydney Queer Muslim group, he enjoys having the opportunity to socialise with people who can understand his situation and in front of whom he can freely express himself. The fact that there are others among the group members who likewise struggle against their same-sex desires instead of embracing them, like Hana, also encourages Adnan to maintain a connection with the group.

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[45] PsychCentral is a clinic that provides 'psychological, psychiatric and counselling services to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) individuals, couples, and families'. Participants in this study view PsychCentral as being a Muslim-centred clinic despite their claim to cater to a diverse range of people. Their website is available at: http://www.psychcentral.com.au/ (last accessed 17 January 2018).

Protecting family and community

Well-known Muslim figures in Sydney, who are often referred to as 'community leaders' in the local press, have been accused very publicly in the media of homophobia over the years. In 2002, Hanan Dover, who was then a postgraduate student teaching at Western Sydney University, and the Lebanese Muslim Association's then-vice president Keysar Trad, presented speeches on the 28th of June at Western Sydney University's Bankstown campus in a forum titled 'Islam & homosexuality: An Islamic, scientific and logical approach'. Now infamous for its presentation of both false and bizarre claims, such as that exposure to 'acidic' vaginal fluids during lesbian oral sex poses a risk to facial tissues because of the absence of facial hair[46], this event has since become an often cited point of reference in discussions of the level of homophobia that exists among some Sydney Muslims. This is hardly surprising given that other key claims from both Trad and Dover's speeches include that sexuality is chosen, that therapy is advisable for same-sex attracted Muslims, and that any form of non-heterosexuality is entirely incompatible with any form of Islam and any same-sex attracted, transgender or transsexual Muslim is an unbeliever if they do not actively strive to embrace heteronormative interpretations of Islam[47].

This event is not alone in representing publicly expressed homophobia among Sydney Muslims. In 2005, Channel Nine's 60 Minutes program broadcast a segment featuring US-based Sheikh Khalid Yasin, who had been invited by a Sydney mosque, telling a sympathetic group of young Muslims outside Bankstown's Town Hall that the appropriate punishment for same-sex intercourse in Islam is death (Sydney Morning

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[46] The full text of Hanan Dover and Keysar Trad's speeches at this event are available from http://www.josken.net/homoph4b.htm (last accessed 28th December 2017), courtesy of Lesbian and Gay Solidarity Melbourne. Hanan Dover has since expressed regret over her words (Dover, 2016).

[47] Although the shocking content of the forum did attract attention at the time (L. Harrison, 2002), there has been renewed attention paid to this particular event after Hanan Dover's name appeared together with some prominent Sydney Muslims on a joint media statement expressing condolences for those affected by the Orlando Pulse nightclub massacre (Carney & Crane, 2016; Faruqi, 2015; Urban, 2016). The forum has also been discussed in academic work as well (Dreher & Ho, 2009; Hussein & Imtoual, 2009).

Herald, 2005). More recently, president of the Australian National Imams Council Sheikh

Shady Alsuleiman came under fire for claiming in a sermon uploaded on YouTube[48] that

same-sex attracted people are responsible for the spread of diseases such as HIV and

that same-sex intimacy is an 'evil act' (Chambers & Morton, 2016). He was invited to an

Iftar dinner, which is an evening meal that marks the end of the daily fasting during the

month of Ramadan, by Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, who later expressed

regret over the invitation after learning of the homophobic nature of Sheikh Alsuleiman's

online sermons (Keany, 2016)[49].

The examples of homophobic rhetoric coming from, or endorsed by, prominent

figures among Sydney Muslim communities could give the impression of widespread

rampant homophobia that is somehow unique to Muslims in its intensity. Yet when one

considers both the well-documented bias of the press against Australian Muslim

communities (Aly, 2007; Hopkins, 2008; Manning, 2006; Poynting, 2002; Poynting &

Noble, 2003; Saniotis, 2004), as well as the lived experiences of non-heterosexual

Muslims locally, a more nuanced reality emerges.

Homophobia may be alive and well among Sydney Muslim communities, yet it is

also pervasive among Australian communities in a general sense as a recent postal vote

on the issue of marriage equality revealed (Butler, J. A. 2017). Key figures in Australian

politics, such as former Prime Minister Tony Abbott, outspokenly advocated against

marriage equality on the grounds of religious freedom (Karp, 2017b). Despite current

Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's claims that 'Australians are able and have

demonstrated that they can have a respectful discussion' about marriage equality,

homophobic pamphlets making claims, such as that homosexuality was a 'curse of death'

or that '92% of children of gay parents suffer abuse,' proliferated (Karp, 2017a). The

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[48] The video was available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OCK2RmnCmi8 until recently but appears to have been taken down (as at 11 November 2016) in response to a copyright claim by IslamicMedia Entertainment.

[49] Sheikh Shady Alsuleiman has since sued News Corp papers for defamation (Wahlquist, 2017).

plethora of homophobic messages that emerged during the postal vote on marriage equality came from an abundant diversity of non-Muslim authors (Woodward, Watson and Evershed, 2017). Furthermore, the homophobic discourse of some religious leaders within the Sydney Muslim community bears a striking resemblance to public homophobic discourse provoked by the postal vote. However, the personal lives and relationships of Muslims can be entirely disconnected from the discourse of local Muslim leaders. My research indeed suggests that many same-sex attracted Muslims continue to enjoy harmonious relationships with their families and communities after their sexual orientation becomes known. However, this harmony is conditional and 'tolerance' may be a better word to describe many of these relationships than 'acceptance'. It is important to understand the often complex dynamics underpinning such relationships to avoid repeating stereotypes of homophobic Muslim communities silencing non-heterosexual Muslims through shame and intimidation.

Many young same-sex attracted Muslims keep their sexual orientation private out of compassion for their families. In the case of Mardi Gras, I met several young Muslims who felt that celebrating something that may well bring pain and distress to loved ones would be inappropriate and decided to privilege perceived obligations towards their family and community instead. Abdul, to illustrate, is a 29-year-old graphic designer born in Sydney to Lebanese migrant parents. He explained to me that the unspoken understanding he and his family share, which allows him to cohabit with his male partner without breaking the close relationship he enjoys with his moderately conservative Sunni Muslim family, is a result of maintaining what he believes are realistic expectations.

> My family [parents] aren't city people. They're from a small village called near the Syrian border. They have very set ideas about the way the world should work and what is right and wrong, and before they came to Sydney there was not much in their life that would have challenged that. […] In fact, living in Lakemba [a Western

Sydney suburb with a very high Muslim population], there is probably still not much that challenges that. And to me that is ok. I don't want to challenge it either. I have no plans to try to get my parents to accept Todd [my partner] because I know it will never happen. It would just upset them, and probably more in a sad way than an angry way. […] They know [that I'm gay]. They also know that Todd is my partner, even though he has never been introduced as such on the few times that they've visited. Officially, he is a good friend and roommate who helps share the cost of an overpriced flat in Sydney. There's only one bedroom, but I never draw attention to that and nobody mentions it.

Abdul's family, which consists of his mother, father, and younger sister Rouba, very rarely visit him. His apartment is small and being that he lives near Sydney's CBD it is out of the way for his parents to simply pop by, so he makes the effort to go visit them on a regular basis at the family home in Lakemba. He has aunts, uncles and cousins in Lebanon yet he and his sister never developed much of a relationship with them despite having spent the occasional holiday visits with them during childhood. When his mother calls his aunts on the phone, she always mentions what he is up to and speaks proudly of the fact that he has been successful enough in his graphic design work to afford to live in a nice apartment in a high rise block. What she does not mention, however, is that he shares it with a young Chinese Australian man named Todd.

Abdul frames his parents' attitude towards his living arrangements and sexuality in words that imply denial and avoidance on their part. He explained that when he was an adolescent his lack of interest in young women never caused any concern because his mannerisms were not particularly effeminate and from his perspective he imagined that he appeared to be rather asexual, which belied an attraction to other boys that developed from an early age. He was a good student who preferred the company of books over his peers and he tried very hard to be a good son, and his efforts won him respect from his

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father and effusive praise from his mother. Similar to many others participating in this study who belong to religiously conservative families, sexuality was not a topic much discussed at home. Unlike his sister, who received occasional stern reminders from their mother of what was and was not correct behaviour in the company of the opposite sex, Abdul does not remember ever receiving any kind of guidance or warnings concerning his interaction with girls from either parent and he believes the difference is a combination of culturally informed male privilege and the fact that he never expressed much interest while growing up. Abdul's parents had no intention of arranging the marriages of either their son or daughter yet there existed a clear presumption, which would manifest itself through the occasional joke or cheeky comment at the marriage parties of friends, that both would marry fairly early in life and establish families of their own. Rouba, who is two years younger than Abdul, married in her early twenties while Abdul failed to show any interest in following that particular culturally-prescribed life course.

Abdul received some criticism over the years from his father for his apparent lack of religiosity as well as his reluctance to 'grow up and get married', yet it was neither severe nor ongoing and he replied to it with a mixture of passive acceptance and gentle deflection. Interestingly, it ceased altogether after Abdul and Todd began sharing a home together. There were never any accusations made against him nor questions asked by his parents. As he explains,

> I believe my parents likely figured out my sexuality not long after I left home [at 20]. Leaving home felt like a big liberation for me and I loved life in the city. At university, I started going to LGBT activities, making friends and going to parties, which was nice. I pretty much forgot about religion for a while and focused on work and play, lots of play. I went a little wild for a while there and this meant that I changed a lot. I became less worried about the things I said or how I acted. And then I started to feel like I should really own who I am and I

got so tired of hiding. It made me angry, especially after I started dating [men].

So, when I went home, they [my parents] would have noticed me change even

though I never said to them, "I'm gay". [...] Then there were things [tagged

photos taken at an LGBT event] that Rouba noticed on my Facebook. She

didn't tell my parents, but she did come talk to me and she told me that she had

heard our parents talking about me and they were a little worried. They thought

it was just an attitude more than anything else; a passing thing because I've

dropped into the wrong crowd. We talked about it, and I confirmed I was gay,

and she was chill about it but she said not to tell anyone and to be more careful

with Facebook privacy [because friends or other relatives might view it and ask

questions]. We were surprised that there were never any questions though, not

even from Mum. Then there was Todd, years later, and they would have

noticed him too. Still no questions or comments though.

Abdul believes that avoiding the topic of his sexuality with his parents has essentially

saved their relationship because he would not expect them to be as understanding as his

sister, Rouba, who was born and raised in Australia. There is no doubt that he feels

sorrowful that he and his partner Todd will never experience the warm acceptance at

family and community events that Rouba and her husband do. It is painful for Abdul to

pretend to his parents and their friends, some of whom have been like surrogate aunts and

uncles to him while growing up, that Todd is merely his roommate and that he is simply too

busy with work to pursue women. This undoubtedly impacts on the relationship that he has

with them. However, as Abdul explains, some compromises are worthwhile.

Like I said, it's about expectations. There is a lot out there suggesting that you

have to be yourself, be authentic, 'do you'! And that's great, but it doesn't

always bring happiness and sometimes the happiest solution is actually

diplomacy. Look, I hate that I can't bring Todd home but he gets it because his

family is similar. We're also careful about public affection [even in Sydney CBD, where there is less of a risk of being seen and recognised], but that's more out of general safety. [...] If we went to Jasmins [restaurant in Lakemba], and someone saw me and Todd as a couple, it would get back to my parents and everything would blow up. I don't want people telling my Mum her son is going straight to hell or gossiping that she didn't raise me right. That would cause a lot more pain than me not getting to *do me* all the time. And besides, it's all good. It's not like I stop loving Todd just because I don't bring him to Eid parties. There's just no point in expecting to explain it [our relationship] to anyone who can't understand.

As a result, his silence about his sexuality and the nature of his relationship with Todd, painful as it is, has meant Abdul's parents have never been forced to acknowledge or come to terms with it. Although Abdul is 'out' in the sense that he openly lives with his male partner and makes no attempt to hide their relationship from non-Muslim friends and colleagues in Sydney, he has taken increasingly careful measures in recent years to prevent his family and others in the Muslim community from coming across evidence of his non-heterosexuality. As such, Abdul's parents have never had to endure the shame, whether from scorn or from pity, that a fully public disclosure of his sexuality would inevitably bring them from various friends and acquaintances. Moreover, it removes any potential concern on the part of Abdul's parents that they may appear to be condoning their son's choice of partner by maintaining a relationship with him. Therein lies Abdul's motivation for keeping clear of Mardi Gras festivities involving Muslim groups, such as Muslims for Progressive Values or Muslims Against Homophobia. In his own words,

Pride comes in all kinds of shapes. I don't see how being proud of being gay is better than being proud of being a good son and never giving your mum a

> reason to cry. Mardi Gras looks like a lot of fun but I'm not going to risk being
> seen there. It would hurt my parents and disappoint others.

Abdul's reluctance to participate in Mardi Gras, then, was primarily motivated out of compassion. The way in which Abdul compartmentalises his life in general appears to be mostly motivated by a desire to retain close ties with his family and community.

The fact that Abdul's non-heterosexuality has never been confirmed in any undeniable way gives his parents enough leeway to offer him the benefit of the doubt, so to speak. Abdul's parents would not be alone in this. Conditional tolerance of same-sex intimacy among Muslims who would ordinarily express unsympathetic attitudes towards same-sex relationships has been documented elsewhere (Bereket & Adam, 2008; Bonthuys & Erlank, 2012; Murray, 1997; Pierce, 2007). Murray has called this tolerance 'the will not to know' and argues that such mindset is closely linked to traditional Islamic juridical standards of proof that require four witnesses to establish guilt of sexual offences (Murray 1997: 14-15). In effect, if these stringent standards were always employed within Muslim communities, they would remove private intimacy between consenting adults from scrutiny altogether (Bereket and Adam 2008: 210). Of course, Islamic authorities and leaders often see this differently and indeed, while all schools of Islamic jurisprudence forbid same-sex intimacy, the reality of how LGBTQ individuals in various Muslim communities around the world have been subjected to the disciplinary gaze of Islamic authorities both past and present is varied and complex (Hamzić, 2015).

'Does the Rainbow flag of diversity include and protect me too?'

Mardi Gras is widely understood to represent values of radical acceptance and pride in individual uniqueness. Those who marched with Muslims Against Homophobia or Muslims for Progressive Values in the 2016 parade felt proud to have brought a Muslim presence to the celebrations. However, there are many same-sex attracted Muslims who preferred not

to participate because they felt unrepresented by what they perceived Mardi Gras to stand for and generally disillusioned with mainstream LGBTQ spaces in Sydney. For them, the kind of visibility that Alice was trying to achieve through Mardi Gras was unimportant at best and distasteful at worst. There were also fears that increasing visibility by marching at the parade as a Muslim group would simply attract patronising pity from supporters and hatred from opponents, thus potentially increasing homophobia within the Muslim community, Islamophobia from others, and perhaps even inciting violence.

In contrast to the frequent allegations of medieval Western writers who considered Islam to be unacceptably tolerant of same-sex intimacy (Daniel, 1993), much contemporary discourse positions Muslim homophobia as somehow rooted in the teachings of Islam (Kelly, 2010: 249; Sarac, 2015: 483; Siraj, 2009: 41). Furthermore, Rahman has noticed that the intense global scrutiny that Islam and Muslims have been subjected to in recent years has been an attempt to explain the 'otherness' of Muslims and as a result of this examination, 'Muslim identity has become the semiotic marker for all that is opposed to Western values' (Rahman, M. 2014: 29). Against this backdrop, the existence of same-sex attracted, gender queer or transsexual Muslims who are comfortable in both their sexual, gender and religious identities can appear confusing, or even confronting, to non-religious people who identify with various mainstream LGBTQ communities. As Abraham has explained in his research with queer Muslims in Australia, gay, lesbian or bisexual Muslims may be considered 'unviable subjects' by conservative Muslims while also being considered 'impossible – or at least dubious – subjects' by those in mainstream queer spaces and communities (Abraham, 2009: 88-89). Abraham further refers to this assumption among mainstream queer communities of the mutual exclusivity of religious and sexual identity as 'hegemonic queer Islamophobia' (Abraham, 2010), and the literature suggests that it also exists in many places outside Australia (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2014; Minwalla, Rosser, Feldman, & Varga, 2005; Rahman, M. 2014).

Many of my informants had experienced incidences of 'hegemonic queer Islamophobia' and this had been a source of great disappointment to them. Seeking out queer spaces in Sydney and expecting to find acceptance and friendship, many same-sex attracted Muslims have instead experienced discrimination, racism or pity because of their religious or ethnic backgrounds. As Mehmet Ali, who is a 25-year-old gay Australian man of Turkish heritage, explains,

> If you are queer and Muslim, it is easy to connect with the queer community – Sydney has no shortage of places where you can meet people. Even meetup.com can be a good place to start if you're lonely and maybe a little shy. The only issue with that is that you might still feel lonely because probably none of these people will ever really get you. They can be really friendly but when you tell them you're Muslim, then the questions come and suddenly all your problems would be magically solved if you just got over your faith. And if you get them to respect your religion it can be even worse! Like, they don't understand how I can share my bed with a guy, or maybe drink alcohol sometimes, but not want to eat bacon or dance about in my undies at Mardi Gras.

The fact that same-sex attracted and gender queer Muslims experience a lack of understanding, and often discrimination, from both Muslim communities and queer communities places them in a harrowing double bind and calls into question optimistic claims such as Herdt's contention that the recent emergence of gay and lesbian communities 'has transformed our culture and consciousness, creating radically new possibilities for men and women to "come out" and live more openly as homosexuals' (Herdt, 1998: 279). It is undeniably true that there are more freedoms and opportunities for same-sex attracted people to live openly in Australia and most other 'Western' nations than there were as little as 30 years ago. However, those 'radically new

possibilities' may be less numerous (or less radical) for minority groups such as same-sex attracted Muslims. As Mehmet Ali elaborated,

> Sometimes the racism is right there in front of you and for some reason it's cool to say "no Arabs" or "no Middle Easterners" on your Grindr profile, or even to someone's face. That is not ok anywhere else.

As previously discussed, there are many negative stereotypes attached to Muslims in Australia and Sydney queer communities are not immune to their pervasive influence. These stereotypes particularly affect Arab migrants and Australians of Arab heritage and can create confusion for someone who is of Turkish heritage, like Mehmet Ali, about whether or not the anti-Middle Eastern discrimination applies to them or not.

Mehmet Ali's perceived lack of acceptance was echoed by others with similar sentiments. Some complained that Mardi Gras in particular was 'white washed' and objected to elements of the festivities that they saw as confirming commonly-held stereotypes held of non-heterosexuals involving drug use, general debauchery, and promiscuity in particular.   To illustrate, Salih, a 27-year-old Australian gay man of Turkish heritage, felt disengaged with the Mardi Gras festivities because he found what he described as 'gay culture' to be distasteful. As he explains,

> I'm an ordinary guy. I have a white-collar office job. I have a Turkish boyfriend and we've been together two years. We do normal things like hit the beach or go to the movies on the weekend. Beyond the fact that I'm gay, I have nothing in common with that fancy-dress fuck fest. I think they're clowns. And if you go as a Muslim you have to dress up like one too, yeah? It's exoticised bullshit. Also, when they put the giant condom[50] on the obelisk – what was that all

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[50] ACON, a LGBTI health promotion organisation based in Sydney, had an 18-meter tall pink condom placed over the obelisk in Sydney's Hyde Park ahead of the 2016 Mardi Gras Parade to remind people of the importance of HIV prevention. For more information, please see the ABC news story at http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-02-27/giant-pink-condom-goes-onto-obelisk-at-hyde-park-in-sydney/7205162 (last accessed 29 November 2017).

about? I know why people were upset about that. And then there's the parade

with all the nearly-naked people. It's a bit full on and I feel annoyed that it's

come to represent gay culture. It's world famous, but to me it doesn't mean

anything. It's about as fake as you can get.

Salih's perception, which he is not alone in holding, is that Mardi Gras is indeed a time for

LGBTQ pride, but only when those identities are narrowly defined and carefully curated to

fit into a gay (or lesbian) stereotype. He and others also questioned the existence of the

'gay community', remarking that there are too many divisions to allow for much of a

community to flourish. This observation has been made in literature discussing gay

communities in Australia (Holt, 2011), as well as elsewhere (Barrett & Pollack, 2005;

Teunis, 2007), with differences such as race, class and HIV status being identified as

reasons underlying divisions. Some feel that there is not much space for true diversity

within Mardi Gras, or even within local queer communities, because of widespread

perceptions that Islam holds same-sex attracted Muslims back from living authentically as

well as more negative claims that Islam is somehow a violent or repressive religion. Thus,

some same-sex attracted Muslims, such as Mehmet Ali and Salih, feel as if they are

outliers in Sydney queer communities and perceive a lack of understanding of the unique

pressures and challenges they face as Muslims and as ethnic minorities in Australia as

well as a lack of respect for the sometimes quite conservative values they may hold.

Returning to the 2016 Mardi Gras parade for a moment, I can identify elements of

the Muslim presence at the parade that confirm Salih's and Mehmet Ali's criticisms. For

example, in keeping with the vivid colours of others marching that day, the men of the

group wore diverse outfits, with some in colourful harem pants and vests and others

wearing nothing but tight booty shorts, glitter and a smile. Women marching with this

group mostly wore shimmery colourful clothes that ranged from a gown known as a thobe

al nasha'ar, or Khaleegy dress, to the choli-style crop-tops and flowing skirts often

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Fig. 13.): Muslims Against Homophobia during the 2016 Mardi Gras parade. Photo credit: Matthew Neville.

associated with belly dancing. Although some women wore more revealing clothing than others, nobody wore a headscarf. Wearing my green sari, I stood out as being the only one dressed in South Asian attire and although I am not South Asian, I received compliments for adding to our diverse appearance. We were a mixed group, and not only in terms of the clothes we wore, as we were also fairly ethnically diverse. However, we did indeed 'dress up' as Muslims as per Salih's criticism. Indeed, I did not think about it at the time but many of us were unwittingly complicit in reinforcing Orientalist stereotypes about the exotic Muslim Other. We had been given open instructions by Alice to wear 'Muslim clothes' so that we would have something that unified us and some of us chose an outfit which could be said to either parody or appropriate cultural clothing styles that were not ours to borrow, particularly those of us who – like myself – had no cultural claim to do so. Despite the fact that we all identified as Muslim, neither I nor anyone else stopped at the

time to reflect upon the image we were presenting to the crowds of what a 'Muslim' might look like in reality.

The parade was set to kick off at 7.30pm and Alice had asked us all to meet at the Liverpool Street entrance to Museum train station at 1.30pm. Some of the group complained that this early meet up time would result in far too much sitting around since we did not have much to rehearse or prepare. Indeed, we were a simple marching group carrying only two banners and most of us arrived already dressed. Aside from liberally applying glitter to one another, there was not much else to do aside from chat with each other and other parade entrants and nibble snacks. Kamal, who was 20 years old and of Turkish heritage, took the downtime as an opportunity to teach us all a simple dance routine that we could do during the parade to engage the crowd. Although he urged us to not be shy in hugging onlookers, or even kissing them, most of us (and myself included) felt more comfortable reserving our hugs and kisses for the familiar faces we happened to recognise. We did welcome his enthusiasm, however, and he had a way of keeping everyone's spirits high even when the hours spent under the hot sun had taken their toll on our energy levels.

We were noticed by many of the other parade entrants because we were there for so many hours and also Kamal was quite dazzling in his glittery orange shorts and flamboyant dance routine, which even in rehearsal often involved kissing strangers. We were approached several times and asked about who we were, why we were there, and what we stood for. That in itself marked us as different from the other parade entrants, or at least those who were congregated in our vicinity, as I do not recall noticing any other group being asked why they were there unless it was by actual journalists covering the parade.   Most of the people who spoke to our group were very kind, supportive and happy that we were taking part. However, some did snigger and make jokes. Also, some made comments that suggested they were worried our presence in the parade could attract ill

will or violence from the Muslim community or even provoke a terrorist attack. Given recent local newspaper stories, such as the one mentioned previously where Sheik Khalid Yasin warned that homosexuality is punishable by death in Islam (Sydney Morning Herald, 2005), this concern is not entirely surprising when taken in context with the often overblown threat of terrorism as portrayed by Western news media.

It was not only non-Muslim parade entrants who questioned the potential security concerns of having a queer Muslim group march at Mardi Gras. Kimi, a 20-year-old Persian Australian lesbian Muslim, described to me why she believed that Alice's quest for visibility was misguided and why she would not be marching with Muslims Against Homophobia.

> People talk about visibility without really thinking hard about what that means. Why would you want to be visible? You are much more likely to be left alone when you are not! Visibility, like what comes from having the media publish lots of articles about how there's going to be gay Muslims at Mardi Gras, only really brings the trolls out.

When asked for clarification, Kimi explained that she was referring to personal safety as well as freedom from harassment and not to the threat of terrorism. However, she did not exclude the possibility of a Muslim criminal deciding to attack a Muslim Mardi Gras group out of homophobic hatred as ridiculous, even though she believed it unlikely. Sadly, after the Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando on 12 June 2016, where 49 people were killed and 53 wounded in the worst hate crime against LGBTQ people in US history by 29-year-old American Muslim Omar Mateen (Alvarez, Perez-Pena, & Hauser, 2016), the fear of terror attacks inspired by Muslim homophobia may only increase.

Sexual identity: Coming out or 'inviting in'

Heteronormative interpretations of Islam are overwhelmingly dominant within Muslim communities and the discourse of most Muslim leaders globally (Beckers, 2010; Bonthuys & Erlank, 2012: 272; Hooghe, Dejaeghere, Caes, & Quintelier, 2010: 66; Marching, 2008: 8) and literature on the topic features many examples of the heteronormative pressures placed on young gender queer or same-sex-attracted Muslims (Abraham, 2009, 2010; Al-Sayyad, 2010; Baderoon, 2015; Bonthuys & Erlank, 2012; Eidhamar, 2014; Rahman, M. 2014). Research suggests the hegemonic status that heteronormativity enjoys within Muslim communities can lead to poor self-esteem among non-heterosexual Muslims and leave them feeling alienated (Bereket & Adam, 2008; Jaspal, 2012; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2012). The inability of some participants to comply with the heterosexual cultural life course expected of them by friends, family and the wider community is an ongoing source of distress and frustration for some as is the pressure, whether self imposed or not, to compartmentalise their lives in order to preserve relationships. Those who have not revealed their non-heterosexual orientation often have to cope with pressure to marry and those who have potentially leave themselves (and their immediate families) open to criticism and condemnation. These pressures have left some research participants very ambivalent about accepting their own sexuality and left others who have accepted their sexuality feeling as if they must lead double lives. Stage models of sexual identity may help in understanding these challenges and ambivalences among some, while the weaknesses of these models as they apply to participants in this study are a rich source of information in their own right.

Various models have emerged since the 1970s that depict the development of so-called gay and lesbian identities from the initial experience of same-sex attraction to the exploration of these feelings and finally the assumption of a sexual identity (Carrion & Lock, 1997; Cass, 1979; Chapman & Brannock, 1987; Coleman, 1982; Fox, 1995; McCarn

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& Fassinger, 1996; Minton & McDonald, 1984; Morales, 1989; Plummer, 1975; Ponse, 1978; Reynolds & Pope, 1991; Siegel & Lowe, R., 1994; Sophie, 1986; Troiden, 1989). These models portray sexual identity development as a process that consists of various stages a young person must go through in order to achieve positive self-esteem and emotional balance. Although the models all differ from each other, with some focusing on specifically gay or lesbian identity development for example, they do share several significant similarities. Eliason and Schope (2007: 13-15) reviewed the above popular stage models, as well as others that address transgender identity development (Devor, 2004; Nuttbrock, Rosenblum, & Blumenstein, 2002), and argued that they share five common themes: a feeling of difference starts the formation of identity; identity forms through a developmental process that ranges from a poor to good level of psychological adjustment; people feel a need to disclose their sexuality and that not doing so is unhealthy; many experience a need to reject heterosexual societal norms and assert one's identity in conspicuous opposition to them; and finally there is a need for identity integration, or synthesis, whereby a person's anger towards heteronormative cultural norms lessens and therefore a person's sexual identity becomes no more important to than any other aspect of that person's identity.

Although early stage models have been critiqued and improved through the years (Horowitz and Newcombe, 2002; Bilodeau and Renn, 2005; Savin-Williams, 2011), the classic studies remain influential despite their age and continue to shape not only research but also, and more importantly, public discourse about sexual identity (Rosser et al., 2008; Savin-Williams, 2011; Kenneady and Oswalt, 2014). Beliefs are pervasive that a same-sex attracted person needs to 'come out' and, in order to lead an authentic, healthy life, mimic the 'markers of successful LGB identity development' as articulated by early stage models (Shapiro, Rios and Stewart, 2010: 492). Same-sex attracted participants in this study, in both Singapore and Sydney, report being advised by friends, psychologists and

others in queer communities that they would be happier if they decided to come out and live publicly as a gender queer, gay, bisexual, or lesbian person. Comparing their experiences, and their own articulations of 'success' in managing their sexual identities, with a classic stage model can help us understand why they might reject calls to come out. For this purpose, Dr Eli Coleman's 'Developmental Stages of the Coming Out Process' (1982) may be used as an example to illustrate how the experiences of my informants can be measured against a sexual identity stage model to understand aspects of their challenges that are unique to them. Coleman, a psychologist and professor at the Medical School of the University of Minnesota, described five fundamental stages of what he has described as 'the coming out process': pre-coming out; coming out; exploration; first relationships; and integration. The well known model addresses same-sex attraction yet, since it considers the impact of the environment and the approval of others, it is also helpful in understanding the process by which a gender queer individual becomes aware of, expresses and lives their gender identity regardless of their sexual orientation. Although Coleman does not presume all same-sex attracted people complete all these stages or go through them in the order that he has set them out (1982: 32), his model can be helpful in understanding — through comparison — the nature of some of the challenges that young, same-sex attracted as well as gender queer Muslims can encounter.

Coleman's first stage, pre-coming out, begins in early childhood before a child may be consciously aware of same-sex attraction. A young person, after learning family and community expectations of what is considered 'normal', may feel that they are different somehow and yet not be able to clearly articulate why. Behavioural and psychological problems may result from this inability to communicate their inner conflict. A sense that there is something wrong can cause a person in this stage to suppress their feelings or hide them from others, and this in turn may give rise to poor self esteem, depression, as

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well as suicidal ideation or even attempts (Coleman 1982: 33). Coleman's description of this stage resonates with Adnan's experience of depression and isolation mentioned above. While Coleman is here referring to a young person's experience of growing up in heteronormative wider society, the impact of community and family expectations on a young same-sex attracted or gender queer Muslim can be severe. Such expectations, in both Adnan and Hana's case above, carry additional weight because they are considered to be the result of religious obligation. In order to stay true to their understanding of Islam, Adnan and Hana actively repress their sexualities, which may be psychologically harmful to them (Ford, 2002; Halderman, 1991, 2008; T. Harrison, 2003; Rowen & Malcolm, 2003).

The second stage, according to Coleman, is 'coming out' and this involves acknowledging same-sex attraction and disclosing it to someone. Arguing that it is impossible to feel 'worthwhile,' 'accepted' or 'valued' on one's own, Coleman suggests same-sex attracted people must take the risk of disclosure in order to attain acceptance from others for the sake of their psychological wellbeing, even if only a small circle of family and close friends (Coleman 1982: 34). By virtue of the nature of qualitative research and the fact that I recruited research participants mostly from queer Muslim spaces, everyone I have interviewed has disclosed their same-sex attraction to several people. However, many research participants in this study have never admitted their non-heterosexuality to a heterosexual Muslim friend or family member despite having to cope with suspicion and occasional gossip. For many, like Abdul who only admitted he was gay to his sister and believes his parents have independently figured it out, the 'will not to know' (Murray, 1997) of family allows him the peace of mind to enjoy living with his partner Todd while knowing he is not the cause of any disruption or pain to his family. Coleman suggests that coming out to heterosexual loved ones may be of more benefit to self-esteem than to only come out to close friends or family who are also same-sex attracted because the affirmation received may have more meaning given that it would openly

challenge heteronormative messages a same-sex attracted person would have grown up with (1982: 35). For Abdul and others, however, coming out in Coleman's terms would feel unacceptably selfish – even presuming there is hope of acceptance from relatives or friends – because of the impact of community expectations. Moreover, as a result of frequent experiences of discrimination and racism, community belonging can be very important to Muslims, whether heterosexual or not. In this respect, there are complexities within many Muslim communities in Sydney, such as high levels of community identification and pressures from non-Muslim Australians (Woodlock, 2011), that Anglo Australians as well as many other communities do not have to contend with. In that sense, Coleman's (1982: 35) recommendation that it is important for same-sex attracted people whose family took their disclosure badly to persevere with their family while they grieve sounds naively optimistic, or in Abdul's words, not a 'realistic expectation'.

Coleman's third and fourth stage involve exploration of one's sexuality and the first relationships a same-sex attracted person enters into respectively. He notes that the period of sexual exploration can be comparable to a delayed adolescence of sorts whereby a person can engage in potentially risky behaviours such as substance abuse or sex with multiple partners. Although only hinted at in Abdul's quotations above, he described going through a period that aligns very much with Coleman's third stage of exploration as well as the fourth stage, first relationships. After going through a rebellious period where Abdul rejected religion and his previous asexual lifestyle for parties and multiple partners, he slowed down as he aged and engaged in more lasting relationships, the most recent of which has been with his current partner Todd. Coleman describes the first relationships that same-sex attracted people engage in as being at risk from challenges arising from the lack of support from family (1982: 39). Now that he is almost thirty, and though being silent about his sexuality in his younger years angered him, he speaks of feeling proud that he has never made his parents suffer the shame of a public

disclosure of his sexuality and how his discretion has allowed him to live without guilt. Abdul is lucky in that his partner's family dynamic is similar to his own, which makes him understanding, yet the privileging of family over openness about romantic love still places a burden on the couple.

Abdul is not alone in following the pattern described here. Data from this study in both Singapore and Sydney suggest that it is not unusual for same-sex attracted Muslims to undergo a period of extensive sexual exploration after leaving the family home and then settle into more lasting, monogamous relationships after the novelty of sexual freedom has waned. Some find relationships with other Muslims preferable, yet I have not observed any particular pattern of partner choice. As Coleman stresses, however, it should not be assumed that people pass through these stages in order simply because they are presented as linear. Stage models merely provide a framework to understanding of the process involved in integrated sexual identity formation (1982: 40).

The final stage, for Coleman, is integration and in this stage individuals are said to combine their public and private identities into one self-image. In colloquial terms, this could be described as fully 'coming out'. Coleman draws upon the work of Grace (1979) in describing this stage as one characterised by greater emotional maturity, psychological resilience and relationships that benefit from experience and better interpersonal skills. Achieving this stage, or arriving at an integrated identity in other words, is something that Coleman believes will also help individuals cope with the strains and demands of various phases of adult life (1982: 39).

Yet such an integrated identity is beyond the reach of many of my informants. This chapter has discussed reasons for which same-sex attracted Muslims did not wish to participate in Mardi Gras and for most, the difference between them and those who did hinges largely on this fifth stage. Although there were exceptions, such as those unsettled by the inaccurate representation of our group in the press as being exclusively

gay and lesbian, most of those who marched at Mardi Gras would fit Coleman's definition of having an integrated identity in which public and private identities merge, leaving no one to hide from and nothing to hide. It was for this reason that they were comfortable with being seen at the parade as well as photographed by the media, such as in the photograph taken by the Huffington Post featured earlier. Claiming that such people have achieved a 'higher' or 'healthier' stage ignores several challenges of their own experience, such as their relationship to local Muslim communities in general, as well as the tangible benefits of the coping mechanisms of those who do not achieve or even pursue identity integration.

Coleman's stage model is not the only to presume identity integration is a pinnacle of social and psychological wellbeing. Eliason & Schope's (2007) review of stage models noted that identity integration, where a person's sexual identity becomes no more important than any other aspect of their identity and anger towards heteronormative cultural norms subsides, was a key final stage in the reviewed theories. This is problematic for many reasons. As Eliason and Schope themselves note (2007: 4, 15), these models tend to be derived from a Eurocentric perspective and are not inclusive of minority sexual and gender identities or of the identities of people who believe their sexuality is a choice. Citing Fassinger and Miller's suggestion (1996: 56, cited in Eliason and Schope 2007: 18) that disclosure is so influenced by contextual oppression that using it to measure identity development places a person as responsible for his or her own victimisation, Eliason and Schope note that examples of people who engage in same-sex relationships or have various gender identities may have been socialised to see 'passing' as an indication of identity competence (2007: 18). Furthermore, Eliason and Schope (*ibid*.) cite research that suggests an LGBTQ identity can be beyond the reach of members of racial, ethnic or religious groups who are vulnerable to discrimination and need the support of their families and communities (Conerly, 1996; Loiacano, 1989; Rosario,

Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2004). An LGBTQ identity may also be beyond the reach of religious people whose value system does not permit such identity, such as Hana and Adnan, or those who would face rejection from their religious community (Yarhouse, 2001), such as Abdul, Mehmet Ali and Salih.

Australian Muslim Psychologist Sekneh Hammoud-Beckett (2007) has identified the normative framework of 'coming out' described above to be problematic for her same-sex attracted Muslim clients. As a solution, she encourages young Australian Muslims who experience same-sex attraction to invite select loved ones to 'come in' to their lives and not feel pressured to 'come out' in a conventional sense. According to Hammoud-Beckett, this alternative framework facilitates relationships between same-sex attracted Muslim Australians and their families. She reports one of her clients as claiming,

> Even if I don't tell certain members of my extended family about my sexuality, I don't view myself as in the closet, in a dark place that I must escape from. Far from it, this 'closet' is full of precious things, like things you could never afford to buy! It's my treasure chest. The way I see it, rather than me needing to move out of the closet, to make my sexuality public to everyone, including my grandparents, instead I get to choose who to open the door to, and who to invite to 'come in' to my life. (Sekneh Hammoud-Beckett, 2007: 35)

While some of the same-sex attracted participants in this research are similarly selective about revealing their sexuality, none approach the optimism of Hammond-Beckett's client. By contrast, participants in this study often kept their non-heterosexual orientations private out of a fear of hurting their loved ones or damaging relationships with them. At the same time, some participants also felt isolated from mainstream queer spaces, where they sometimes experienced Islamophobia or other forms of discrimination. Although LGBTQ identities as well as identity integration, such as discussed in identity stage models, is of course not beyond the reach of all Muslims, many do not construct 'sexual identities' in the

sense that these models are looking at. Instead, many same-sex attracted Muslims see

sexuality as something they do, rather than something they are, and feel far too alienated

from mainstream LGBTQ spaces to assume sexual identities that connect with that

discourse.

Chapter Six

Tactical intimacies: romance and dating in Singapore

The authority of the Singaporean state over its citizens and residents, as well as the power relations between various Singaporean ethnic groups, is an easily observable reality that is woven into some of the most mundane aspects of everyday life. Chih has suggested that government intervention in Singapore 'permeates all areas of life' (2002: 1348), and some of the regulatory and disciplinary practices behind this and similar claims have already been discussed, such as the ethnic quotas imposed on public housing estates (Chih, 2003: 530) as well as the state's management of religious bodies (Rahim, 2012: 171). The Singaporean government seeks to guide some of the most intimate areas of life and policies designed to encourage a very narrow ideal of the Singaporean family, which contrasts sharply with the stereotype of traditional Malay Muslim families, have an effect on the way young Malay Muslims in Singapore choose their romantic partners and plan their futures. The Singaporean government would not be alone in guiding the private intimate lives of its citizens (Hirsch and Wardlow, 2009; Afsaneh, 2010; Padilla et al., 2012), and some scholars suggest that all nations do to some degree, referring to the division between the public and the private as a 'purposeful fiction' (Joseph, 1997: 73).

Government rhetoric on what constitutes an ideal family and how to go about finding a partner to build one with as well as the often contrasting Malay Muslim community expectations of the same can create a source of frustration and stress among young adults. This chapter will begin with a discussion of some of the Singaporean state's efforts to shape demographics through policy and show how these regulatory strategies prove to be disproportionately disciplinary in their impact on the Malay Muslim community. Drawing upon Michel de Certeau's framework for understanding the strategies of control

by the powerful and the tactics of resistance employed by those subject to it discussed in chapter 4, this chapter will then explore the influence of state discourse surrounding what it means to be a 'successful Singaporean' on romantic choices among young Malays and the instances in which young people resist social expectations or strategically comply with them for personal benefit.

Social Control and Discipline: shaping demographics through policy in Singapore

The People's Action Party (PAP), which was founded in 1954 by Lee Kuan Yew and has governed Singapore since June 1959 (Hill & Kwen, 1995), has led Singapore to great economic growth, political stability and relative social harmony. These achievements, however, have come with a price. In exchange for prosperity, the government imposes its vision of moral, gendered and political order through an illiberal democracy that is intolerant of dissent or discourse that questions the PAP worldview (George, 2007; Gwynne, 2013; Rahim, 2012; Rodan, 2004, 2009; K. P. Tan, 2007; Tremewan, 1996). Life in Singapore is carefully curated by the PAP from the well manicured public parks and open spaces which are meticulously planned to express a very deliberate sense of order (Savage, 1992a, 1992b; Yuen, 1996) to the discipline of singles under the age of 35 through policy that forbids their purchase of public Housing Development Board (HDB) homes unless they opt to enter a heterosexual marriage (Chua, 1995; Jones, 2012a; Teo, 2010).

The regulation of family life or the promotion of marriage through government policy is not uniquely Singaporean. The United States, for example, has long promoted heterosexual marriage through public policy with the purpose of addressing various social problems such as poverty or instability within families (Brotherson & Duncan, 2004). Despite pro-marriage initiatives often appearing well intentioned, research exists that is critical of marriage as a solution to these issues (Lichter, Graefe, & Brown, 2003), and

abundant literature suggests such policies are actually disciplinary and a form of social control (Cahill, 2005; Coltrane, 2001; Hardisty, 2007; Polikoff, 2008).

In the context of Singapore, although the state very much valorises heterosexual marriage as being the cornerstone of the nation, the intentions of policy to manage demographics have extended far beyond mere marriage promotion and have historically involved overt efforts to discipline those who did not comply. For example, the Singaporean government promoted anti-natalist policies from 1965 to 1982 out of a fear that population growth might put stress on Singapore's then-newly-developing economy (Leong & Sriramesh, 2006: 246). These policies took the shape of campaigns such the 'Stop-At-Two' (children) initiative that employed the slogan 'Girl or Boy—Two is enough', the liberalisation of abortion as well as the legalisation of voluntary sterilisation, which came with incentives such as priority in primary school registration for existing children as well as the reimbursement of delivery fees (Wong & Yeoh, 2003: 7).   Wong and Yeoh (2003) note disincentives to having more than two children as well, such as the fact that delivery fees would increase and women would not be eligible for paid maternity leave after the birth of their second child. These anti-natalist policies, together with an ever-increasing focus on economic progress and the encouragement of the nuclear family structure by the government in both rhetoric and housing policy (Kuo & Wong, 1979), were ultimately successful in achieving their aims and replacement-level fertility was achieved in 1975 (Wong & Yeoh, 2003: 8).

The demographic regulatory strategies of the Singaporean government were perhaps at their most extreme during the period between 1983 and 1986, which has been called the 'Eugenics Phase' in Singaporean history (Teo, 2010; Wong & Yeoh, 2003). The period of rapid economic development that followed Singapore's independence from Malaysia led to wider participation of women in the workforce. This led to the nation's long serving Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, having doubts about the wisdom of opening up

employment opportunities to women as he feared it was creating an imbalance in reproduction among Singaporeans whereby highly educated and employed women were having far fewer children than their less educated sisters (Saw, 1999). An excerpt from one of his speeches, which was titled 'Talent for the future' and delivered on 14 August 1983, expresses his ambivalence.

> When we adopted these policies they were manifestly right, enlightened and the way forward to the future. With the advantage of blinding hindsight, educating everybody, yes, absolutely right. Equal employment opportunities, yes, but we shouldn't get our women into jobs where they cannot, at the same time, be mothers…. You just can't be doing a full-time, heavy job like that of a doctor or engineer and run a home and bring up children … we must think deep and long on the profound changes we have unwittingly set off.

> …Our most valuable asset is in the ability of our people, yet we are frittering away this asset through the unintended consequences of changes in our education policy and equal career opportunities for women. This has affected their traditional role as mothers.

> It is too late for us to reverse our policies and have our women go back to their primary role as mothers, the creators and protectors of the next generation. Our women will not stand for it. And anyway, they have already become too important a factor in the economy. (Lee Kuan Yew as cited in Wong and Yeoh 2003: 8)

The fact that well-educated women were bearing the fewest children was an issue to be addressed urgently, according to Lee, because he believed that educated individuals possessed better genetics and so encouraging tertiary-educated women to procreate

would result in brighter future generations of Singaporeans (Straughan, 2015: 63). Lee Kuan Yew's worries led to a pro-marriage and selectively pro-natalist policy shift.

The Singaporean government went about addressing this concern by involving itself in heterosexual matchmaking among university graduates to encourage them to marry young and have children. The Social Development Unit (SDU) was established in 1984 for this purpose, and although its efforts were initially mocked and not taken very seriously, it was soon normalised and accepted (Jones, 2012a: 91). The government had even been successful in turning around negative jibes made at the initiative, such as a joke that SDU really stood for 'Single, Desperate, and Ugly', with clever rebranding that associated the terms 'Single, Desirable, and Unattached' to the acronym (Leong & Sriramesh, 2006: 252). The SDU was followed in 1985 by the Social Development Services (SDS) that offered matchmaking services to non-graduates and in 2009, the two were combined and renamed as the Social Development Network (SDN) to reflect that the division between services for the graduates and non-graduates no longer existed (Social Development Network, 2011).   The SDN's stated aim is to 'promote [heterosexual] marriages and nurture a culture where singles view marriage as one of their top life goals' (Social Development Network, 2011) and while they are very careful to avoid any mention of ethnicity or religion on their website, the planned activities (many of which involve non-halal food and alcohol) as well as the fact that their 'Success Stories' feature only couples who appear to be Chinese Singaporean, suggest that this service is aimed primarily towards Chinese Singaporeans. This is unsurprising given that fertility among the various ethnic groups in Singapore differ greatly, with overall fertility among Chinese Singaporeans being much lower than the national average (Jones, 2012b: 316).

During the so-called 'Eugenics Phase,' the Singaporean government's drive to encourage only the educated to have children focused primarily on women and did not stop at matchmaking. Other benefits for tertiary-educated or professionally qualified

women included income tax reliefs and amendments to policy that offered priority primary school registration to the children of graduate women who had a family including at least three children under the 'graduate mother scheme' (Saw, 1999). In addition to these incentives, disciplinary measures were introduced to discourage less educated, low-income parents from having more than two children. Given that Malay Muslim Singaporeans have generally had both lower incomes as well as larger families (Yap, 2003: 647) than the Chinese Singaporean majority, these policies would have disproportionately affected them. The disciplinary measures included, for example, the Singaporean government's decision to increase the delivery fees for third and subsequent children in government hospitals and also encourage sterilisation by offering a S$10,000 housing grant to such mothers after the birth of their second child (Yap, 2007: 207).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, these policies were very unpopular and while some of the policies were dropped, such as the 'graduate mother scheme' mentioned above (Leong & Sriramesh, 2006: 249), others were simply amended and softened. To illustrate, a policy that rewarded educated women with an 'enhanced' tax relief for their children remained although the educational limit was lowered to women with at least 5 O-levels (Wong & Yeoh, 2003: 23). At present, however, the Singaporean government appears focused on convincing all citizens to have larger families in a general sense. Generous tax credits and newborn grants exist for parents and there are specific initiatives designed to keep working women in the workplace, such as the Working Mother's Child Relief tax benefit as well as the Enhanced Foreign Domestic Worker Levy Concession that offers to make the employment of a domestic helper more affordable for those who have children, elderly parents or disabled dependents living with them[51].

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[51] For more information on these initiatives and others, the government of Singapore has set up a website specifically to detail the benefits available to parents at http://www.heybaby.sg/. There are also further details about the tax benefits available to parents via the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore at https://www.iras.gov.sg/ (both pages last accessed at 20 January 2018). The eligibility criteria for a majority of these benefits require parents to be Singaporean citizens and heterosexually married, divorced, or widowed.

Singapore's eugenics phase may be over in the sense that contemporary government policy appears to avoid overt bias. However, that does not mean that the Singaporean government does not continue to tightly police notions of what a 'successful' family looks like. As (Sun, 2011: 135) notes,

> … while the eugenic principle may not be explicitly articulated or even consciously intended, differential outcomes and class-aligned support are embedded in the structure of the program implemented since 1987. The current criteria for the restriction and encouragement of reproductive behavior is primarily based on an individual's socio-economic achievement, based on indicators that include but are not limited to, education, income, property ownership, and employment status. Different elements, such as the forms in which incentives are delivered and the media channels through which information is disseminated, converge to benefit childbearing by citizens of a higher socio-economic status.

The implications of this go beyond mere socioeconomic class because Malay Muslims are significantly over represented among Singaporeans of lower than average socioeconomic status (Chua, 2003: 66; W. K. M. Lee, 2004: 30; Mutalib, 2012: 33). An 18-month study commissioned by the Malay community social welfare group Mendaki reported in 2015 that about two-thirds of low-income Malay Muslim households do not claim support from social services because they are either unaware of the available resources or they fear the stigma that may be attached to accessing them (Sim, 2015). Furthermore, lower socioeconomic status means that a disproportionate number of Malay parents simply cannot afford the same opportunities for their children that wealthier Singaporeans can. In Singapore's competitive job market where advantages such as private school attendance are highly prized, this can lead to a serious disadvantage for young Malay Muslim Singaporeans.

Media representation and stereotypes: the 'cultural deficiency' hypothesis

There is strong evidence to support an argument about the structural nature of the prevalence of poverty among Singaporean Malays that ranges from the impact of colonial history (Alatas, 1977)[52] to present day and ongoing structural inequality (Moore, 2000; Senin & Ng, 2012). Unfortunately, however, alleged cultural deficiencies on the part of Malay Muslim Singaporeans are commonly accepted as causes behind their position of disadvantage (Moore, 2000; Wan Hussin, 1990). Political elites describe meritocracy as being a core Singaporean value that allows all Singaporeans to pursue educational and economic achievement on a level playing field, yet opportunities for the ethnic Chinese majority to exercise subtle forms of prejudice abound (Barr & Skrbis, 2008). Portrayals of social problems affecting Malay Muslim Singaporeans are frequently depicted by politicians and reported in the press as being due to individual decision making and/or the result of adherence to a maladaptive culture as opposed to resulting from structural inequalities within the small city-state (Saito, 2006). More worryingly, the state's own insistence on dividing Singaporean citizens by race, constantly comparing communities against each other as well as developing community-specific social welfare organisations, has resulted in many Malay Muslim Singaporeans internalising racist discourse (Chua 1998: 171).

Considering that the Singaporean government exerts considerable influence upon local news media (T. Lee, 2010), the manner of reporting stories about Malay Muslim Singaporeans may be read as another form of social control. The Singaporean state confirms stereotypes about the community-based nature of a social problem and then encourages Malay Muslims to shed aspects of their culture and religion that are perceived to hold them back while also celebrating Chinese Singaporean cultural superiority as a

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[52] For a detailed discussion of the impact of colonialism on Malay Muslim communities and culture, please see Aljunied 2009 and 2010.

model to work towards. Many Malay Muslim Singaporeans, as other Singaporean ethnic minorities, may find themselves under pressure to conform to expectations set by Chinese Singaporeans without ever being able to fully overcome their marginalised position (Barr & Skrbis, 2008: 98). An example of this process may be found in the representation of substance abuse as being a particularly Malay issue. When statistics are divided along ethnic lines, substance abuse appears to be disproportionately high among the Malay community (Cheong, 2016). However, as sociologist Chua Beng Huat has observed, when one looks at the addicted population as a whole, substance abuse is very much an issue affecting those of lower than average education and socioeconomic status and the number of Malay Muslim Singaporeans in this group cannot be separated from these factors (Chua 1998: 171).

Links between structural disadvantage and social problems are well known. Poverty in itself correlates with lower academic achievement (Eamon, 2002; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Pagani et al., 1999) and although the Singaporean government has made efforts to improve the educational level of the Malay community (J. Tan, 1995), there has not been a similar attempt to address the income disparities that may give rise to not only low educational attainment levels but also the social problems that are said to beset the community. Indeed, Chua (1998: 171) has suggested that:

> As comparisons of relative wealth are unavoidable, Malays are exhorted not to compare their circumstances with the better positioned Chinese but to examine and compare their present circumstances with their own past, and finally, to discover for themselves the fact they have improved and should continue to develop self-help strategies towards higher achievement. This 'internalization' of economic disadvantage is 'encouraged', if not imposed, on the Malays for fear that cross comparisons with other groups may lead to inter-racial conflicts.

The regulatory strategies used by the Singaporean government, which often involve use of the media, have a great impact on the ways in which Singaporeans of any ethnicity perceive themselves as well as interact and relate to each other.

Media in Singapore is regulated through both specific statutes as well as government supervision of key media organisations, such as Singapore Press Holdings (Kenyon et al., 2014: 16). Singaporean leaders have spoken specifically over the years about the role of the media in building social cohesion and the fact that it is subordinate to the government's vision of national interests[53] (Bokhorst-Heng, 2002: 560). In theory, a commitment to cohesion should help ensure that material that might be considered offensive toward a particular ethnic or religious group would not be published or broadcast within Singapore. Attacks against a particular group in the media are, after all, not conducive towards harmony in a multicultural context. In practice, however, the lines that separate what is considered offensive from what is simply considered a portrayal of an unfortunate reality are blurred and not readily agreed upon. The Singaporean media often portrays Malay Singaporeans as having a culture and religion that is somehow maladaptive to present day Singaporean values of striving for economic and educational achievement as well as social cohesion. For example, on 21 August 2016, the Singaporean newspaper *Today* published Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's exhortation to the Malay Muslim community to keep up with developing technology under the headline 'Master new technologies for new economy, PM Lee urges Malay Singaporeans'. He is quoted in the article as saying, 'If more Malays participate and succeed in the new economy, the stronger will be our multi-racial cohesion, and we will be better prepared to overcome all challenges' (Online, 2016). *Today* also reported the comments of Home Affairs and Law Minister Shanmugam on 20 January 2016, in an article titled 'Muslims

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[53] For examples of this please see the following speeches: Goh, C.T. (1998) 'Speech by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong at the Lianhe Zaobao 75th Anniversary Gala Dinner'. Singapore: MITA and Lee, K.Y. (1971) 'The Mass Media and New Countries', address to the General Assembly of the International Press Institute at Helsinki, 9 June 1971. The Mirror (14 June).

here growing "somewhat more distant": Shanmugam', who warned that increasing

religiosity among Malay Muslim Singaporeans could cause divisions that are 'not good for

the Muslim community and not good for Singapore, with serious long-term

implications' (Siau, 2016). It is not only non-Malay Singaporean politicians who single out

the Malay community as having unique weaknesses. Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs

Dr. Yaacob Ibrahim, who identifies as a Malay Muslim Singaporean, recently commented

on the perceived underachievement of the Malay Muslim community, saying that 'We

lagged behind in education, higher divorce rates, higher crime rates and more recently,

Islam has been associated with the terrorism threat' (Toh, 2016). These are merely three

recent examples of a whole host of media articles about the Malay community that suggest

their deficiency as Singaporean citizens in one way or another.

The implication that Malay Muslims need special government encouragement to

become technologically literate and discouragement from being overly religious for the

good of the nation is patronising at best and extraordinarily offensive at worst. However,

such stories are frequently seen, by Singaporeans of all communities, as faithful depictions

of social issues that can be overcome by community self-investment and/or individual

effort. Indeed, since the 1990s, reports of Malay Muslims who have 'conquered' such

perceived cultural defects and achieved prestigious professional or educational accolades

have emerged in the media as role model success stories that the government hopes will

motivate other Malay Muslim Singaporeans (Saito, 2006). The presentation of such

success stories as being newsworthy feeds common perceptions that Malay economic or

educational achievement is anomalous, and thus reinforces the stereotype of Malay

Muslims as being typically underachieving[54]. Furthermore, some stories that are intended

to portray Malay Muslims in a positive light draw attention to government regulations that

underscore their perceived deficiencies, such as a recent *Straits Times* piece featuring the

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[54] For recent examples, please see (Salleh, 2015; Teng, 2015).

success of a local madrasah school that mentioned the Singaporean Ministry of Education's 'requirement that madrasah pupils must not score lower than the average PSLE [primary school leaving examination] aggregate score of *Malay pupils* at the six lowest-performing national schools' (P. Lee, 2014, emphasis added). Although a commitment to racial and religious harmony is clearly a priority in political discourse that is often repeated in media content, assumptions that entire communities can have particular aptitudes and shortcomings that stem from shared biological, cultural or religious values often go unchallenged.

The young Malay Muslim Singaporeans who participated in this study often measured their achievements and aspirations against this backdrop of narrowly defined concepts of success in building both careers and families while discussing their current situation or plans for dating, marriage, or remaining single. There was, however, an extra consideration that most of them had to take into account in their lives that would not affect their fellow Singaporeans from other religious groups: the expectations of the Muslim community as well as the influences of both local and international Muslim religious leaders on those expectations. In this context of plural and often contrasting value systems, conformity with one may be read as an act of resistance against another. In choosing one path, another must necessarily be rejected. The following will discuss some examples from my fieldwork that illustrate how my Malay Muslim research participants resist or comply with social expectations of romance and dating in ways that bring personal benefit, satisfaction or pleasure.

Selective intimacies: nuances of resistance and compliance

There are many ways in which individuals can deploy tactics of resistance against communities and/or the state. From spending time with research participants and listening to them describe their relationships to their families, community and religion, I have

identified recurring themes of tactical resistance and compliance which loosely describe

the discourses my research participants appeal to when relating stories of their intimate

lives or their relationship plans. For example, some resist the Singaporean state's ideal of

the working married couple through compliance with a pious Islamic position that

encourages women to be homemakers and men to be breadwinners or traditional Malay

community norms of having many children. Other themes include the resistance of Malay

community stereotypes through either compliance with transnational ideals of Islamic piety

that prioritise Muslim identity over Malay identity or compliance with state discourses of

economic success that prioritise Singaporean-ness over Malay identity. A further example

involved, conversely, resisting the Islamic piety of family members through compliance

with state ideals or Malay community norms, where for instance the advice to refuse

handshakes from the opposite sex was dismissed as both un-Singaporean and not

authentically Malay Islam. These major themes help frame the experiences of romance

and dating offered by participants in this study because, as we shall see, their descriptions

often use Singaporean government discourse, Malay community stereotypes and Islamic

piety as points of reference with which to structure their narrations.

Resisting the state

As demonstrated above, the Singaporean government has been often complicit in

reinforcing common negative stereotypes of Malay Muslim Singaporeans through the

media. To further illustrate the extent of this discrimination, a brief look at the Singaporean

government's direct treatment of the Malay Muslim community reveals many potential

reasons why some feel a great deal of resentment towards the state. The Singaporean

government has, for example, banned female Muslim students in public schools from

wearing a headscarf (known locally as a *tudung* in Malay) while allowing Sikh students to

wear turbans and arm bangles; placed official restrictions on the growth of enrolment

numbers in privately-run Islamic madrasahs; and overturned a primary school principal's decision to only provide halal food on his campus (J. Tan, 2012: 1964). In the military, the Singaporean state employs a discriminatory approach to the recruitment of Malay Muslim Singaporeans for positions within the Singapore Armed Forces that are seen as 'sensitive' out of a fear that religion may get in the way of their patriotism in serving their country (Mutalib, 2012: 48-49). The result of discriminatory practices such as these, as well as government statements about the Malay Muslim community as reported in the press, is an 'increasing inclination and danger for all Singaporeans, Malay-Muslims included, to make a subjective judgement on whether a Singapore Malay-Muslim is "moderate" or "extreme", "tudung wearing" or "not tudung wearing" and, that awful term, "good" or "bad" Muslim' (Ismail & Shaw, 2006: 43).

As a response to this pressure, some of my informants have decided that they want nothing to do with the label 'moderate Muslim', which they see as being tied up with a misplaced subservience to the government that should ideally be directed towards God. This has direct implications for how they approach dating as well as socialising with the opposite sex in general. For example, Haziq, who is a single 26-year-old Malay Muslim Singaporean man, explained to me that he wanted to find a 'real' Muslim woman to marry and he did not see the purpose of dating, understood here to mean spending leisure time alone with the opposite sex for the purpose of pursuing a romantic relationship, for an extended period. As a full-time employee at a local software company, Haziq had both enough time and disposable income[55] to date women should he wish yet, after having what he described as morally bad experiences in his late teens, he had no further interest in doing so. He elaborated on his position by saying,

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[55] A majority of my heterosexual Malay Muslim Singaporean informants, both men and women, believed that a man should pay for most activities when he is dating a woman, although women are generally expected to at least offer to contribute something if they are employed wage earners.

Although I'm not against arranged marriage, I would still rather choose and know that the girl chose me too, but I don't see the point in dating because it just opens up opportunities for *khalwat* [inappropriate close proximity with the opposite sex]. It's not a proper way to start with someone that you want to marry. […] [Finding a partner in Singapore] is hard because a lot of [Singaporean Malay Muslim] girls are really into non-Muslim habits, and they get in trouble because they don't respect themselves. I want a wife who respects herself, her *deen* [religion] and wears *tudung*.

Although currently single, he was now in favour of what he considered to be a more traditional pattern of courtship, where a young man courts a young woman formally, with a chaperone and with the clear intention of exploring the possibility of marriage. Given his position as gainfully employed and currently helping to support his working class family, this form of courtship would also allow him to demonstrate his worth as being both pious and well provisioned to his potential spouse's family.

Other characteristics that Haziq mentioned seeking in a potential wife were a love of children and a desire to build a large family, a contentment with staying at home to care for that family, and a willingness to help care for his ageing parents should the need ever arise. It was clear from our conversations that he saw men and women as being suited to a highly gendered division of labour within a family, which he believed was the natural design of God, and accountable to different standards of behaviour. Indeed, Haziq appeared quite critical of local young women, citing the high numbers of young single mothers as evidence of the moral waywardness of Malay Muslim Singaporean women. 'Where in the world do you ever hear of the Muslim girls being the wild ones? I think it's only here', he lamented before insinuating that local Muslim women who engaged in casual dating did not 'respect themselves' and wilfully put themselves at risk of 'moral danger' with single parenthood as a potential consequence. Interestingly, Haziq did not

appear to evaluate his earlier choices to engage in the same behaviours in similarly harsh terms and his only comment on the topic was an acknowledgement that he believed casual dating, even without sexual intimacy, was not 'a proper' way to begin a relationship with someone considered to be a potential marriage partner. His viewpoint which positions female chastity as being of particular importance is not an uncommon Muslim perspective transnationally (Buitelaar, 2002; Eşsizoğlu, Yasan, Yildirim, Gurgen, & Ozkan, 2011; Hanassab, 1998; Mir, 2009; Smith-Hefner, 2005), and it informs religious discourse among both Muslim religious leaders and Malay Muslim households within the city-state.

Haziq was also of the opinion that many local traditional Malay customs were un-Islamic and hoped to find a partner who would share his commitment to a lifestyle that modelled his understanding of the lives of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions as closely as possible. In practice, from Haziq's perspective, this would mean eschewing many common Malay practices that are locally considered to be very much Islamic. One such example is the practice of female circumcision, or *sunat perempuan* as it is referred to in Malay. Commonly understood to be obligatory by the locally dominant Shafi'i school of Islamic jurisprudence (Feillard & Marcoes, 1998: 351), female circumcision is widely practiced in Singapore and surrounding Southeast Asia (Clarence-Smith, 2008; Isa, Shuib, & Othman, 1999; Merli, 2008, 2010; Newland, 2006). As it exists in the region, the procedure is usually not very severe and the amount of skin that is removed from a woman's clitoral prepuce is small enough that it is difficult if not impossible to tell whether she has had it performed on her or not upon reaching adulthood (Marranci, 2015: 280). In Singapore, The Islamic religious council of Singapore, which although known in Malay as the *Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura* is usually referred to by a phonetic pronunciation of its acronym 'MUIS', officially endorsed the practice until recently on a Q&A section of their

website[56]. While Haziq was not opposed to courting a woman who had undergone *sunat perempuan*, he was adamant that he would not want it done to any daughters he may have in future. Haziq acknowledged that it was a Shafi'i practice, and so not exclusively Malay, yet he believed that it was practiced among Malays for traditional rather than religious reasons and felt that it was hypocritical for a statutory body such as MUIS to support the practice while also supporting what he perceived to be unacceptable calls by non-Muslim politicians for Malay Muslims to adopt so-called modern values and a vaguely defined 'moderation' in religious practice.

Haziq was highly critical of MUIS, which he made fun of for avoiding certain topics, such as *sunat perempuan*, in public discussion. In his own words, he described MUIS religious leaders as,

> puppets of the government. They belong to the state yet they have no power. Do you know that they [the government] handpick all MUIS leadership? […] Do you know that you have to go through a stupid two-day course in order to get married [under the Muslim Marriages Act] in this country? That is not Islamic. […] Things are better in Malaysia. [I don't agree with everything the Malay Islamic authorities do][57], but at least they try their hardest to keep young people safe [from immorality]. MUIS is more worried about their image than pleasing Allah *subḥānahu wa ta'alā* [God, praised and exalted is He].

Haziq would not be alone in his disappointment with having the local Islamic religious council firmly under state control. In 2003, the president of the Singapore Islamic Scholars and Religious Teachers' Association (*Persatuan Ulama dan Guru-Guru Agama Islam*

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[56] Islamic Religious Authority Singapore (MUIS), 'Frequent Asked Questions: Is circumcision compulsory for Muslimahs?', formerly available at http://www.muis.gov.sg/cms/oomweb/oom_faq.aspx?id=15104. Interestingly, the page appears to have been taken down and no mention of female circumcision currently exists on the website at the time of writing.

[57] Haziq criticized Malaysian Islamic authorities for promoting female circumcision as he was aware of the 2009 fatwa issued by the National Council of Islamic Religious Affairs (JAKIM) that declared female circumcision to be obligatory (wajib) for all Muslim women. For more information on this fatwa, as well as reactions to it, please see (Ainslie, 2015)

Singapura, PERGAS) stated that PERGAS would have to serve the moral interests of Singaporean Muslims because 'MUIS could not do it … MUIS is a statutory board, they must serve the interests of the state. It is our responsibility to serve the interests of the Muslim community' (Kadir, 2007: 150). Indeed, Haziq's opinion of PERGAS together with other non-MUIS affiliated local Islamic groups was much higher even if he had some issues with particular scholars or some aspects of their organisations. Citing the fact that Malay Muslim Singaporeans were known for higher than average rates of crime, drug abuse, divorce and other social issues, Haziq concluded that Singaporean Muslims were in desperate need of a spiritual leadership that MUIS was simply not equipped to provide.

Haziq lived by a number of rules he considered to be 'true' Islamic etiquette, such as not having female friends or offering a handshake to a woman. He claimed to not follow any one particular religious scholar and although he was raised to practice Islam according to the rules of the Shafi'i school of Islamic jurisprudence, he did not believe that his way was the only, or even the most correct, way to be Muslim. However, he did have very clear ideas about what poorly practiced Islam looked like. Given that he distrusted MUIS, he tended to look both across the causeway to Malaysia as well as further afield to international scholars of Islam for inspiration and guidance. Transnationally dominant interpretations of Islam were influential in Haziq's life. He had very strong opinions about certain topics, such as his belief that festivities that marked religious occasions should be respectfully avoided by Muslims and that other holidays, such as Valentine's Day, were unquestionably forbidden to Muslims and worthy of open criticism. As he elaborated,

> Valentine's Day is wrong for two reasons. Firstly, it is Western and it's not even Christian because I don't think Jesus, peace and blessings be upon him, would be pleased with what goes on. It encourages immorality and greed. Sadly, [many local Malay Muslim] girls usually can't see that. They want Swensen's [a Western style halal restaurant in Singapore] for dinner, gifts and flowers. Well, I

guess not all [local Malay Muslim] girls are like that. There are some who would agree with me. But it's different in Malaysia. There are more in Malaysia [who would agree], and it's actually likely that I will end up marrying a Malaysian girl. They are just more spiritual.

While Haziq is correct that many young Malay Muslim women in Singapore would agree with him about Valentine's Day, there are a large number of exceptions with many of my own participants among them.

Haziq made comparisons between Singapore and Malaysia many times during our conversations and he suggested that it was much easier to be a 'true Muslim' in Malaysia than in Singapore for many reasons, such as the fact that the Malaysian National Fatwa Council (*Majlis Fatwa Kebangsaan*) was taken more seriously given that their fatwas carried the weight of law while in Singapore MUIS could be ignored without consequence. For example, Islamic religious opposition to Valentine's Day in Malaysia has been robust and unambiguous with the National Fatwa Council declaring it haram (J. C. H. Lee, 2013: 173), Valentine's Day immorality raids on budget hotels that were code-named 'Ops Valentine', and scripted sermons read out in Selangor State declaring that 257,411 unwanted pregnancies between 2000 and 2008 were the result of elicit Valentine's Day passion (Yeoh, 2014: 155). In Singapore, by contrast, although individual MUIS figures have been known to occasionally warn against the perceived risks of Valentine's Day, the organisation itself does not launch the annual assaults on the holiday that are common in neighbouring Malaysia and Indonesia. It is also clear that many young Malay Muslims openly celebrate the holiday. Indeed, a local entertainment website, DiscoverSG, recently published a list of potential restaurants for Muslims to take their Valentines dates in an article titled, '5 Romantic Halal Restaurants To Dine At This Valentine's Day' (DiscoverSG, 2016). Haziq believed that the difference in both moral and legal authority between the Singaporean and Malaysian Islamic religious councils had a great influence on the level of

observance among Muslims within the two respective countries, which is one aspect that made a Malaysian woman more appealing to him as a potential spouse.

In some aspects of his religious conservatism, Haziq is a rarity among my Singaporean Muslim informants and were it not for the fact that I was an acquaintance of his sister, Yati, who participated in my previous research on Islamic environmentalism during the years I lived in Singapore, it is likely that I would have never had access to interview him at any length or even possibly at all. Yati sat with us while we spoke and although I was aware from other conversations that her views contrasted quite significantly with his in many respects, such as regarding the necessity for separation between the sexes which she attributed to Saudi Arabian influences on Malay Islam, she remained silent while he spoke and never once challenged him in front of me. She would later explain that she had an argument with him once about religious matters as well as her decision to no longer wear a headscarf and had no desire to debate these topics ever again. She also refused to discuss the details of her own love life with him although she was typically very open with her other siblings and parents who were trusting of her and did not share Haziq's opinion about the moral perils of unmarried young men and young women spending time together. Given that she was one year and a half older than Haziq, her parents were actually very much in favour of her dating and finding a potential husband sooner rather than later. As far as sexual relationships were concerned, Yati felt that after the age of 25 there was very much a culture of 'don't ask, don't tell' in both her family and in the families of some of her female friends within her age group. While Yati described her mother putting pressure on her to marry young, there was no such pressure on her brother and he had not been known to have a girlfriend for some years.

The degree of distance that Haziq appeared able to maintain between himself and the potentially eligible women around him, such as among his sister's friends or even among his own colleagues, was a little unusual in the context of Singapore. His Facebook

profile was all-male as was his social circle. When I asked him how he intended on finding

a spouse, he answered that he would soon ask some friends he had in Malaysia to assist

but he was elusive about precisely how and when that search might begin. He had both

friends and family who could help him to find a potential spouse in Singapore, too, but he

was less enthusiastic about that possibility.   This was something that Yati said concerned

their parents, who were worried that he was becoming obsessive about religious rules and

distancing himself from the family because of an increasing sense of self-righteousness

that caused him to be judgmental and intolerant.

It may be tempting to label Haziq as a fundamentalist, but that would be neither fair

nor accurate without first establishing clear criteria of what exactly a 'fundamentalist' is.

Haziq had neither attended a madrasah school nor had he had any formal religious

training. He simply had a love of reading Islamic literature, viewing videos of sermons

online and had devoted much effort over the years to learning and practicing the intricacies

of his religion to the best of his understanding. His distrust of MUIS began with his

realisation of the extent to which it was an arm of the Singaporean state, and given the

government's near-constant insistence on the need for moderation in religious observance

among Singaporean Muslims, this distrust soon turned into outright disgust. Haziq

believed MUIS to be guilty of expending much more effort in pleasing Prime Minister Lee

Hsien Loong than in guiding Singaporean Muslims in religious matters. He also saw them

as endorsing practices that he considered to be un-Islamic Malay tradition such as *sunat*

perempuan as well as being tolerant of other non-Malay traditions, such as Valentine's

Day. Haziq's rejection of MUIS as being a statutory body rather than a legitimate religious

authority and also his hinted preference for marrying a young Malaysian woman suggest a

strong desire to resist the state as well as what he saw as a morally relaxed culture among

Singaporean Malay Muslims. In this sense, he is resisting *both* the state and the local

Malay Muslim community by appealing to the pious ideals of a seemingly puritan yet ill-defined interpretation of Islam which he perceives to be uncontaminated by either.

Resisting stereotypes of the 'Malay community'

As previously mentioned, stereotypes of Malay Muslim Singaporeans often go unchallenged when they are reproduced by the political elite in Singapore. I have observed that they also frequently remain unchallenged when they appear in casual conversation and many research participants appeared to overlook the structural nature of Malay disadvantage and instead agree that there is something inherent in Malay culture that proves maladaptive in present day Singapore. There were various ways in which these stereotypes were resisted, however, even if they were not publicly challenged. Of these tactics of resistance, two main themes emerged: some take ownership of a stereotype and flip the meaning of it to highlight a positive attribute of Malay Muslim culture while contrasting it with a negatively perceived attribute of the Chinese influence on 'Singaporean' culture, while others appear to distance themselves as much as possible from any association with the 'Malay community' and seek to embrace what they understand to be the ideals of Chinese Singaporeans as much as they can. These two tactics of resistance have significant implications for the kind of partner young Malay Muslim Singaporeans desire because they affect the kinds of relationships or families that young people see themselves building in the future and this directly impacts on their potential compatibility with others.

Norlidah, who is a 24-year-old Malay Muslim Singaporean woman, provides an excellent example of how a stereotype may be appropriated and flipped around to claim an identity that is both positive and distinct from the Chinese majority. When I first met Norlidah, she was a student at a local polytechnic university and the girlfriend of a male Malay Muslim friend of mine, Rafi, of the same age. Rafi was at that time a delivery driver

and the pair were saving money to marry and by 2017, the pair had married and were expecting a child. They are both of lower socioeconomic class family backgrounds and the young couple both work very hard towards building a more comfortable life together than that which they were accustomed to while growing up. Our friendship preceded my current research project and while I lived in Singapore, the three of us would spend time together in the company of other friends at local food courts or in each other's homes. After my departure to Australia in 2012, both Rafi and Norlidah supported and participated in my research primarily via Skype and during one of our many conversations, I had asked Norlidah if she believed there were any significant differences, beyond religious considerations, between what Malay Muslim Singaporeans and other Singaporeans look for in romantic partners. Norlidah replied by explaining,

> I think Malays are very family oriented, so you'd [as a Malay] want someone who is very loving and loyal. Most Indians are the same this way. The Chinese are also very loyal and value family, but they love in a different way. They love their wives and kids with gifts, money. They can be very *kiasu* [afraid of missing out] right? Very status hungry. Malays usually aren't so uptight like that. Money is nice but it's not the most important thing. Most Malays are at least a little bit religious and so it's hard to separate that out, but in general I think we just spend more time together. You can't spend time with your loved ones if you are always at work. If you're looking for a husband, you want someone who will be home and even more so if you are a Malay guy looking for a wife. These are the important things in life whether you're religious or not.

Norlidah was not the only one of my research participants who stereotyped Chinese Singaporeans as being highly concerned with status, wealth, and as being pragmatic to the point of becoming emotionally distant from their families. Others had made similar points over the course of my research, and similar stereotypes of Chinese Singaporeans

have been noted in academic literature (Kopnina, 2004; Paul, 2011; Ward & Hewstone, 1985). Norlidah's comment is particularly significant because of the fact that she directly compares the two communities and finds the Malay Muslim community favourable. She felt proud of the fact that, in her opinion, Malay Muslim Singaporeans correctly value interpersonal relationships more than material wealth.

Speaking of religion and its importance to young Malay Muslim singles, Norlidah explained that people and their treatment of one another is all that ultimately matters in the eyes of God. It was a pity, she argued, that a culture of greed often obscured that fact in Singapore despite that all the major Singaporean communities belonged to religions that taught similarly. She mentioned the fact that at Haw Par Villa, a local public attraction, there is a gory recreation of the Ten Courts of Hell where the punishments for greed, fraud and other crimes from traditional Chinese folk religion are illustrated in colourful yet chilling detail. Stating this caused her to reflect for a moment, and she paused

Fig. 14.) Colourful displays at Haw Par Villa illustrating scenes from Chinese traditional religion and mythology

before also citing practices that commonly –but not exclusively-- occur during Ghost Month as evidence of the materialistic nature of Chinese culture in particular. The seventh month of the Chinese lunar calendar, otherwise known as the 'Hungry Ghost Festival' or simply 'Ghost Month', is dedicated to the veneration of the dead through offerings that, among other things, consist of food as well as the burning of joss paper representations of luxury items and money (Comaroff, 2007: 63). In any given Singapore HDB estate, it is not

uncommon to find Chinese families burning such items after nightfall in big steel drums downstairs in the void decks and beside footpaths. In Norlidah's opinion, it was not traditional Chinese folk religion that was materialistic, but rather the culture of the people who practice it that was shaping how it was practiced. 'Do the dead really need the latest iPhone? It's silly, and not even traditional. If the Chinese could become closer to the spirit of their religion, the meaning and not just the rituals, they would be a lot better off …

actually, we all would!', she said.

Norlidah conceded that while she believed Malays were a lot less ambitious because of a difference in cultural values, it would be unfair to say that they did not enjoy money or status. She simply believed that most within the Malay Muslim community prioritised putting effort into human and spiritual connections over exerting oneself for material gain. This was particularly true among women, according to Norlidah, and was the result of a fundamentally different culture existing between Malay Singaporeans and the majority Chinese. As she explained,

> Malay women are different [to Chinese women]. Chinese mothers are very
> strict and can even be really cruel. I remember a [Chinese] friend saying how
> her parents made her take her hamsters to the SPCA [Society for the
> Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, a Singaporean animal welfare organisation] as
> a punishment because she got bad grades. I've never heard of a Malay doing
> that to her kids. That's awful. We want our kids to get good grades too, but we
> don't go over the top if they don't. Malay mothers can be a little soft in some
> ways, and we [Malay women] get criticised for that. They say we don't
> discipline our kids. That's not true, but that's what they say. We just try to show
> children the value of mercy too. It is part of our faith. Even when they're
> teenagers, if they mess up, we usually try hard to forgive. […] You do

sometimes get a few Malays who try to be Chinese and put their kids through all kinds of hell, but it's definitely not normal.   It's like they forget themselves.

Norlidah's comment represents an effort to flip the stereotype of the 'culturally deficient Malay' around and suggest that although Malay Muslims may not excel by the same parameters as the ethnic Chinese majority, this is because Malay Muslims place more emphasis on spiritual qualities such connecting with others as well as being patient and merciful with children. She believes it is impossible to aggressively pursue wealth or educational attainment and devote oneself to family life at the same time. This line of reasoning employs common stereotypes of the Chinese majority of Singaporeans who are portrayed as valuing economic gain above all else. Therefore, the 'cultural deficiency' of

Fig. 15.): Graffiti artwork by one of my neighbour's children at the Ghim Moh HDB block I lived in. Norlidah explained such childlike graffiti as an example of something 'naughty' that a child could do which might meet gentle correction from a Singaporean Malay parent but harsh punishment from a Singaporean Chinese one.

Malay Muslim Singaporeans only exists because Singaporean culture, which is dominated by the majority Chinese, promotes values that are ultimately inferior when one understands a commitment to family (or God) as taking precedence over the accumulation of wealth or status. In this way, Norlidah, along with those who would agree with her, successfully resist stereotypes of Malay Muslims as being under achieving and instead perceives the community as being *differently* achieving.

Norlidah had mentioned in her comments that some Malay Muslims 'try to be Chinese', appear to 'forget themselves' and though this description was meant very clearly in a pejorative sense, not all would agree that shedding practices or customs that are considered traditionally 'Malay' is necessarily a bad thing or something that causes a loss of Malay identity. There is much diversity within the Singaporean Malay Muslim community and Norlidah's opinion, and that of Rafi who mostly agrees with her, merely represents one viewpoint among many within this internally diverse community. The example of Nursyazanna's story may offer a useful counterpoint to illustrate this fact. Nursyazanna is a 23-year-old female Malay Muslim student at National University Singapore, where she studies sociology, and she is the youngest among her parents' four children. Revealing her university major is important in this instance because, firstly, many Singaporeans consider that a sociology degree is unhelpful for job prospects; and secondly, Nursyazanna credits one of her professors, the well known Malaysian sociologist Associate Professor Syed Farid Alatas, with inspiring her to resist Malay Muslim stereotypes through achievement and to challenge traditional Muslim religious conventions. In particular, she remembered hearing Associate Professor Alatas speaking casually amongst a group of Muslim colleagues and playfully questioning beliefs that many Muslims take for granted, such as the necessity after visiting the toilet to perform ritual ablutions, or *wudhu*, prior to the next daily prayer. Although he did not say whether he personally believed such practices were right or wrong, the mere fact that he felt comfortable to challenge them in front of others left a deep impression on her.

After completing her undergraduate studies, Nursyazanna hoped to pursue postgraduate study in Australia and, ideally, eventually migrate. Having come from a lower middle class family background, with parents who both work full time and support her financially, she is free to live at home while pursuing her interests at university. While her family are concerned that she is unwise to prioritise her education over seeking a potential

spouse, they do not interfere beyond encouraging her to consider marriage sooner rather than later.   At the time I spoke to her, her university life was rich and full of extracurricular activities that included volunteer work as well as creative arts. There was very much a disconnect between the future that she was planning for herself and the future that her parents imagined for her, however.

> My family are worried that I'm not planning for marriage yet. They're worried I'll spend too long in education and end up being called '*anak dara tua*' [spinster, or old virgin]. They're even more worried that I won't [be called an old virgin as that implies experience of premarital sex]. They want me to get married while I'm very young because they say my choices are better now, but I find that really gross. When I said I didn't want to get married until I was at least 30, my mother looked at me like I had just insulted her and my father just shook his head. I do like the idea of getting married eventually, but it's just not that important to me right now. I don't currently have a boyfriend, maybe that's why, but to be honest I can think of so many other things I'd rather do right now than get married and have babies. I want to build something for myself. That's really hard when the people around you think your best [asset] is your youth and the fact you can give birth.

For Nursyazanna's family, marriage promised safety and this is something that she understood, even if she did not entirely agree. According to her family's logic, if Nursyazanna marries, she will not only safeguard her reputation, but she will also ensure her financial stability which they expect to be tenuous given that she chose to study a subject that they see as having limited worth in the local job market.

Nursyazanna's wish to postpone marriage until her early thirties did not make sense to her mother in particular, who believes that the earlier a woman marries, the better her marriage prospects are in that she is more likely to attract a wealthier and younger spouse.

This very strategic approach to matrimony made Nursyazanna feel objectified and, I would argue, further inspired her to work hard towards achieving her own independence on her own terms. Nursyazanna believed that the Malay Muslim custom of encouraging young people to marry early was interfering with the wellbeing of the larger community. From her perspective, young people would be far better off focusing on attaining educational and economic success rather than 'getting distracted' by the requirements of married life and the ensuing children which she saw as inevitable. Marrying early, together with Malay families' tendency to have many children, was one factor among many that Nursyazanna believed was holding young Malay Muslims back relative to their fellow Singaporeans of Chinese or even Indian descent.

> I think it's [the encouragement to marry young] because of religion, really. We're not supposed to be having sex, right? Not many people can hang on [chastely], so it's better to get married than sin. Also if you don't marry, people will talk. That's great, but it doesn't help us [as a community]. But if the reasons aren't right, people can't cope and you get divorce. When so many break the rules anyway, what's the point? It's all a show. Why not just accept that people sometimes have fun with each other and let go of these really old fashioned expectations?

Where many (perhaps even most) other Malay Muslims might see a religious safeguard, Nursyazanna saw a quaint yet outdated custom that is perhaps often more linked to tradition and a fear of what others might think than piety. She saw the high rate of failure among Muslim marriages as evidence of the fact people, of all ages, were marrying to save face more than out of a deep desire to commit. The success of Muslim marriages when compared with civil marriages is frequently discussed in Singaporean news media (Goy, 2015; Channel News Asia 2016). Statistics, such as the fact that in 2015 4.2% of Muslim brides and 1.5% of Muslim grooms were under the age of 21 compared to 1.1% of

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brides and 0.2% of grooms who married in civil ceremonies (Department of Statistics, 2015), provide talking points that often lead to discussion of the 'problem' of early marriage as being a particularly Malay Muslim issue and one that disproportionately affects families of lower socioeconomic class (Rahman, 2009). Nursyazanna showed an awareness of this class aspect when she said, 'When you look at who's having babies and getting married at 16, it's never the rich kids, is it? I think they [wealthy Malay Muslim families] manage to pull themselves out because they drop this kind of thinking and these traditions. Look at how much others [communities] have changed! Why should the Malays be the only ones stuck in the past?'

Early marriage was not the only aspect of local Malay Muslim culture that Nursyazanna took issue with. She saw what she described as 'victim behaviour' as being commonplace among Malay Muslims. She accepted that Singaporean society was indeed shaped primarily by the Chinese majority, yet she believed that fact in itself conferred no tangible disadvantage to her or other non-Chinese other than the preference of some local employers to hire only Singaporeans who were bilingual in Mandarin. She believed in Singaporean meritocracy, that individuals of any ethnic group were the masters of their own fate and there was no situation that could not be improved through hard work, and she held the experience of her own family up as an illustration of this. Her mother and father were both from lower socioeconomic status families and yet, with the assistance of her mother's parents with whom they all lived for many years before Nursyazanna's birth and up until she was a very small child, they had managed to build a modest yet comfortable home and achieve financial security. While she acknowledged that some may have to work harder than others to achieve such stability, as well as the fact that her own family may not be as well off were her grandparents not able to help, she conceptualised most hurdles to economic or educational success in terms of social class and downplayed the impact of discrimination on the basis of race or religion. Through her prioritising

academic and economic success over family and community expectations, Nursyazanna sought to resist stereotypes of the Malay Muslim community as being tied down by traditions that are maladaptive to Singaporean society. In order to resist those stereotypes, however, she believed she had to resist the traditions that gave rise to them.

These stories are framed in terms of resistance because each choice made by the research participants above is tied up with a particular image or stereotype that they would like to reject. Although not universal, this tendency to firmly align oneself with one category in order to strongly reject another is something I have observed many times both among research participants in Sydney and Singapore. The Singaporean government's habit of rigidly categorising people according to their 'race' and then reproducing (and thus lending credibility to) stereotypes about these groups in the popular press only facilitates this kind of dichotomous thinking. In other words, people strengthen their definition of who they are through strong assertions of who they are not, and partner choice, the decision to seek a partner or not, as well as the decision to marry or not are all very important aspects of this self-definition.

Chapter Seven

Mixed messages: romance and dating in Sydney

Despite having a history in Australia that stretches from the era of colonial invasion (M. L. Jones, 1993; Rajkowski, 1987; Stevens, 1989), and includes significant numbers of Turkish and Lebanese Muslims arriving in the 1960s (Wafia & Kristy, 1996: 23), Muslim Australians are still widely thought of as being recent migrants (K. Dunn, Atie, & Mapedzahama, 2016: 284).   Recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics suggests that 40 per cent of the overall Muslim population are Australian-born and of these 81.8 per cent are under 25 years old (ABS, 2013). Muslims who are born in Australia, or other Western contexts, to migrant parents are often described as being 'second generation' migrants who may be 'caught between two cultures' in that they grow up with elements of both their migrant family's culture as well as Anglo-Australian culture (Noble & Tabar, 2002: 131). Although scholarly interest in second generation Muslim migrants to Western countries is not new (Anwar, 1976, 1984; Krieger-Krynicki, 1988; Modood, 1990; Nielsen, 1987), it has increased greatly in response to acts of terrorism committed by Muslims, such as 9/11 in the United States (Skrbis, Baldassar, & Poynting, 2007: 265) or 7/7 in the United Kingdom (Abbas, 2007), as well as various challenges to multiculturalism in Western European countries (J. R. Bowen, 2010). Popular interest in Muslim communities, with particular attention paid to the younger so-called second generations, has also increased and this can be easily observed in the vast volume of news media dedicated to the topic (Brasted, 2001; Dreher, 2003; Grewal, 2007; N. Kabir, 2006; N. A. Kabir, 2008; Manning, 2003; Poynting, Noble, Tabar, & Collins, 2004). The negative representations of Muslims in much of this media has lead to a discourse of 'Othering', by

which Australian Muslims are portrayed as being culturally inferior outsiders (K. Dunn, 2004: 334).

Representation produces meaning and this interacts with power, shapes identities, regulates behaviour and informs the way in which a subject is approached, thought about or studied (Hall, 1997: 6). This chapter will examine the varied ways in which my research participants pursue and understand romantic relationships against a backdrop of stereotypes that characterise them as belonging to a repressive religion that overwhelms personal will and determines their social relationships and life choices (Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005: 5; Saniotis, 2004: 51). The pressures that negative representations of Muslims place on young Australian Muslims can impact upon self-perceptions, piety (or the public performance thereof) as well as concepts of intimacy, all of which in turn influence the romantic relationships they pursue. Similar to many other so-called second generation migrants, my research participants often blended a range of cultural beliefs and practices into what may be described as hybrid identities (Bhabha, 1994), yet they also told stories of temporarily adopting specific, situational identities that depended upon their perceived need to emphasise certain aspects of their identity in particular contexts, which Noble, Poynting and Tabar (1999) have referred to as the performance of 'strategic hybridities'. Much has been written about the engagement of Muslim minority communities with mainstream Anglo-Western norms and the resulting emergence of hybridised practices (Aitchison, Hopkins, & Kwan, 2007; Basit, 2017; Dwyer, 2000; Hopkins, 2011; Mir, 2007; Mishra, 2010; Noble et al., 1999; Noble & Tabar, 2002; Werbner, 2004). Starting with a brief examination of some concepts of intimacy and the expectations that participants in this study have of intimate relationships, this chapter will then discuss examples that illustrate the various ways in which some young heterosexual Sydney Muslims tactically engage with or resist Islamic, ethnically specific, or mainstream Anglo-Australian practices of intimacy.

Complexities of romantic love and intimacy

Concepts of romantic intimacy may sometimes be conflated with romantic 'love' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1992), with the definition of either term being highly subjective and ambiguous at best. Some scholars have sought unified definitions of love (Oord, 2010: 29), while others have identified and separated out various stages of romantic love and illustrated how they have varied throughout history (Armstrong, 2003). Romantic love as it is commonly understood today in the West is a relatively modern phenomenon and is characterised by a desire for fusion or '*some* kind of unity or shared identity with the beloved' (White, 2001: 58, original emphasis). Loving in this way, as White suggests, not only involves 'desiring the beloved's happiness and well-being but also desiring that it should be oneself, and not another lover, who actually brings this about. And this desire is in opposition to the selflessness that romantic lovers usually proclaim' (2001: 59). Yet, 'intimacy' and 'love' are not interchangeable for all and not everyone loves in the same way. Love is, in other words, not a 'singularity' (Rebhun, 1999: 59). There are many exceptions to the expectation for exclusivity in romantic relationships although they are not all viewed equally. To illustrate, while practices such as polygyny are frequently discussed alongside concerns about the integration of Muslims who engage in it (Charsley & Liversage, 2013; Husain & O'Brien, 2000; Joppke, 2009; Norris & Inglehart, 2012), plural marriage is by no means alien to the West. Bigamy laws may forbid it in the United States, yet polygyny is every bit as Western as the Mormon fundamentalist groups who currently practice it (Duncan, 2008). Furthermore, the practice of polyamory, or consensual non-monogamy, enjoys growing visibility and acceptance as being one of many romantic possibilities in contemporary Western culture (Haritaworn, Lin, & Klesse, 2006).

The experience of romantic love is, like most descriptions of human emotion, strongly shaped by culture (Doherty, Hatfield, Thompson, & Choo, 1994; Jankowiak, 1995; Jankowiak & Fischer, 1992), and it would be a mistake to presume that intimate relationships that are based on romantic love and mutual satisfaction are specific to Western cultures (De Munck, 1996; Lindholm, 1998), or unique to secular modernity (Martin, 2005).   Love reflects power structures as well as the cultural norms of specific communities and intimacy, as a concept, may be easier to pin down and describe despite it being shaped by those same factors. Intimacy may be defined as a 'means of expression and affective fulfilment' (Chambers, 2013: 163), or as Jamieson writes, 'a very specific sort of knowing, loving and "being close to" another person' (Jamieson, 1998: 1). The increased individualism that followed late modernity has brought about ever-expanding possibilities for 'being close' that have not previously been viable options for some people. Writing about Western countries, scholars such as Bauman (2000) Beck (1992), and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) have suggested that societies have become more individualised. While an increasing focus on individualism and the right to self-determination promotes freedom of choice for individuals, Beck's relative optimism about the increasing liberty of people contrasts with Bauman's worry that the resultant weakening of community norms will ultimately create a state of anomie.

Beck has defined modernisation as being characterised by 'change in societal characteristics and normal biographies, changes in lifestyle and forms of love, change in the structures of power and influence, in the forms of political repression and participation, in views of reality and in the norms of knowledge' (1992: 50), and argued that this process creates insecurities and risk as well as freedoms. These profound changes have brought about a process of increasing individualisation, which has facilitated the democratisation of intimacy and the existence of non-normative and casual intimacies (Berlant & Warner, 1998; Reay, 2012). Within this context, intimacies have emerged that approach Giddens'

description of 'pure relationships' (Giddens, 1992: 62), which are based on a mutual exchange of pleasure instead of on obligation and can be terminated at the will of either partner should the relationship no longer satisfy. Such democratisation of intimacy is by no means accessible, or even desirable, to all who consider themselves 'Western', however. The ways of theorising and categorising romantic relationships have often privileged a focus on the types of unions and/or encounters the Anglo-Western, male, middle-class, heterosexual modern subject might engage in (Attwood, Hakim, & Winch, 2017: 249). Intimate relationships between people may be shaped by a vast range of diverse factors such as social class, sex, sexuality, gender identity, religion, and ethnicity among others (Jamieson, 1998; Roseneil, 2013; Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004; Weeks, 2007).

It is common for literature that discusses romantic love or intimacy to make gendered comparisons between the sexes, such as in their respective sex drives (Baumeister, Catanese, & Vohs, 2001) or approaches to love (Sprecher & Toro-Morn, 2002). Numerous studies suggest that young men and women experience intimacy differently (Allen, 2003; Hillier, Harrison, & Warr, 1998; Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1998; Tolman, 2012; Tolman, Striepe, & Harmon, 2003). Many of these studies feature similar suggestions that, in relationships, young women want to experience the emotional pleasure of love while young men desire the physical pleasure of sex. Such claims do not go undisputed, as Byron (2017) has observed with the examples of authors such as Allen (2003) and Tolman et al. (2004), who challenge such gender stereotypes in their work. However, studies that question such familiar binaries often do so while presenting 'binary distinctions between female/male practices, alongside distinctions between sex/love and pleasure/intimacy' (Byron, 2017: 335). The difference between sex and love, pleasure and intimacy, or even maleness and femaleness is constructed and negotiated within the cultural context in which such distinction is being made. Judith Butler has defined gender as being 'the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts

within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (Butler, 1990a: 45). As a result when gender norms are tightly policed so that most people tend to broadly conform to them, they can be mistaken for naturally occurring patterns of behaviour. Yet, for Butler, gender is only 'real to the extent that it is performed' (Butler, 1990b: 278). The bodily stylisation and performance of gender, in other words, is shaped by a culturally defined regulatory frame which becomes understood as representing naturally occurring differences between people.

The regulatory frame of culture expands beyond expectations of how maleness and femaleness are *correctly* embodied to also govern perceptions of what constitutes 'proper' intimacy, love, sex and pleasure. Berlant (1998), for example, believes that intimacy is inseparable from public life and hegemonic discourse. Intimate lives, for Berlant, 'absorb and repel the rhetorics, laws, ethics, and ideologies of the hegemonic public sphere, but also personalise the effects of the public sphere and reproduce a fantasy that private life is the real in contrast to collective life: the surreal, the elsewhere, the fallen, the irrelevant' (1998: 282-283). Giddens acknowledges the influence of social structures in his idea of the pure relationship, which is by definition an intimacy tailored to the most private needs of partners, yet he also suggests that the existence and form of such relationships in turn shape the wider social order (Giddens, 1992: 195). The democratisation of personal relationships, for Giddens, can only occur in an environment where the public domain is likewise democratised and not only on a political level (*ibid.*). Berlant and Giddens both acknowledge an active engagement with the public sphere at play in people's intimate lives and this, as we will explore in the pages that follow, shapes the many narratives and experiences of my research participants[58].

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[58] With the exception of some professional figures, such as social workers or religious scholars, all of my research participants have been between the ages of 18-30. A majority of participants were female and aged between 23 and 30 at the time I was conducting research and this will have had a significant impact on the experiences and concerns I recorded in my field notes.

Romantic expectations and realities

Much has been written about courtship among young people in Muslim communities in the West and elsewhere. Oftentimes, research emphasises aspects such as gendered double-standards, chastity norms and the risks that unmarried Muslims can face if they are caught in transgression of them (Bennett, 2005; Buitelaar, 2002; Chakraborty, 2009, 2010; Hanassab, 1998; Hendrickx, Lodewijckx, Van Royen, & Denekens, 2002; Skandrani, Baubet, Taïeb, Rezzoug, & Moro, 2010). Research also often privileges the role of religion in the sexual or romantic lives of unmarried Muslims and this has brought some, such as the anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod (1997), to question discourses that presume the existence of 'Muslim sexuality' or attempts to compare the practices of the 'sex positive' West with those of seemingly restrictive others. While community religious norms are certainly important factors for many when deciding how, when or with whom to engage in romantic partnerships, they vary in their significance for individuals at specific points in their lives and they are by no means a central consideration for all Muslims at all times. Despite this reality, religion is frequently seen as playing a much more influential role in the lives of Muslims in Western contexts than in those of their non-Muslim neighbours. Woodlock has suggested that 'Muslims are seen as possessing a qualitatively different – almost consuming – type of religiosity from non-Muslims, but this fails to recognise that the very same forces of modernity and postmodernity that have challenged the place and role of religion in the lives of those living in the Western world have been hard at work amongst Muslims as well' (2011: 398). When scholars, such as Giddens (1992), write about modern Western intimacies, the democratisation of emotions or changing relationship expectations, there has not been much space given to acknowledge the variation that exists among religious and ethnic minority populations as they engage with these trends

and influence them regardless of the fact that individuals within these communities may be entirely *of* the West and not simply *in* the West (Roald, 2001).

Questions about gender roles and the search for a romantic partner provoked lively conversations among my Sydney research participants. The following three sections will explore experiences and stories that I collected during a combination of small focus groups and in-depth interviews that took place at various local cafes, public parks and less structured conversations at social gatherings. I have arranged my findings around themes in order to present material from as wide an array of participants as possible as well as to hopefully help make sense of the diverse viewpoints I encountered.

Mixing and matching and meeting: Muslim reflections on finding a partner in Sydney

> My mother's family is from Bandung, Indonesia. My grandmother didn't wear hijab but my mother does. I grew up here and I didn't wear it until I started thinking about marriage, which was only last year. I thought it would show that I'm mature, spiritual and give me some better choices [of prospective partners]. I want people to know that I'm a decent girl and I also want them to know that I'm proud to be Muslim […] I felt amazing when I put it on. The praise I got was out of this world. I posted a photo of myself covered [in a headscarf] on Facebook and it got so much love. It was amazing. […] But, I still haven't found anyone. (Rima)

Rima is a 21-year-old Australian Muslim woman of Indonesian-Arab descent who describes herself as religious and actively seeking an Australian Muslim male partner with the intention of marriage. Although she is not entirely closed to the idea of marrying someone from overseas, she is reluctant to because she has heard many stories about so-called 'visa hunters', men who marry Australian women in order to establish legal residency. University students who are in Australia on temporary study-related visas often

arouse suspicious that their intentions are less than genuine and that they may start divorce proceedings as soon as they achieve the right to remain in Australia indefinitely. For this reason and others, such as an expectation that an Australian-born partner would be generally more compatible, Rima together with a majority of my female research participants[59] in Sydney intend to exclusively seek partners who are already living in Australia legally.

The demand for partners who are both legally resident in Australia and ready to consider marriage seriously, according to Rima, is high among young, religious women. This demand creates a competitive atmosphere among women due to a common perception that desirable male candidates are few and/or difficult to meet. The perception of scarcity can inspire some, like Rima, to begin adopting certain signifiers, such as a headscarf, to communicate religiosity or readiness for marriage and consequently be perceived as a more attractive potential partner. Few of my research participants, either male or female, expected their future marriages to be arranged. The term 'arranged marriage' has many meanings among Sydney Muslims. Some among my research participants understand it to mean a situation where one's parents find a potential spouse, seek the couple's consent to marry and then proceed with all the necessary arrangements with the actual spouses-to-be spending little if any time together prior to the point at which they are recognised as husband and wife. This was often described to me in terms of historical practice that was appropriate in a specific cultural context or time period, but is no longer suitable for most young Muslims in Sydney. An exception to this was a belief voiced by four of my female Arab Australian participants that older generations of South Asian Muslims, who were perceived to encourage this practice more frequently than Muslims of other ethnic backgrounds, purposely held tightly to their traditions of arranging

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[59] I also spoke to Muslim men who were wary of the idea of marrying a spouse from overseas for similar reasons yet it appeared not to be as much of a central concern as it was for the Muslim women I discussed the topic with.

the marriages of their children to avoid them marrying non-South Asians. More commonly, however, 'arranged marriage' was understood among research participants to mean the introduction of a local eligible man and woman by relatives or close friends, who then leave the couple to gauge each other's compatibility in their own time yet within some clearly defined and widely agreed upon limits, such as not spending time alone together or engaging in affectionate physical contact. This kind of arrangement was viewed much more favourably among my research participants of both sexes, yet most still expressed a preference for meeting a potential spouse on their own as this avoided a great deal of awkwardness and allowed the potential couple privacy to explore their compatibility without interference or pressure from others.

The perception of scarcity for some religious Muslim women, like Rima, is driven by two main factors: a belief that non-Muslim men, and so the majority of the population, are off-limits; and the fact that opportunities to meet suitable Muslim men are limited for Muslim women who believe casual unsupervised socialising between men and women is problematic and best avoided. Although none of my male or female research participants were familiar with specific passages within either the Qur'an or other religious texts that explicitly prohibited Muslim women from courting or marrying non-Muslim men, all were sharply aware of the forbidden nature of such relationships and the fact that the prohibition originated in the Qur'an.

Religious interpretation is not the only factor that deters young women from forming romantic relationships with non-Muslim men. Fulfilling family expectations as well as a concern for maintaining one's reputation, and by extension that of one's family, are factors that young Muslim women take into consideration when making such choices.   Fajr, a 19-year-old Kuwaiti-Australian Muslim woman, answered my question about the consequences of marrying a non-Muslim man by explaining how the potential costs of such decision would be too high to offset any conceivable benefits.

If you ended up marrying a non-Muslim, your family would think you'd given up on Islam and others would too. You wouldn't ever get to be a real family together because you would never be part of his family and he would never be part of yours, and that would be just too painful and I don't believe that love conquers all. I think it's manageable if you don't have support, but it's doomed if everyone around you is totally against your relationship […] Dating would be even worse because that makes you seem trashy, which is totally unfair because Arab boys chase white girls all the time and as long as they marry a Muslim, it's all good. Even if they didn't, they could still make things work somehow.

Fajr here refers to a double standard that is more forgiving towards men's romantic transgressions than women's and which is not unique to Sydney Muslim communities by any means (Bennett, 2005; Buitelaar, 2002; Chakraborty, 2009, 2010; Hanassab, 1998; Hendrickx, Lodewijckx, Van Royen, & Denekens, 2002; Skandrani, Baubet, Taïeb, Rezzoug, & Moro, 2010). Fajr explained that premarital chastity is widely considered particularly difficult for young Arab Muslim men, and so intimate relationships with non-Muslim women are often ignored as long as they are conducted discreetly and the man eventually marries a Muslim. The perceived opposition between mainstream Anglo Australian communities and Muslim communities influences attitudes toward such unions as well, with Anglo Australian non-Muslim women not being considered worthy of the same level of respect that a Muslim woman would be by some.

Stereotypes loom large in some Sydney Muslims' perceptions of compatibility with both non-Muslims as well as with other Muslims from various communities. To illustrate, Babak, a 22-year-old Australian male Muslim student of Iranian heritage, feared being stereotyped by non-Muslim Anglo-Australians as well as by other Muslims yet at the same time viewed both through the lens of his own stereotypes. Coming from a Shi'a family,

Babak felt somewhat of an outsider while growing up in a predominately Sunni area of Punchbowl, in Western Sydney. He was from a middle class family and this only further emphasised his difference from his peers at the public high school he attended, whom he described as being mostly of working-class Arab Sunni Muslim backgrounds, and he struggled to fit in with his classmates as a result. His experience of marginalisation made him more likely to reach out to non-Muslims for friendship and as he got older for romantic relationships too. He explained that his family was open minded and he expected that as long as he brought home a loving, loyal woman who was respectful and did not object to their traditions or religion, they would more than likely accept his choice of partner. However, while his circle of friends included many non-Muslims, Babak voiced concerns about dating a non-Muslim woman.

> [Being Muslim], I hate how people think that detail alone tells them anything about me. When you get the normal [mainstream] male stereotypes and mix them with Islam, you get a picture of this awful person. […] I've had [non-Muslim] girlfriends who, when we fought, would roll their eyes and dismiss me as a hothead because I'm Muslim. I was constantly worried about how I might come across like that and it was annoying. It's really quite off putting actually because it's always in the back of my mind [with a non-Muslim woman].

Babak had concerns about dating Muslim women as well. He believed he would not be compatible with a Sunni Muslim woman because he felt Sunni families would never accept a Shi'a son-in-law, a reason that partially echoes Fajr's concerns about religious difference and family acceptance. He was also worried that a Muslim woman, regardless of ethnicity or religious denomination, may wish to get married quickly, expect him to become more religious after marriage and then feel disappointed when he neglected some aspects of Islamic practice such as regular prayers. Babak freely admitted that his concerns were shaped by stereotypes, yet he also explained that while he was aware that stereotypes

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were an exaggeration of reality, his own observations and experiences reinforced many of them in his mind.

For some women, such as Rima, who observe religious restrictions surrounding interaction with unrelated men, opportunities to meet suitable Muslim men are limited. Gender segregation in Muslim communities and in Islamic jurisprudence has a long and complex history (Ahmed 1992). The form that 'Islamic' gender segregation takes in any given place or time period depends upon the cultural and political context in which it is practiced. Rules determining the limits of propriety between men and women may be interpreted and imposed by the state, as they are in countries such as Saudi Arabia (Meijer 2010), or they may be decided upon and negotiated among individuals who enjoy the freedom to decide according to their own beliefs and/or follow the advice of religious scholars of their choice. In contexts where Muslims are not subject to gender segregation laws, ideas of what may be considered appropriate conduct with the opposite sex may widely vary among Muslims living in the same locality. For example, Predelli's (2004) study of Muslim migrant women in Oslo, Norway, demonstrated how Islamic values were used to explain a wide range of views towards gender relations and how practice did not always match discourse. Likewise in Sydney as well as in Singapore, where a young Muslim's only consideration may be the expectations of family and community as well as his or her own conscience, the lines of propriety in interacting with the opposite sex are fluid for some, rigid for others, but at least somewhat flexible for most.

Rima studied speech pathology at a local university in Sydney. She lived with her parents and kept close relationships with the friends she made while attending a public high school in one of Sydney's western suburbs. Not long after beginning her first year at university, Rima discovered the Muslim students' association (MSA) and attended some of their events and volunteered to help organise some of their activities. She was keen to meet new people, make new friends and hopefully find a partner eventually. Rima told me

that MSAs had a reputation for being a good place to meet potential partners and even were sometimes referred to playfully as a 'matrimonial services association'. She did not approve of the use of the term 'dating' because she believed it implied a casualness and a closeness that was un-Islamic. Instead, Rima preferred to speak of 'spending time with' or 'getting to know' someone with the clear objective of eventual marriage in mind. There were various permissible, or halal, ways to spend time with a potential partner, as Rima explained:

> I think chatting online is ok. Some people think you should have no contact at all [with unrelated men], but that's not all that realistic. The phone would be ok too, but it's awkward and that makes it hard and texting feels a bit weird. It's a lot easier to chat online. It's less personal [than texting on the phone]. You can even just share articles. It's also the most relaxed way to figure out if you might work as a couple or not. […] Going out together is also ok if it's with friends and you've got something to do, so you're not alone. MSAs are good for that. Everyone's got their own ideas though.

Rima believed her parents trusted her to maintain proper conduct with the opposite sex, which she defined as consisting of being friendly without flirtation, never being alone together and avoiding all physical contact. She acknowledged that there were many Muslims locally who frown on mixed-gender socialising of any kind, but she felt such a point of view was unnecessarily restrictive and impractical and she was also embarrassed about the impression such avoidances might make on non-Muslims.

The danger of falling into any kind of sexual immorality, for Rima, began with 'flirting' which she, as well as some other Muslim men and women I spoke to, defined as interactions that include sexual innuendos and sexually suggestive behaviour as well as finding excuses to touch the person being flirted with. Rima would not consider signalling interest in a potential partner by subtle means, such as demonstrating aligned interests or

compatibility over social media, to be flirtatious for example. However, she considered social media potentially problematic because it allowed some to share emotional intimacies with people who may be undeserving or romantically uninterested, which would be less likely to happen in person between a Muslim man and woman because of the necessary presence of others. Another issue that troubled Rima was the reluctance of some young Muslim men to commit to a relationship and instead engage in sometimes very intense and romantically charged relationships with female friends online who would be expected to perform emotional labour for them at a distance. Rima was not alone among my research participants in observing this and some, as will be illustrated later in this chapter, have experienced having such intimate correspondence-based relationships themselves. For this reason Rima encouraged making intentions clear to potential partners, taking the relationship offline and making it known to friends and family as early as possible to avoid disappointment or possible heartbreak.

Performative piety and the costs of nonconformity

> If you stand out too much or you disagree too loudly with the superstars, you risk being called a liberal Muslim, which pretty much means you've been whitewashed. If you have a boyfriend or you take off your hijab, it's the same. It's more political than religious. […] You have people like Morsi stirring the shit all the time and that makes it worse too. He gets people all fired up. It [public nonconformity] isn't worth all the headaches and arguments. (Mariya)

Mariya, a 24-year-old Australian Muslim woman of Lebanese heritage, was referring in the above quote to a monthly educational seminar series held in Sydney by Dr Yassir Morsi and Ms Hanan Dover called 'Islamicate' that discussed topics such as power, globalisation, racism and whiteness among others. Dr Morsi, an academic and occasional contributor to the Guardian newspaper, gained a reputation among some Sydney Muslims

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as being aggressively argumentative on the social media platform Facebook. This aspect of his reputation made him well known among my research participants yet it contrasts sharply with his published work, such as his recent book *Radical skin, moderate masks: de-radicalising the Muslim and racism in post-racial societies* (2017), which consists of a scholarly and nuanced discussion of Islamophobia, privilege and discrimination. He and Ms Dover were both among small group of people who Mariya referred to as community 'superstars', or those who had influence, media presence and were considered 'community representatives' by both Muslims and non-Muslims. These figures, she argued, had both positive and negative influences on the lives of local Sydney Muslims. On the one hand, Mariya felt that their visibility and their outspokenness inspired confidence among local Muslims who frequently suffer various forms of discrimination and that they were able to represent Muslim interests in mainstream media. On the other hand, however, Mariya believed that they also frequently reinforced stereotypes of Sydney Muslims as speaking with one voice or being uniform in their interpretation of Islam, intolerant towards those who are critical of them, and resistant to integration. Despite not being trained Islamic scholars, such 'superstars' were very much a source of strategic Islam.

Such stereotypes affect non-Muslims and Muslims by convincing both that a singular 'Muslim community' exists and that 'real Muslims' share a series of beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. Mariya and others, such as Ozlem who features later in this chapter, told of having experiences where non-Muslim friends and acquaintances did not understand that small acts of non-conformity, such as not wearing a hijab or drinking alcohol, was not equivalent to a lack of faith and expected Muslims, and Muslim women in particular, to be religiously observant in ways that did not appear to apply to their Christian friends. In this context of abundant stereotypes, a Muslim's disagreement or divergence can be perceived as a kind of disassociation from the Muslim community, or even a

renunciation of their Muslim identity, by both Muslims and non-Muslims in Sydney. Mariya's usage of the term 'whitewashed' above further reflects this oppositional understanding of divergence from the perspective of other Muslims. Muslim men and women do of course deviate from community expectations without renouncing their religious identity; however, to avoid the consequences that could follow being labelled as 'liberal' or 'whitewashed' they often do it privately.

The stereotypes attached to Muslim communities in Singapore and Australia are often very different, yet one that the two countries have in common is a perception that Muslim communities are somehow distinct and separate from the rest of the nation. Moreover, Muslims in both countries can hold similar stereotypes about 'the Muslim community' that non-Muslims do. In Sydney, many of my Muslim research participants who believed 'the Muslim community' to be overly oppressive, for example, had suffered in some way at the hands of Muslim family or friends that impacted upon their autonomy as adults or older adolescents, such as feeling forced to end a romantic relationship or prevented from commencing one. One illustration of this involves Toufiqa, a 24-year-old Australian Muslim woman of Indonesian heritage, who reported that she had to be careful to maintain her reputation according to the standards of others as a good daughter and a good Muslim for the benefit of her family. She spoke of meeting a young Nigerian Muslim man while studying at university and how their friendship had the potential to develop into a romance. Although Toufiqa had some previous experience with romantic relationships, this particular relationship would have been different because she felt she would be forced to keep it a secret should it progress and that there was no viable future for the pair that did not entail upsetting her parents. As she explained,

> My parents would want me to be happy, but happiness is complicated and they
> would be worried about how it would look and how people would treat us. There
> is a lot of racism in the Muslim community and an Asian girl with a Black guy

raises eyebrows even if you're not doing anything wrong. It's really sad, but we were just be more noticeable as a couple and people would ask rude questions that they probably wouldn't otherwise bother with, questions that I wouldn't get asked if someone saw me with another Asian boy. It became too much, so I ended it before it got too serious and hurt either him or my parents.

Toufiqa expected that her family would have concerns about the young man's racial, cultural and socioeconomic background due primarily to the influence of the opinions of mostly other Indonesian-Australian Muslims, though she noted that racial and class-based prejudice are widespread among Sydney Muslims of other ethnic backgrounds as well. According to Toufiqa, too many Asian and Arab Muslims were insular, reluctant to marry Muslims of African heritage (or even outside of their own ethnic groups) and overly concerned with socioeconomic status. She resented this stereotype and would have been happy to break it yet she feared that doing so may reflect badly on her parents and she did not feel ready at that point to take any position that might cause them hurt or embarrassment. As a result of this, she conformed not to the wishes of her parents but rather to a combination of what she imagined the expectations of the Muslim community around her would be and what her parents' reactions to those imagined expectations would be. In doing so, she did not at any point allow her parents the opportunity to express their opinion about her Nigerian friend and their compatibility and instead assumed their response.

Discussions of the importance of compatibility between partners considering marriage feature in various schools of thought in traditional Islamic jurisprudence (Siddiqui, 1996; Ziadeh, 1957; Zomeno, 1997), and research participants who made references to the importance of marrying someone from a suitable socioeconomic class, level of education or cultural background often did so in Islamic terms, noting for example a religious responsibility to honour the wishes of parents.   Similarly, I've observed many

religious research participants of both sexes to speak about the necessity of starting and continuing a romantic relationship in 'the right way' in religious terms, with both men and women using their interpretations of Islamic prohibitions against premarital sex and physical intimacy as a kind of test of how religious and/or worthy of respect their potential partners are. However, when I asked some of my research participants what they believed would be the negative consequences of not following Muslim community protocol for interactions with the opposite sex, major concerns included repercussions linked to shame, disappointing relatives, or running the risk of damaging their reputation and in turn their existing social networks. With some exceptions, very few primarily focused upon the risk of damaging their relationship with God. As I would discover, however, this did not necessarily indicate a lack of religiosity on the part of those who were more concerned with consequences in this world rather than the next.

In an interesting parallel to prevalent media stereotypes that position Muslims as being more observantly religious than other groups, some of my research participants felt compelled to perform religiosity in particular ways to identify themselves as Muslim in various contexts in front of both other Muslims and non-Muslims. Examples have already been mentioned in Chapter 3 of this phenomenon among participants who recalled feeling that they had to represent Islam positively to their peers in high school, explaining the Islamic logic behind practices such as polygyny and pre-marital chastity even if they themselves were not entirely supportive of it. Other illustrations of this among participants in Sydney include a perceived need to keep friendships with non-Muslims away from Muslim friends and family as well as a refusal to challenge Muslim community norms in front of non-Muslims. For example, Ozlem, a 21-year-old Australian Muslim woman of Turkish heritage, explained that friendships with non-Muslims were often looked down upon among some Muslims in Sydney because,

> There is an idea that we're [Muslim and non-Muslim Australians] just different
> and if you spend too much time with them [non-Muslims] or get too close, you'll
> end up committing *istihlal* even if you don't really want to. My family are easy
> but a lot of my [Muslim] friends are a bit paranoid about this.

Ozlem understood the Arabic term *istihlal* to mean excusing actions as religiously permissible without the support of proper Islamic legal reasoning or evidence, and offered young Muslims' dating habits as an example. She claimed that some of her more religiously conservative friends interpreted the normalisation of casual interactions with the opposite sex, such as meeting alone in a cafe or going out in public together, as a result of the influence of non-Muslims despite the fact that such casual socialising is not an uncommon occurrence among Muslims in Sydney or even in most Muslim majority countries. Sceptical of the supposed bad influence of having non-Muslim friends, Ozlem was careful to keep a growing number of friendships she formed with non-Muslims, such as from among colleagues at her workplace or classmates at university, to herself and not include them in her multi-ethnic Muslim social circle and vice versa.

Ozlem described herself as spiritual, but not religiously observant. At the time I met her, she was studying at a local university and hoped to build a career working with disadvantaged families in Sydney's western suburbs, an aspiration which she felt reflected her spirituality. Her immediate family, which consisted of her divorced single mother and older brother, were similarly inclined towards religion and believed, according to Ozlem, that a person's spirituality could not be measured in the number of prayers they offered each day or in how they dressed. As such, Ozlem never chose to wear a headscarf although she did report feeling a degree of peer pressure to do so from friends who did wear one. Peer pressure of various kinds was a great source of resentment for Ozlem. Although she valued her spirituality and was proud of her Muslim identity she did not appreciate being pressured into conforming to the religiosity of others. Moreover, she did

not understand the level of moral policing she observed among her female Muslim friends, which in her opinion became particularly harsh when it involved outward matters relating to modesty or interactions with the opposite sex. As Ozlem explained,

> You're always being measured as a Muslim woman. I really hate gossip, so I end up living a kind of double life which isn't fun, but I feel I have to because these are people I grew up with and their families are like my family. […] We had a good [Muslim] friend who fell in love with a Hindu doctor she was working with and eventually moved in with him. I think they eventually married, but almost nobody sees her anymore. She has different friends now and pretty much a different life too. I couldn't do anything like that.

Ozlem mentioned feeling measured *as a Muslim* by non-Muslims as well. She claimed that some of her choices, such as not eating pork or not sunbathing in swimwear publicly, were often interpreted by non-Muslim friends as religious observances when, to Ozlem, they were simple personal preferences. It also annoyed Ozlem that she was sometimes praised for not wearing hijab, and that on the rare occasions when she drank alcohol and engaged in other acts that her non-Muslim friends understood as indicating a lack of religiosity, this was perceived positively, while by comparison the level of religious observance of her Christian friends went largely without comment. As she explained,

> I've got White Christian friends who believe [in God], but nobody makes a big deal out of it. They have relationships, move in together and nobody really cares. I know not all Christians are like that, but a lot are. As a Muslim, though, you are rarely seen as just you. I never talk about this to [non-Muslim] friends because they wouldn't understand. I have to be careful what I say because sometimes I'm the only Muslim they know and I want to make a good impression [of Islam].

Ozlem was saddened by the fact that her spirituality as a Muslim was scrutinised in unique ways that she felt did not apply to Christians. She believed that her Christian friends in Sydney had options to connect with their spirituality in private, unquestioned ways that were not available to her as a Muslim. This left Ozlem feeling as if she must always represent Islam in front of both Muslims and non-Muslims in a way that her Christian friends did not represent Christianity.

The examples shared throughout this chapter show that there is a great diversity in not only how Muslims interact romantically, but also in how they experience their own spirituality. A focussed examination of the dating habits of Muslims *as Muslims* in the face of such diversity would reinforce othering discourses that position Muslims as being products of their religion. Hence, the aim of presenting a diverse collection of illustrations of how participants in this study experience and embody their religion is to move the discussion about sexuality and love among Muslims away from what Maxime Rodinson has called theologocentrism, which is the suggestion that among Muslims 'almost all observable phenomena can be explained by reference to Islam' (2006: 104). Even when Muslims purposefully align their choices and beliefs with what they perceive to be religious requirements, they are still engaging in acts of interpretation whether it be of religious tradition or stereotypes.

Age, gender and the 'marriage market'

Among both men and women there appeared to be various common age-specific and gendered concerns related to courtship and marriage. An example of this can be seen in the accounts I collected concerning self-perceptions of 'readiness' for marriage and dating as well as beliefs about what makes a man or woman prepared for marriage in a more general sense. I encountered widespread gender stereotypes that crossed ethnic boundaries as well as age and sex. A majority of both male and female participants

believed to varying degrees that men generally matured at a slower pace than women and were ready for marriage at a later age. This delayed maturity was often said to be the result of the 'nature of the sexes' as well as perceived Islamic obligations for a married man to be both the financial support of the family as well as a source of spiritual authority.

The strongest beliefs in a fundamental and unbridgeable divide between men and women were often presented in religious terms as representing a natural order that is set in place by God but which is often challenged by mainstream Anglo Australian discourse and practice. I observed a tendency among participants to make reference to these perceived differences when describing their expectations of romantic relationships with the opposite sex, particularly in regard to what respective roles they expected to have, regardless of their own self-described level of religiosity. For example, Aaqil, who is a 28-year-old Muslim man of Lebanese and Iraqi heritage, described what he perceived to be the importance of complimentary gender roles and the troubles that may arise if they are not clearly defined. In conversation one evening at a mutual friend's house, I spoke to Aaqil about a lecture I was soon to give to second-year anthropology students about gender and sexuality. He asked what I was planning to teach and I showed him some slides that I had prepared and saved on my iPad that covered the basics of gender and sexual diversity, discussed gender as being a social construct and presented some examples of the great variety that exists in gender identities and sexual orientations across cultures.

Aaqil claimed that non-heteronormative gender identities that reject binary distinctions between males and females such as 'non binary', 'gender queer', and 'gender fluid' were merely a passing fad that was symptomatic of a breakdown in traditional family structure in mainstream Anglo Australian society. To him, non-heteronormative gender identities did not exist among first generation Arab Australians and younger second generation Arab Australians, regardless of whether they were Christian or Muslim, would

only claim them if they had 'forgotten their values'. While he did not suggest I was wrong for educating my students about what those identities meant for the people who live them, Aaqil felt I was wrong to teach that gender identities were social constructs separable from sex. He explained,

> It's become very popular to talk about equality [between the sexes] as if it means absolute equality, but I can't take that seriously. The difference between men and women is so obvious you can even see it among animals. So how can [gender] be constructed? People can be taught to ignore their fitrah [nature], but that's unnatural and against what is intended for us [by God]. Men and women shouldn't look or act like each other. It causes problems.

By the time this conversation took place, Aaqil and I had engaged in many previous similar exchanges and we had many mutual friends and acquaintances between us who were well used to our often-challenging discussions. This familiarity allowed for difficult topics to be approached with relative ease even though Aaqil and I were both very much aware of our differences in opinion. Despite the temptation to engage in debate for the pleasure of it, I focused as much as I was able on probing Aaqil's beliefs through precise questions and this soon led to an exploration of Aaqil's perspectives on traditional gender roles in a more general sense.

On this particular evening, I asked Aaqil to tell me more about the problems he felt transgressing traditional gender norms might bring about and to whom. To the nodding approval of some friends listening in, he insisted that I already knew deep inside what was 'right' and that his telling me was redundant, but I gently pressed him for an answer by explaining that it was important for me to accurately represent his viewpoint on this topic in my research. After a brief pause in which to collect his thoughts, he proceeded to explain,

> People who just pretend men and women are identical will suffer. If we pretend men and women are the same and interchangeable, and society is ok with that,

you get confusion and that ends up hurting everyone in the long term, but especially women and children in my opinion. This is a big problem in Australia. Married women with children who keep a career going end up working unreasonably hard because men just aren't suited to doing a lot of the domestic stuff so it ends up being unfair. Women have more patience than men, I think. […] There are always exceptions, but that doesn't change what's normal. People joke about it because they know it's true, but if you dare say anything you get called sexist and backward.

Although Aaqil did not consider himself to be very religious, he did support what he described as traditional Islamic values as he believed they provided a solid foundation for harmonious family life. Despite his lack of religious practice, he was proud of his Muslim identity. For Aaqil, 'being religious' meant observing the ritual elements of Islam, such as prayers and fasting, on a regular basis as well as maintaining premarital chastity and he separated this from his appreciation of Islamic values and his spirituality. Aaqil understood social norms that position men as earners and women as nurturers to be Islamic and also to serve as a protection for the family unit. However, he was also sympathetic towards married women who were forced to step out of traditional feminine roles because of economic hardship, which he saw as a problem affecting Anglo-Western countries in particular and which he linked to changes in the economy brought about by the normalisation of women's participation in the workforce. It was, as he put it, 'a problem that Western women brought upon themselves that is now affecting everyone'.

Sara, a 26-year-old Australian Muslim woman of mixed Syrian-Lebanese heritage, held similar views yet she voiced concerns that Aaqil had not mentioned. Sara was enrolled in a postgraduate course at the University of Sydney and had aspirations to start her own business. Unlike Aaqil, she described religion as being very important to her and she believed marriage would help her improve her level of religious practice. She had

recently ended a relationship, which she had made known to her family but was not yet an engagement, after she discovered her partner was engaging in what she considered to be inappropriate conversations with another woman online. Sara's former partner was a year younger than her, yet she now expressed a desire to pursue older men in future. When I asked her to explain what she found particularly attractive about older partners, she said,

> I want someone with a bit of life experience and who is ready to settle down. Also someone older will be more likely to be in a position to financially support a family, and that's important. It's a man's Islamic responsibility to guide and provide for his family, but in order for him to realistically fulfil that he needs to be old enough! A woman can work, but the responsibility for getting the bills paid is his. Here [in Australia] though, it can be really hard to live on one salary. I want to work mostly from home, but I still want to work. It's important because you never know what might happen with your relationship or with his job.

Sara left her previous relationship feeling disillusioned and pessimistic about the possibility of forming romantic partnerships with men of her own age that she might meet spontaneously at community events or through her religiously conservative group of friends. She insisted upon considering only Muslim men as partners and she felt that this limited her options not only because she would have a smaller pool of potential men to choose from but also because she believed that she would be evaluated based on her age, ethnicity, perceived religiosity, occupation and beauty before any potential partner had the chance to know her as a person beyond these factors.

> The truth is I'm not really in all that much of a hurry to get married and do the whole mommy thing. I feel I don't have much of a choice. Or actually, I have a choice. I can do it now or I can wait until I'm older and finished with my degree, but the chances of me finding someone drop. After a certain point, it gets really

hard. I want to have a husband and children, but I think if I don't make that

happen now, it won't happen at all.

Age was a particularly concerning factor for Sara. At 26, she worried that her time to find a

potential spouse was running out and it was necessary to exclusively pursue men who

were 5-10 years older than her in order to make marriage a more likely outcome.

Sara also explained that she was not the only person she knew of to engage in a

relationship with a man who was simultaneously courting someone else and claimed that,

It's something that I think younger men tend to do. Because we never hold

each other or kiss, they can pretend they haven't done anything wrong. [My

former partner said] the deep discussions and talk about the future were really

just about getting to know each other, and that it wasn't a real relationship, so

he had been perfectly Islamic about everything and I was wrong to become

attached. […] He either didn't realise or didn't want to acknowledge that you

can break someone's heart without even once holding their hand. He just

wanted to play the field pure and simple to get an idea of who he liked best.

Sara had invested emotionally in her former relationship and to have her ex-partner deny

that they had even had a 'relationship' hurt her deeply. The explanation that a relationship

is not of a romantic nature unless it becomes a formal engagement to marry did not

impress Sara and she viewed it as an excuse to engage in 'Western' behaviour of 'playing

the field' while concealed by a thin veneer of Islamic propriety. She concluded that she

was less likely to have a similar experience with someone older and believed that her

educational accomplishments and ambitions to start a business may also be viewed more

positively by an older partner.

Some young women I spoke to who had specific career aspirations or planned to

engage in postgraduate study felt that they must begin the search for a spouse in earnest

before they make significant achievements professionally or they risked 'pricing

themselves out' of the 'marriage market'. The use of economic terms such as 'market', 'value', 'resources', and 'assets' was widespread among young middle-class Australian Muslim women of South Asian or Arab heritage who either had career and/or educational ambitions or had already achieved them. Concerns among South Asian and Arab Muslim women over the age of 25 that professional success or educational attainments might scare off potential male partners were commonplace. At the same time women who expressed these concerns explicitly sought highly educated and/or career-minded partners. Referencing common beliefs that it is a man's responsibility to financially provide for his wife and children, many feared that if their achievements or wealth approached or surpassed that of a potential spouse, it may be seen as emasculating and make them appear less attractive. Belief in the fragile nature of male self-worth was particularly widespread among Arab Australian Muslim female participants. Arab Australian Muslim men, on the other hand, did not agree. Of the five I interviewed about this precise topic, most claimed that they would not mind having a spouse who out-earned them or surpassed their level of education. However, when I asked what they were looking for in a potential spouse, all replied with descriptions of personality traits such as kindness, religiosity or humour and did not emphasise education or profession to the extent that my female participants did.

Muslim romantic lives: love, marriage and community expectations

Muslim romantic lives around the world, both before and after marriage, have attracted much scholarly attention in recent years. The rights and position of Muslim women in heterosexual marriages have received particular attention from studies of Islamic family law from the Middle East and North Africa (Al-Azri, 2010; El Alami, 1991; Mir-Hosseini, 2001; Shaham, 1999; Tizro, 2011; Welchman, 2011; M. A. Z. Yamani, 2008), and South Asia (Carroll, 1982; Serajuddin, 2010; Subramanian, 2008). Other research on women's

rights in marriage relationships examines controversial aspects of the canonical sources of Islam, the Qur'an and hadith literature, such as Marin (2003), Dunn (2010) and Ali's (2006) exploration of the Qur'anic verse 4:34, which suggests a Muslim husband has a right to physically discipline his wife in specific circumstances. Kecia Ali has also written about the history of marriage in classical Islamic jurisprudence (Ali, 2008), and made an interesting comparison of marriage to slavery, arguing that both involved the sexual ownership of women by the men (Ali, 2010). Islamic discussions of guardianship and the right of husbands to discipline wives have shaped studies in domestic violence among Muslims, some of which probe religiously-informed patriarchal ideologies among communities (Haj-Yahia, 1998; Haj-Yahia & Uysal, 2011; Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001) as well as the extent to which male and female attitudes towards such violence can be exceptionally similar (Tizro, 2011).

In addition to research concerning the ins and outs of marriage from an Islamic legal perspective, there is a lot of literature on Muslim marriages as they are lived around the world[60]. Across geographical regions and communities, researchers have documented strong double standards not only in how young Muslims are expected to approach romantic partnerships but also in how able they are perceived to be in adhering to community religious norms governing sexual behaviour and interactions with the opposite sex. Muslim religious scholarship has often described women as being the weaker sex and particularly in need of regulation to protect them from potential corruption and to safeguard their honour (Smith, 1979). Islamophobic pressures from outside Muslim communities, as well as Islamist voices from within, have increasingly identified women as the representatives of Muslim communities, according to miriam cooke[61] (2008). In

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[60] For some examples from the Middle East and Africa please see (Erdeich, 2006; Henquinet, 2007; Hoodfar, 1997; Sonneveld, 2012); from South and Southeast Asia (Huda, 2006; G. Jones, 1994; Waleed, 2009) and from Europe and America see (Fournier, 2010; Walbridge, 1996; Yilmaz, 2004).

[61] miriam cooke prefers her name to be spelled without capitalisation. She also writes 'muslimwoman' without a capital letter.

response to this dynamic, cooke developed the neologism muslimwoman to draw 'attention to the emergence of a new singular religious and gendered identification that overlays national, ethnic, cultural, historical, and even philosophical diversity' (2008: 91). Cooke further explains,

> Whereas before it was men who represented the umma, today the muslimwoman stands in for it. The religious and gendered exemplar confirms and highlights the morality of a god-fearing patriarchy where men protect and women are protected. In such a moral economy, women define the border between pure and polluted. The logic of the argument is that women are the potential outside whom insiders must keep pure or purify in order to save the purity of the inside. To uphold this moral regime, insiders must cooperate in maintaining and monitoring the muslimwoman's appearance and behavior.
>
> (2008: 92)

This policing, cooke argues, takes the form of religious prohibitions, which are intended in theory to apply to both sexes, being applied far more rigidly on women than on men. Dating, or even merely interacting with the opposite sex without a clear and sanctioned purpose, carries a lot more risk for women than it usually does for men, as my own research as well as studies from several different countries have confirmed (Bennet, 2005; Buitelaar, 2002; Chakraborty, 2009; Hanassab, 1998; Hendrickx, Lodewijckx, Van Royen, & Denekens, 2002; Mir, 2009; Skandrani, Baubet, Taïeb, Rezzoug, & Moro, 2010). Family honour and reputation, for example, rests on the well-behaved shoulders of young women (Bennett, 2005: 103; Chakraborty, 2009: 426), and this can be jeopardised in some communities by simply being seen in conversation with a man (Mir, 2007: 87). This disciplinary culture of surveillance and enforced purity can have drastically differing effects. As Khoei, Whelan and Cohen (2008) observed among Iranian Muslim women living in Australia, oppressive discourses of sexual modesty can lead some to suppress their own

sexuality before marriage to the extent that they struggle with sexual intimacy once they find a spouse. Others, by contrast, as both Chakraborty (2009, 2010) and Bennett (2005a, 2005b, 2007) have discussed at length, simply perform piety in public and become remarkably adept at keeping their private intimacies discreet. As Bennett (2005: 64) observed in her study of single Muslim women in Mataram, young women can even challenge gender norms through such intimacies, which serve as an unobserved yet legitimate form of female resistance that demonstrates the failure of local patriarchal norms to control them.

There are other similarities between gendered expectations of behaviour observed in this study and other research as well. For example, young men in many Muslim communities are not subjected to the same degree of regulation or encouraged to conceal and/or repress their own sexualities to the same extent that women are. In a study of second-generation Moroccan migrants in Belgium, Hendrickx and colleagues noted that young men were aware that Islam theoretically prohibited premarital sex for both sexes, yet very few felt that this prohibition applied to them in practice for a number of reasons, such as a belief that male sexual passion is irresistible and they must prove their manhood through sexual contact (Hendrickx et al., 2002: 91). That this is the opinion of young men who enjoy privileges from such stereotype is perhaps not surprising; however, they are not alone in their views. Muslim families and communities around the world have demonstrated a belief in a fundamental and unambiguous difference between male and female sexualities, with the former characterised as harder to control to the extent that young men are not fully culpable for their sexual transgressions (Chakraborty, 2010: 15; Hanassab, 1998: 70; Khoei, Whelan, & Cohen, 2008: 242). Women, by contrast, are widely thought to take pleasure in upholding community norms of sexual propriety. As Shakira Hussain and Alia Imtoual explain of Muslim minority communities in Western contexts,

Cultural discourses surrounding virginity and female celibacy frequently conflate the virtue of refusing sexual encounters outside of marriage with happiness and satisfaction at 'choosing the right path'. However, these discourses negate or downplay women's sexual desires and result in women often feeling trapped into having to perform the 'myth of the happy celibate'. To disrupt this myth is to unleash the potentially destructive power of female sexuality, while to openly challenge it is to risk being positioned as a 'slut' (2009: 25).

For some, the only way out of this dilemma is to distance oneself from other Muslims whose judgement may be harsh, as Ozlem described of her friend who moved in with her Hindu partner and then limited contact with the friends she grew up with.

To borrow cooke's term in the context of this study, a good muslimwoman does not experience lust or sexual frustration because the knowledge that her chastity and suppression of sexual desire will be rewarded by God is a source of immense joy and satisfaction. In Sydney, a Muslim woman's complaints of sexual frustration or even an eagerness to get married are sometimes understood by family and friends as evidence of a lack of patience, which in turn may be interpreted as a lack of faith. If a Muslim woman is known to engage in pre-marital sexual relationships, or in relationships with non-Muslim men, her actions may be widely seen as indicative of an absence of faith.   In the often tense context of Sydney, where there is much fear of women becoming 'polluted' by permissive mainstream discourses that normalise pre-marital sex, a woman who challenges the myth of the happy celibate risks more than being positioned as a 'slut', or a bad Muslim, she risks being positioned as an outsider, or a non-Muslim.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion: the silent farts of everyday resistance and diversity in everyday Islam

Anthropologist James Scott's book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990: v)*,* opens with an Ethiopian proverb that reads, 'When the grand lord passes the wise peasant bows deeply and silently farts'. As Scott's work demonstrates, open defiance is rare because it is risky (Scott, 1985, 1990). Oppressors often respond to would-be challengers with ferocity in order to maintain authority and the status quo, making resistance only safe when quiet (Wade, 1997), sometimes even as quiet as a silent fart.

The diversity of Muslim beliefs and practices explored within this thesis all represent various forms of such resistance. Diversity itself can only exist because of resistance. Making the decision to choose one path over another requires resisting the path that one is currently on, or that others are taking. However, making such a choice is risk laden and may come with negative consequences from structures of power that designate certain paths, choices or behaviours as appropriate to the exclusion of others. For many of the young Muslim participants in this study, choosing a path that is too distant from Muslim community norms could have dire repercussions not only for themselves but also for their families and perhaps even their communities as well. Conversely, choosing a path that is too distant from the mainstream context in which they live could also adversely impact upon them. The strategies of control, after all, come from multiple and varied sources in the lives of research participants. In order to mitigate risk, their resistances were often very silent, unorganised and carefully calculated.

Having the benefit of two vibrantly multicultural field sites to draw data from has privileged this research with a unique perspective on the ways in which state politics and strategies can impact upon the not only the tactical Islam of individuals, but also the

strategic Islam of Muslim leaders and Islamic institutions. In the case of tactical Islam in Singapore, for example, we can see how knowing that the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore was a statutory-board of the Singaporean state caused Haziq to search outside Singapore not only for religious guidance but also for a potential spouse. In order to resist what he saw as its corrupted interpretation of Islam, Haziq preferred to follow Islamic advice from overseas scholars that strongly prohibited activities that local Singaporean Islamic scholars were less preoccupied with, such as the social mingling of men and women. In Australia, a mix of political culture and popular discourse that positions Muslims as incompatible with, and in opposition to, non-Muslim Australian communities likewise impacts upon tactical Islam.   Fears of appearing 'white-washed', for example, kept Mariya from disagreeing publicly with well known figures in the Sydney Muslim community and also caused her to police her own behaviour. In order to not threaten her perceived loyalty to her community, she kept any problems she had with local Muslim community norms or discourse to herself. Beliefs about the incompatibility of so-called 'Islamic values' with 'Australian values' were reported as being so pervasive among both Muslim and non-Muslim Australians, that many participants in this study felt pressured to choose between the two, or at least give the appearance of having chosen and behave accordingly.

State politics and context impacted upon strategic Islam in interesting ways as well. In Singapore, Anthropologist Nur Amali Ibrahim observed that Muslims reproduced homophobic evangelical Christian discourses in order to perform 'good citizenship' and attempt to overcome their underprivileged and distrusted minority status (2016: 981). This study confirms his findings and demonstrates a similar dynamic occurring in the example of local Singaporean Islamic scholar Noor Deros's 'Wear White' protest against Pink Dot. In his protest, he not only publicly broke with a Malay tradition of not being overly preoccupied with homosexuality (Ibrahim, 2016: 972), but he also encouraged the

participation of a well-known Chinese Christian pastor in his protest. Woodhead (2016: 16) defined strategic religion as 'that which gives space and place to the powerful'. Being a statutory board of the Singaporean state makes the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore a source of both state strategy and strategic Islam simultaneously. Noor Deros is likewise, albeit unwittingly, a source of the same. Despite his position as part of an underprivileged minority, the support he gained through his Wear White protest in defence of 'family values' earned him both power and respect from Muslims and non-Muslims, which was further solidified by his ability to recruit a Chinese Christian pastor to his cause. Strategic Islam, then, does not always emerge from Islamic sources. Similarly in Australia, strategic Islam emerges from varied sources. Due to the oppositional political discourse existing between Muslim and non-Muslim Australians, sources of strategic Islam, such as the 'community superstars' Mariya spoke of, tend to warn Muslims of contamination by Western 'Australian values' and draw strength from supporters who feel marginalised and seek belonging. Discourses of strategic Islam in Sydney that espouse separations between 'liberal Muslims' from 'real Muslims', or 'house Muslims' from 'real Muslims' draw power from the experiences of discrimination that are common among Sydney Muslims and tap into transnational Islamic discussions of religious authority and what is authentic Islam. Adopting an approach that is sensitive to non-Muslim influences on Muslim religious ethics, as this thesis does, yields a more holistic perspective of everyday lived experiences of Islam.

The examples of resistance discussed in this thesis are numerous, varied and not often intended to effect change or visibly subvert social norms. Anthropologist Linda Rae Bennett has engaged with research critical of anthropologists' perceived 'romanticisation of resistance' (2005b: 63), citing among others the claim that feminist anthropologists use the concept of resistance too liberally in their eagerness to uncover 'indirect or unconscious resistance' (Lewin 1998:164 as cited in Bennett, 2005b: 63). Bennett

responds by aligning herself with Lock and Kaufert (1998), who are cited as arguing that 'the notion of explicit intention to resist is not always applicable to women's lives because female resistance rarely takes place in the form of public demands for reform or a visible rejection of the hegemonic discourse' (2005b: 64). Although this observation concerns women, the principle behind it applies to any group who face risk as a consequence of resistance. Precisely in order to mitigate risk, many participants in this study diverged from local Muslim community normative beliefs or practices in silent, carefully calculated ways.

Some participants defied local Muslim community norms as a result of their own reinterpretations of Islam. For example, several participants in this study found comfort in focusing on divine mercy and as a result viewed sins that cause no apparent harm, such as consensual premarital sex or same-sex intimacy between adults, as minor. Shafinaz, for example, defies the label of 'irreligious' even though she defined herself as a 'lazy Muslim' and openly resisted local Muslim community norms. Despite consuming alcohol and finding no issue with premarital sex, Shafinaz specified that she would never dare challenge what she saw as the teachings of Islam or try to downplay her own moral shortcomings beyond humbly acknowledging that she was trusting in the mercy and forgiveness of God. In Azizah's case, on the other hand, we can see how a person might resist certain aspects of Islamic orthodoxy while also upholding other aspects of it. Azizah believed that Islam was a source of protection from the risks of premarital genital-penetrative sex, particularly pregnancy. However, she simultaneously resisted local Muslim community norms that would prohibit her from other forms of sexual contact. This calculated resistance allowed Azizah to maintain sexual boundaries that allowed her to enjoy sexual pleasure, reap the benefits of maintaining her good reputation and also feel personal satisfaction in the knowledge that she was preserving her virginity for a future spouse, which she saw as Islamically important.

A key aim of this thesis is to further add to existing theoretical literature on everyday Islam in order to help move scholarship on Muslims away from a theologocentric viewpoint that presumes, as Maxime Rodinson has observed, that 'almost all observable phenomena [among Muslims] can be explained by reference to Islam' (2006: 104). Although anthropologists cannot often be accused of reducing Muslims to their religion by virtue of the very nature of our discipline, this thesis seeks to stand out among existing anthropological studies of Muslim communities by providing an atypically large range of diverse Muslim beliefs and practices from two very different field sites.   For this reason, this research is also inclusive of a wide range of participants with varied ethnicities, sexual orientations and gender identities. For example, this thesis illustrated examples of the various ways in which some young Muslims, of varying sexualities and gender identities, strategically engaged with or resisted Islamic, ethnically specific, or mainstream Singaporean or Anglo-Australian practices of intimacy.

Showcasing diversity in this way highlights both commonalities and differences as well as unsettling stereotypes and commonsense presumptions that might be made about certain groups of Muslims. For example, during the course of my research I have met with non-Muslim members of various LGBTQ organisations in both Singapore and Sydney who presumed that gay and lesbian Muslims would identify as 'progressive' or 'liberal' as a result of their sexual orientations and feel keen to join local queer communities. My research shows the various reasons for which this is not necessarily the case in either Singapore or Sydney.   Assumptions, often based on commonsense understandings about the 'teachings of Islam' (Halstead, 1997; McInerney, Davidson and Suliman, 2000; Orgocka, 2004; Sanjakdar, 2004, 2009a, 2009b), are also sometimes made about Muslims' attitudes towards sexuality and the sex-education needs of Muslim students. Through an exploration of the experiences of participants in their study, a more nuanced picture emerges.

Although appeals to the 'teachings of Islam' are sometimes made by both Muslims and non-Muslims, no single authority speaks for Islam. Participants in this study all engage in interpretation and make decisions regarding the shape that Islamic beliefs and practices will take, even if that decision is to follow someone else in theirs. The uncertainty that results from Islam having no central religious authority opens up possibilities for negotiating new ways of being Muslim. For participants in this study, however, the strategies of local orthodoxy are never far away and tactics for resisting them are context-dependent. There are many ways in which research participants engage with discourses of what sexual choices are open to a 'good Muslim' and they accept, negotiate or resist those choices on a situational basis that is influenced by a range of factors such as the authority structures, political and legal systems, dominant orthodoxies, and cultural norms unique to the context in which they live. While some, such as Shafinaz, are privileged to be secure enough to resist some Muslim community norms fairly openly, a majority of others in this research, whether protecting their own reputation, family reputation or even their own safety, found that the only safe resistance was quiet resistance — even as quiet as a silent fart.

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Appendix I: Research participants by chapter (all categories are self-reported)

Name	Zikra	Jihan	Razak	Raihana	Azhari	Juhairi
Gender	Female	Male	Male	Female	Male	Male
Age	26	24	19	18	20	20
Ethnicity/heritage	Australian-Lebanese	Lebanese-Australian	Malay	Malay	Malay	Malay
Occupation	Retail	Security	Student	Student	IT	Retail
Sexual orientation	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual
Location	Sydney	Sydney	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore
Chapter	1	1	2	2	2	2
Name	Shafinaz	Nurul	Ismah	Azizah	Dani	Murtaza
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male
Age	24	23	21	21	22	22
Ethnicity/heritage	Malay	Malay	Malay	Malay	Lebanese-Australian	Egyptian-Pakistani-Australian
Occupation	Retail	Clerical	Student	Student	Student	IT
Sexual orientation	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual
Location	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore	Sydney	Sydney
Chapter	2	2	2	2	3	3
Name	Naida	Jamel	Mahmood	Mariam	Ali	Aisyah
Gender	Female	Male	Male	Female	Male	Female
Age	20	28	28	24	26	22
Ethnicity/heritage	Palestinian-Lebanese	Lebanese-Tunisian	Bengali-Australian	Malay-Australian	Lebanese-Australian	Lebanese-Australian
Occupation	Student	Retail	Finance	Retail	Hospitality	Student
Sexual orientation	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual
Location	Sydney	Sydney	Sydney	Sydney	Sydney	Sydney
Chapter	3	3	3	3	3	3
Name	Maha	Salma	Yasmin	Lila	Aydin	Mona
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Queer - femme	Male	Female
Age	19	20	23	25	23	20
Ethnicity/heritage	Iraqi-Australian	Jordanian-Australian	Egyptian	Lebanese-Australian	Turkish-Australian	Lebanese-Australian
Occupation	Student	Hospitality	Retail	Clerical	Hospitality	Student
Sexual orientation	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Heterosexual
Location	Sydney	Sydney	Sydney	Sydney	Sydney	Sydney
Chapter	3	3	3	3	3	3
Name	Mehreen	Hazrizal	Nizam	Alfie	Amran	Asmida
Gender	Female	Male	Male	Male	Male	Female
Age	28	23	19	22	22	21
Ethnicity/heritage	Pakistani	Malay	Malay	Malay	Malay	Malay
Occupation	Education	Retail	Student	Trades and services	Hospitality	Retail
Sexual orientation	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual	Homosexual	Homosexual	Homosexual
Location	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore
Chapter	4	4	4	4	4	4

Name	Hisham	Kat	Kartini	Anwar	Ashraf	Hana
Gender	Male	Female	Queer	Male	Male	Female
Age	24	20	22	27	25	early 20s
Ethnicity/heritage	Malay	Malay	Malay	Malay	Malay	Malaysian
Occupation	Student	Clerical	Clerical	Hospitality	Clerical	Retail
Sexual orientation	Homosexual	Homosexual	Homosexual	Homosexual	Homosexual	Homosexual
Location	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore	Sydney
Chapter	4	4	4	4	4	5

Name	Adnan	Osman	Abdul	Mehmet Ali	Salih	Kamal
Gender	Queer	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male
Age	early 20s	Redacted for privacy	29	25	27	20
Ethnicity/heritage	Jordanian-Australian	Redacted for privacy	Lebanese-Australian	Australian-Turkish	Turkish-Australian	Turkish-Australian
Occupation	Student	Psychologist	IT-Graphic design	Hospitality	Clerical	Unemployed
Sexual orientation	Homosexual	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Homosexual	Homosexual	Homosexual
Location	Sydney	Sydney	Sydney	Sydney	Sydney	Sydney
Chapter	5	5	5	5	5	5

Name	Kimi	Haziq	Yati	Norlidah	Rafi	Nursyazanna
Gender	Female	Male	Female	Female	Male	Female
Age	20	26	28	24	24	23
Ethnicity/heritage	Persian-Australian	Malay	Malay	Malay	Malay	Malay
Occupation	Hospitality	IT	Clerical	Hospitality	Trades and services	Student
Sexual orientation	Homosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual
Location	Sydney	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore
Chapter	5	6	6	6	6	6

Name	Rima	Fajr	Babak	Mariya	Toufiqa	Ozlem
Gender	Female	Female	Male	Female	Female	Female
Age	21	19	22	24	24	21
Ethnicity/heritage	Indonesian-Arab-Australian	Kuwaiti-Australian	Iranian-Australian	Lebanese-Australian	Indonesian-Australian	Turkish-Australian
Occupation	Student	Student	Hospitality	Retail	Healthcare	Retail
Sexual orientation	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual
Location	Sydney	Sydney	Sydney	Sydney	Sydney	Sydney
Chapter	7	7	7	7	7	7

Name	Aaqil	Sara				
Age	28	26				
Ethnicity/heritage	Lebanese-Iraqi-Australian	Syrian-Lebanese-Australian				
Occupation	Business	Student				
Sexual orientation	Heterosexual	Heterosexual				
Location	Sydney	Sydney				
Chapter	7	7				

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

SIOBHAN IRVING <lisa.irving@students.mq.edu.au>

Approved- Ethics application- Wynn (Ref No: 5201300128)

Ethics Secretariat <ethics.secretariat@mq.edu.au>   Thu, Apr 11, 2013 at 9:26 AM
To: Dr Lisa Wynn <lisa.wynn@mq.edu.au>
Cc: Ms Siobhan Siobhan Irving <lisa.irving@students.mq.edu.au>

Dear Dr Wynn

Re: "A comparative study of unmarried Muslims' sexuality and reproductive health in Singapore and Australia" (Ethics Ref: 5201300128)

Thank you for your recent correspondence. Your response has addressed the issues raised by the Human Research Ethics Committee and you may now commence your research.

This research meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). The National Statement is available at the following web site:

http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/e72.pdf.

The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

Dr Lisa Wynn
Ms Siobhan Siobhan Irving

NB. STUDENTS: IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO KEEP A COPY OF THIS APPROVAL EMAIL TO SUBMIT WITH YOUR THESIS.

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1.   The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).

2.   Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision of annual reports.

Progress Report 1 Due: 11 April 2014
Progress Report 2 Due: 11 April 2015
Progress Report 3 Due: 11 April 2016
Progress Report 4 Due: 11 April 2017
Final Report Due: 11 April 2018

NB. If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to submit a Final Report for the project.

Progress reports and Final Reports are available at the following website:

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/forms

3.   If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are

continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).

4.   All amendments to the project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee before implementation. Please complete and submit a Request for Amendment Form available at the following website:

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/ human_research_ethics/forms

5.   Please notify the Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project.

6.   At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University. This information is available at the following websites:

http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/ human_research_ethics/policy

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project it is your responsibility to provide the Macquarie University's Research Grants Management Assistant with a copy of this email as soon as possible. Internal and External funding agencies will not be informed that you have final approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Management Assistant has received a copy of this email.

Please retain a copy of this email as this is your official notification of final ethics approval.

Yours sincerely
Dr Karolyn White
Director of Research Ethics
Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee