Hyper-Affiliation to the Religious Ingroup among British Pakistani Muslim gay men

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This article examines how British Muslim gay men may safeguard membership in the religious group, which can be threatened as a result of self-identifying as gay. Twenty British Pakistani Muslim gay men were interviewed. Data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis through the heuristic lens of Identity Process Theory. The following themes are discussed: (1) "Gay identity casting doubt upon one's Muslim-ness"; (2) "Ramadan: A symbolic opportunity to be a 'true Muslim'"; (3) "Accepting 'Muslim views' and religious authenticity." Data suggest that threatened Muslim identity can lead to hyper-affiliation to the religious ingroup, which is achieved through a multitude of sub-strategies.

religion; gay; identity; Islam; hyper-affiliation

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In the Western world, immense strides have been made in reducing stigma around homosexuality (Anderson, 2009). Yet, even in Western societies, non-heterosexual individuals of religious faith can continue to face psychological challenges, as a result of their sexuality being labelled "atypical" by others in their religious group (Yip, 2012). Many gay men of Muslim faith experience identity conflict, since both religion and sexuality are often viewed as important components of the self, and some gay Muslim men report a fear that other Muslims do not perceive Islam to be compatible with homosexuality (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010). Although gay Muslims may themselves append stigma to homosexuality, their sexual orientation may become difficult to deny in the long-run, particularly in a Western context like Britain (Jaspal, 2012b). Conversely, given that Islam constitutes a meaning system and a "core" identity for many Muslims, there is often a desire for continued identification with the religious ingroup.

This article examines how British Muslim gay men safeguard membership in the religious group, despite self-identification as gay, often through what is described as "hyper-affiliation," namely, accentuated social and psychological identification with a social group in response to threatened group membership. Our aim, in particular, is to explore how the theoretical lens of Identity Process Theory (IPT) (Breakwell, 1986) offers valuable insights into the ways in which gay Muslim men in Britain psychologically reconcile potentially incompatible or discordant identities. In doing so we address more general issues around the construction and reconciliation of multiple identities among victims of stigmatized identities. This is not a new topic for investigation, however our adoption of an IPT perspective affords some novel insights into the issue. While there is valuable existing work in the stigma tradition which explores sexual identity and stigma (e.g. Herek, Gillis & Cogan, 2009), we aim to address issues around the management of multiple identities more explicitly than stigma approaches tend to do, with the latter often focusing more on the so-called "spoiled" identity as opposed to the overall self-system of the stigmatized.

British Muslim gay men: Identity threat and coping
Dominant Islamic narratives tend to be in strict opposition to homosexuality (Bonthuys & Erlank, 2012; Duran 1993; Halstead & Lewicka 1998; see also Yip, 2005), although there is an emerging "reverse discourse" with some scholars arguing that there is indeed scope for the theological accommodation of homosexuality (e.g. Kugle 2010; Jamal 2001). For many Muslims though, homosexuality is not regarded as a "natural" alternative lifestyle and gay identity can seem to contradict Islamic teaching regarding "appropriate" social norms.

There is evidence that many British Muslim gay men are themselves acutely aware of negative, stigmatizing social representations of homosexuality, which operate in religious settings (Yip, 2004b). Consequently, many fear, or completely reject, the notion of formally "coming out" (Jaspal & Siraj, 2011). Rejection and ostracization from the religious group can pose psychological challenges, given the importance that many gay Muslims attribute to their religious identity. Since religious identity tends to be the preferred, "core" identity of many Muslims in Britain (Modood et al., 1997), British Muslim gay men may initially attempt to deny that they are gay or re-construct their homosexuality in terms of a mutable behaviour rather than as a static identity (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010).

There is now a growing tradition of research into the interface of religion and sexuality among British Muslim gay men, which acknowledges the complex socio-psychological struggles that can characterize their identity experiences (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010, 2012b). Recent sociological research has examined how British Muslim gay men construct sexuality-affirming hermeneutics by contesting religious discourses of sexual

morality (Yip, 2005), and how they manage family and kin relations in a context of strict religious censure of non-heterosexuality (Yip, 2004b). Yet, there is no existing research into how individuals maintain a strong socio-psychological connection to the religious ingroup despite self-identifying as gay. Our previous research has suggested that for many gay British Muslims, finding a way of maintaining a psychological sense of Muslim identity often remains important, even under circumstances where other British Muslims are perceived as stigmatizing homosexuality (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010). It is argued that IPT (Breakwell, 1986, 2001; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010; Vignoles, Chryssochoou & Breakwell, 2002) can shed light on the psychological mechanisms deployed by gay Muslims when faced with this challenge of maintaining a Muslim identity while acknowledging that many other Muslims perceive Islam to be incompatible with being gay.

IPT is our preferred theoretical perspective because it emerged out of a desire to understand the different strategies that can be adopted by individuals and groups faced with threats to valued identities (Breakwell, 1986), We adopt it here, without proposing it as a competitor to other models of coping with stigmatized identities or other models of identity but, rather, as a complement to those other perspectives, able to offer some unique insights by way of its detailed conceptualization of identity processes, motivations and coping mechanisms. A particular strength of IPT is its ability to encompass multiple levels of analysis, with intra-psychic, intergroup and societal levels all encompassed within the theory.

IPT proposes that the identity structure is regulated by two universal processes: (1) assimilation-accommodation; (2) evaluation. Assimilation-accommodation refers to the absorption of new information in the identity structure (e.g. "I am gay") and to the adjustment which takes place in order for it to become part of the structure (e.g. "I am gay so maybe I cannot be a Muslim"). The evaluation process confers meaning and value upon the contents of identity (e.g. "Being Muslim is a good thing but being gay is not").

These processes function to create particular desirable end-states for identity (or "identity principles"). These include: continuity; self-esteem; distinctiveness; self-efficacy; belonging; meaning; and psychological coherence. The significance of these principles in the context of sexual and religious identities among British Pakistani Muslim men has been discussed elsewhere (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010, 2012). The theory suggests that, when the identity processes cannot provide appropriate levels of *salient* identity principles, identity is threatened and the individual will engage in coping strategies to alleviate the threat (Breakwell 1986). Some strategies function at the intrapsychic level, such as *denial* that one is actually gay, or *re-conceptualization* of what it means to be gay. Others function at interpersonal or intergroup levels, such as *isolation* of oneself from others, or *social denial* of homosexuality.

A consistent finding in IPT research with British Muslim gay men is that they face identity threat due to (1) the perceived incompatibilities between their religious and sexual identities (threatening *psychological coherence*; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010); (2) the inability to construct a coherent narrative connecting past, present and future in relation to being gay (threatening *continuity*; see Cinnirella, 1998); (3) the negative value and affect habitually appended to their gay identity, which nonetheless is recognized as a key component of the self-concept (threatening *self-esteem*; Bhugra, 1997). Identity threat is said to have negative social, psychological and emotional outcomes (Breakwell, 1986; Jaspal, 2012a).

When religious identity is construed as "core," as it often is for British Muslims, self-identification as gay can place British Muslim gay men in a threatening position due to the perception that homosexuality is rejected by other Muslims. This can cause threatened identity and drive attempts to address this potentially aversive psychological state (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010). However, there remains little empirical work on the ways in which gay

Muslim men in Britain may seek to retain a sense of Muslim identity despite stigmatized gay identity forming part of their self, and it is our aim to address this lacuna.

METHOD

Participants and procedure

Twenty self-identified British Muslim gay men were recruited from the Pakistani community in the West Midlands of England. British Pakistanis constitute a demographically important ethnic group in Britain, and the majority of British Muslims are of Pakistani background (Scott, Pearce & Goldblatt 2001). Participants were aged 19-26 years (M: 22.5; SD: 2.6). Six were university students, four had completed undergraduate degrees, five had completed college, and the remaining five had GCSE/A-levels. A snowball sampling strategy was employed with participants recommending acquaintances for the research. Initial participants were known to the interviewer. None of the participants in this study described themselves as "out" to family members or heterosexual friends. All participants defined themselves as being either "moderately religious" or "very religious" and self-identified as "gay." Being gay can be understood in a multitude of ways (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010) but participants converged in their view that sexual attraction to men (and not to women) made them gay. It is noteworthy that all participants reported attaching greater importance to being Muslim than to being gay.

The interviews were conducted by a British Pakistani Muslim gay man, who was known to the initial participants recruited for the study. Interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview schedule consisting of twelve exploratory, open-ended questions regarding: self-description, self-categorization and identity (based on IPT), sense of belonging in and compatibility between the religious and sexual groups, and identity threat and coping strategies. Interviews lasted between 60 and 120 minutes, and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The research was conducted in accordance with British Psychological Society ethical guidelines and pseudonyms are used in order to protect participant anonymity.

Analytical approach

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith & Osborn, 2008) is a qualitative analytical technique that aims to capture participants' attempts to make sense of their personal and social worlds. The approach assumes a relationship between verbal reports and the cognitions and emotions with which they are concerned (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Since the method focuses upon the meanings that particular lived experiences hold for the individual, it was anticipated that this analytical strategy would shed light upon the subjective perceptual processes associated with participants' attempts to make sense of being gay and Muslim, and how they safeguard membership in the religious group. Moreover, the method's idiographic mode of enquiry facilitates in-depth exploration of each individual's account of their experiences.

Analytical procedures

The authors transcribed the recordings and read the transcripts repeatedly in order to become intimate with the accounts, and preliminary interpretations were noted in the left margin. These included *inter alia* participants' meaning-making, particular forms of language, and apparent contradictions and patterns within the data. Initial codes aimed to capture, from the analyst's perspective, participants' attempts to make sense of their identities and experiences. At the next step, the right margin was used to collate these initial codes into potential themes, which captured the essential qualities of the accounts. The list of themes was reviewed and

interview extracts were listed against each corresponding theme. Superordinate themes were developed and ordered into a logical and coherent narrative structure.

Due to space constraints, extracts are presented only to exemplify major substantive and theoretical points which are illustrative of the dataset as a whole.

ANALYSIS

Our interviews were wide-ranging and covered some issues not addressed in the current paper (see also Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010; Jaspal & Siraj, 2011). Here, we focus on themes pertaining specifically to the issue of connections between religious and sexual identities. This section describes the following themes that we identified as relevant to our primary focus: (1) "Gay identity casting doubt upon one's Muslim-ness"; (2) "Ramadan: A symbolic opportunity to be a 'true Muslim'"; (3) "Accepting 'Muslim views' and religious authenticity."

Gay identity casting doubt upon one's Muslim-ness

For several participants, self-definition as gay seemed to inhibit self-definition as Muslim, which may be attributed to the perceived inconsistencies in being both Muslim and gay (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010). The problematic outcomes for self-definition as Muslim can be manifested at the psychological level, given that individuals themselves may come to doubt the extent of their 'Muslim-ness':

> It all boils down to one thing, I just feel that what I'm doing is so wrong, and sometimes I start to doubt I'm a true Muslim. Am I a fake? I know that my friends or my folks would never ever accept that I'm a Muslim, that's for sure. A Muslim man doesn't go around getting f**ked, does he? (Amir)

> There's a big conflict in me, in my mind and my heart. I'm thinking that like I know what the Koran says about men who do it with men so I'm starting to think I'm not a real Muslim. I mean I am a believer. I know my beliefs. But what the hell's a gay Muslim? This side of me doesn't really match. (Shaqil)

There is a clear threat to the psychological coherence principle of identity in that these participants appear to view their religious and sexual identities as inconsistent and incompatible, and in some ways engage in an inner dialogue which involves feelings of guilt and inauthenticity. This is manifested in Shaqil's rejection of the term "gay Muslim," suggesting that this identity configuration is impossible. Like Shaqil, several participants argued that being gay did not "match" their individual identity characterized primarily by their Muslim beliefs. In describing his doubts surrounding his Muslim identity, Amir made a distinction between being a "true Muslim" and "a fake" and proceeded to highlight his suspicion that his membership in the Muslim faith might be inauthentic as a result of his sexual orientation. Similarly, Shaqil attributed his identity conflict to the perceived stance of the Koran on homosexuality, and participants unanimously expressed the view that a "real" Muslim should not engage in sexual relations with other men.

Individuals also attributed their doubts regarding the authenticity of their "Muslim-ness" to the perception that significant others (e.g. family members) would never accept this aspect of their identity:

> I know I'm a Muslim. I have that faith in my heart. *La'ila il ala Mohammadan Rasool Allah* [Arabic statement of Muslim faith]. But being part of the community is important for a Muslim too. You're always part of a community

from day one when you're a Muslim but no Muslim will accept a battyboy (Abdul)

Although participants such as Abdul and Shaqil perceived themselves to be Muslims and highlighted a strong spiritual attachment to Islam, they appeared to view spirituality and personal religiosity as insufficient bases for a "true" Muslim identity. Rather, participants consistently highlighted the importance of "being part of a [Muslim] community" in order to attain sufficiently high levels of religious authenticity. Yet, the perceived incongruence of being Muslim and gay may impede acceptance and inclusion in the religious ingroup, thereby jeopardising an "authentic" Muslim identity.

Identity threat, partly as a result of perceived lack of belonging in the Muslim ingroup, can become accentuated at religious occasions, which render salient to some British Muslim gay men the perceived "religious stance" on homosexuality:

> At a time like Ramadan, you do stop and think about your sins [...] It is the saddest time of the year for me, like being gay and that […] You know, it's a religious time and you see the whole family together and start to think "am I actually part of these people? Do they accept me for who I am?" (Faisal)

For Faisal, Ramadan rendered salient his "sins," namely his sexual orientation, which he viewed as contradicting his Muslim identity. The salience of negatively evaluated elements of one's identity, and particularly the perception that these elements contradict Muslim identity, can render this religious occasion "the saddest time of the year." According to Islamic tradition, Ramadan constitutes a time for spiritual reflection, self-improvement and increased worship (Bakhtiar, 2011). Faisal's account suggests that one's gay identity can contribute to a re-evaluation of events and phenomena associated with religious identity. Furthermore, an important element of Ramadan is self-restraint, which is manifested in the Islamic tradition of sexual abstinence and the avoidance of "sinful" behaviour. Consequently, Ramadan potentially renders salient the problematic "sin" of homosexuality and the perceived tenuity of one's affiliation to the religious group.

Ramadan: A symbolic opportunity to be a "true Muslim"
Interestingly, and in contrast to the experience of Faisal, some participants capitalized on Ramadan in order to attenuate psychologically their gay identity and to strengthen their affiliation to the Islamic faith. For Farid, this entailed diligent observance of fasting, in lieu of any engagement with his gay identity:

> Farid: Like now that it's Ramadan I don't meet any guys until sunset because it's like breaking your fast, isn't it? I always wait until after sunset [...] As a Muslim I can't go messing around with guys during my fast […] As a Muslim, that's important.
> Interviewer: Is this just during Ramadan?
> Farid: Yeah, basically in Ramadan I make sure I don't do anything gay [...] It's the one time I can really feel like a good Muslim.

For Farid, fasting facilitated feelings of religious authenticity, which appeared to be impeded by his gay identity at other times – this enabled him to "feel like a good Muslim." Crucially, avoidance of sexual relations ("messing around with guys") was regarded as an important aspect of the Islamic fast. This perception was derived from the religious prescription of avoiding sexual contact during one's fast (Bakhtiar, 2011). Consequently, it appears that

Ramadan (and fasting) offer the possibility for participants to "normalize" their sexual identity by subjecting it to the same religious restrictions usually assumed to be applicable to heterosexuality.

Similarly, Jamal viewed Ramadan as an opportunity to "make up for" his gay identity:

> I feel that at Ramadan I can kind of make up for it, like being gay. Being gay isn't something that I can choose, having sex with guys isn't something I can resist but I can, I mean I do follow Ramadan, because like food that is something I can resist. (Jamal)

Like Jamal, several participants perceived their Ramadan fast as a means of psychologically "compensating" for their engagement in sinful behaviour, thereby re-conceptualizing the psychological meanings of Ramadan.

As exemplified by Farid's account, many participants attributed their diligent observance of Ramadan to the perceived threats to their Muslim identity:

> Karim: Especially since I've come out to, well, not like other people but like to myself. Since I have now like accepted that it isn't going to change, me being like this, I do think I've become more like religious and that. Like I never miss a fast now. I'm really, really strict about it. Like I do like make a point of that.
> Interviewer: Why?
> Karim: I guess it's because I don't want anyone left in any doubt about who I am – I'm a Muslim.

Participants who acknowledged their gay sexuality as an important, immutable element of the identity structure commonly attributed the "strict" observance of Ramadan to their sexual self-awareness. More specifically, the assimilation-accommodation of being gay seemed to induce this strict observance of Ramadan in order to increase religious authenticity. Karim evidenced his commitment to Islam with his reported tendency to be "really, really strict" about fasting during the holy month of Ramadan. This is an interesting observation, perhaps suggesting that individuals who have identities which could be perceived to be in conflict, might attempt reconciliation of the identities in question during relevant rituals, festivals or other important identity-affirming events, or else manifest extreme levels of adherence to one identity's requirements during these events, as a way of psychologically marking commitment to the identity, almost as an over-compensation. This perhaps also suggests the ability of individuals to dynamically modify the perceived compatibility (which in IPT is called "psychological coherence") of key identities across different situations.

Indeed, continued self-identification with Islam can become particularly important in a context of contested membership in the religious group:

> Asad: I just feel like each time we [his family] mention anything to do with God, they're like looking at me thinking "well, this don't apply to you because you're going to hell."

> Interviewer: How does that make you feel?

> Asad: I am a Muslim and all this just makes me want to prove it more. I reckon my religion has like being a Muslim has become stronger for me, more important [...] I try and just avoid getting too close to people who ain't Muslim. I reckon it keeps me in line [...] I don't go on the scene ever or any other tempting kind of

place like that. Actually, if I get an urge I just go mosque or pray [...] Ramadan is a time I can forget I'm gay.

Asad believed that his parents had, due to their suspicions regarding his sexuality, come to doubt his membership in the religious group and his "authenticity" as a Muslim. Participants unanimously expressed their fear of being excluded from the religious group if their sexual identity were disclosed to fellow religious ingroup members (Jaspal & Siraj, 2011). It is interesting that the concealment of homosexuality perceived to be required in order to be accepted as an "authentic" Muslim did not appear to cause perceptions of inauthenticity in relation to sexual identity. To an observer this might appear to be surprising, and there is some existing research suggesting that when the targets of stigma conceal their stigmatized identity this can cause feelings of inauthenticity (Shelton, Richeson, & Salvatore, 2005). It is likely that this risk of damage to sexual identity caused by concealment may not be a major theme for our relatively young gay Muslim participants because at the present time they are focused on prioritizing their Muslim identities – the longer term psychological consequences of this are potentially more damaging.

Like several participants, Asad coped with fear of exclusion from the religious group by accentuating his connection with Islam. At the psychological level, being Muslim was clearly more central to his sense of self than being gay. Accordingly, Ramadan can constitute a symbolic opportunity to accentuate one's connection to the religious ingroup and to deflect gay identity from the psychological forefront.

Accepting "Muslim views" and religious authenticity
The perception of diminished religious authenticity seemed to induce a psychological need to re-establish authenticity by "proving" it to oneself. For some individuals, this entailed the endorsement of views, norms and values perceived to be central to Muslim identity, as manifested in Amir's account:

> Amir: At the mosque they do sometimes say some things that, you know, they wouldn't exactly be accepted by Christians, Hindus in this country, I think. But I don't ever really disagree with them.
> Interviewer: Like what?
> Amir: You know, things people might say "yeah that's extreme. It's not a British thing to say." But as a Muslim, I see them as necessary things to say.
> Interviewer: Because you believe them yourself, the things they say?
> Amir: If it's a Muslim thing to say, then yes I will believe it.

While there was a general reluctance to provide concrete examples, participants acknowledged the controversial nature (from a "non-Muslim" perspective, at least) of some of the views aired in British mosques. Amir elaborated by hypothesizing that the statements might be regarded as "extreme" and not "British thing[s] to say." Several individuals reported that they did not disagree with the comments but rather viewed them as "necessary things to say," from a Muslim perspective. It appears that, for some British Muslim gay men, agreement with these statements could constitute a means of demonstrating, at a psychological level, their affiliation and loyalty to the Muslim ingroup, in a context of mounting doubts concerning the authenticity of their religious group membership. This process has similarities to the notion of self-stereotyping within Self-categorization Theory (Turner, 1987), a process whereby individuals who identify with a group seek to internalize the beliefs and practices perceived to be typical of the group as part of the self-categorization process through which the group identity becomes a part of the self-system. In seeking to

self-stereotype in an unquestioning manner, these gay Muslim men were essentially affirming the strength of their commitment to Muslim identity.

At a social level, there was a sense among some participants that their Muslim identity might not be accepted or "validated" by other ingroup members (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2012a). Consequently, individuals employed various strategies for exhibiting their "loyalty" to the Muslim ingroup. One particularly salient social strategy was for participants to *manifest* views, which they regarded as being typical of the Muslim ingroup, despite not necessarily holding these views themselves:

> Rashid: I just feel that I can't really be a Muslim-Muslim anymore. I like...
>
> Interviewer: Why do you feel that you can't be a Muslim?
>
> Rashid: I know I'm a true Muslim but like I've always got to be singing the proper Muslim tune, if you get me. To me, it feels like someone else's tune constantly. Like I can't be my own person [...] Like Palestine, I don't really care about it but I just sometimes end up being the most like pro-Palestinian one in the whole group even though deep down I don't care.
>
> Interviewer: Why do you feel you have to be so vocal?
>
> Rashid: I don't know. I guess it's part of just singing the tune.

Rashid seems to engage in an inner struggle between a desire to express Muslim identity through a heightened level of public conformity and a desire to retain a sense of individuality, suggesting, to borrow Brewer's ideas, that Muslim identity might not always provide Rashid with an "optimal" level of distinctiveness (Brewer, 1991).

Another psychological challenge faced by some gay Muslim men in Britain is experienced when they have interactions with non-Muslim gay men. Here, some may seek to downplay their Muslim identity during encounters with other gay men, and as Jamal recounts in the following extract, this may be psychologically painful when it requires tolerance towards critique of Muslims and Islam:

> Being a Muslim on the gay scene isn't exactly cool and it kind of stops you or like is an obstacle sometimes [...] I let guys take the piss out of the Prophet [Mohammad], just drinking and having fun but I felt dirty afterwards you know. I didn't feel like a true Muslim at all (Jamal)

Jamal's account of how he allowed other non-Muslim gay acquaintances to profane the Prophet Mohammad suggested that this caused threats to his self-esteem ("I felt dirty afterwards") and compelled him to re-evaluate and re-conceptualize his Muslim identity ("I didn't feel like a true Muslim at all"). For Jamal, he faced a difficult predicament, wanting on the one hand to maintain a strong Muslim identity but on the other, not wanting to be ostracized when in the company of non-Muslim gay men. It suggests the risk of a kind of double ostracization – on the one hand, gay Muslim men can feel excluded and berated by non-gay Muslims, while at the same time they feel a need to play down their religion when in the company of other gay men. This is likely to threaten multiple identity principles associated with Muslim and gay identities. Furthermore, Jamal's reluctance to confront prejudice head-on in these environments is a phenomenon often observed amongst targets of prejudice and discrimination (see, for example, Swim & Hyers, 1999)

Hyper-affiliation to the religious ingroup can cause potential inconsistencies between Muslim and gay identities to re-surface psychologically. This was clearly manifested in participants' reflections upon acts of homophobia perpetrated by religious ingroup members. These reflections rendered salient threats to psychological coherence in relation to Muslim and gay identities. Several participants invoked the recent case in Derby (United Kingdom) of five Muslim men of Pakistani descent who were found guilty of distributing anti-gay leaflets calling for the death penalty for gay people (Britten 2012):

> Even though those guys were handing out leaflets, deep down, I can understand it. It ain't no big mystery to me and I can't really say that it was wrong either. What else do you expect a Muslim to do? […] They have a problem with people flaunting it, I think [...] Not just flaunting it. They just want people to take the right path. There ain't nothing wrong with that (Omar)

Despite his self-identification as a gay man, Omar provided a sympathetic account of the men's homophobic acts and reported being able to "understand" their intentions. This tolerance for openly homophobic acts committed by fellow Muslims lends further support for the notion that, for participants like Omar, Muslim identity can be more "core" to the self-system, thus requiring a rationalization of apparent wrong-doing by ingroup members, even when the target is another ingroup. Several participants reported their belief that being gay was permissible provided that one did not "flaunt" gay identity. This narrative is consistent with the observation that homosexuality may be tolerated in Muslim cultures provided that it remains silent, invisible and perpetually subordinate to the dominant heteronormative narrative (Bonthuys & Erlank, 2012; Murray & Roscoe, 1997). The perceived tenuity of one's affiliation to the religious group may motivate such adamant defence of the religious ingroup at all costs.

DISCUSSION
British Muslim gay men may view their Muslim identity as being threatened as a result of self-identifying as gay. Threatened Muslim identity can lead to hyper-affiliation to the religious ingroup, through the deployment of various sub-strategies. The primary aim of these strategies seems to be to safeguard the "authenticity" of one's Muslim identity.

IPT sheds light on the potential antecedents of identity threat among British Muslim gay men. Given that being Muslim is conceptualized as a long-standing, positively evaluated element of the self-concept, religious identity tends to be employed as the interpretive lens for perceiving and evaluating gay identity. This is partly because Muslim identity seems to be more central or "core" to the self-system, and other identities must then somehow be made to co-exist and fit in with this apparent hierarchy of identities. For some participants, the assimilation-accommodation of gay identity into the self-concept may not comply with the psychological coherence, continuity, belonging and self-esteem principles of identity. Conflict between the two components of the identity structure arises when individuals view them as incompatible. This is exacerbated if individuals perceive their positively evaluated religious identity as being undermined by gay identity. Thus for some gay Muslims there is little scope for attaching positive value to being gay, given perceived religious disapproval of homosexuality, which means that individuals fail to derive a positive self-conception on the basis of their gay identity (Bhugra, 1997). Self-identification as gay can result in a rupture between past, present and future, since individuals may wish to become a "true Muslim" but can feel that this desired self is impeded by their negatively evaluated gay identity. This is consistent with Cinnirella's (1998) discussion of possible social identities over time. Moreover, the perceived incompatibility of their sexual and religious identities seem to

engender the belief that they will not be accepted by religious ingroup members and, consequently, excluded from the group – this can jeopardize a sense of belonging in an important social ingroup. This general threat to identity, as defined in IPT, can disrupt the construction of a psychologically satisfying Muslim identity, thereby rendering it susceptible to threat.

Self-definition as gay can potentially cast doubt over the "authenticity" of one's Muslim identity at both psychological and social levels. In order to understand perceived religious authenticity, it is useful to draw upon the conceptual dichotomy of spirituality and institutionalized religion (Loewenthal, in press). At a psychological or spiritual level, individuals themselves may come to doubt that their behavior is consistent with the perceived norms, values and tenets of Islam, and therefore come to view their religious identity as inauthentic. In other words, they may question the extent of their spirituality and perceive themselves as "failing" God (cf. Yip, 2004a). Although some participants, conversely, perceived a sense of security in relation to the Muslim spirituality, they nonetheless expressed the view that their Muslim identity might not be "validated" by members of the religious institution since their sexual identity is likely to be regarded by religious ingroup members as contradicting or even undermining Islam.

Hyper-affiliation to the religious ingroup is a complex strategy for coping with threatened Muslim identity. It is argued that religious events such as Ramadan can render salient the perceived "sinfulness" of homosexuality and thereby threaten Muslim identity. However, such religious occasions can also provide prime opportunities for "proving" the authenticity of one's Muslim identity. Individuals may deploy intrapsychic strategies for authenticating their religious identity. These include (1) diligent observance of fasting due to the belief that this "compensates" for engagement in "sinful" behavior associated with gay sexuality; and (2) sexual abstinence during Ramadan. Some participants regarded these practices as key aspects of Islam. Secondly, there were socially oriented methods of safeguarding religious authenticity. In seeking to demonstrate the authenticity of one's religious identity in public settings, individuals may express "extreme" views, which are perceived to be central to Muslim identity. This means of authenticating one's Muslim-ness may be problematic because the perceived ingroup position may not necessarily be viewed by individuals as being consistent with their individual identity. This can induce a discrepancy between their own construal and the perceived social construal of Muslim identity. Conversely, individuals who themselves doubted the authenticity of their Muslim identity reported uncritically accepting and subscribing to some of the "extreme" views said to be associated with the ingroup.

Hyper-affiliation to the religious ingroup has overlap with the interpersonal strategy of passing, which entails "gaining exit from the threatening position through deceit," whereby "[a] new interpersonal network or group is entered on false pretences" (Breakwell, 1986, p. 116). In the case of British Muslim gay men, however, the religious ingroup is not a novel social network but, given that individuals can themselves, or believe that others, doubt their religious authenticity, their (re-)connection to the ingroup can seem to be compromised or false. Individuals exploit the agency that they have in re-establishing their connection with the religious ingroup, rather than compartmentalizing their Muslim and gay identities or disidentifying with the religious ingroup altogether (cf. Yip, 2004a). This study shows that both sexual and religious identities acquire importance for identity, albeit for distinct reasons, and that accordingly the identities are managed in distinct ways. While Muslim identity is readily acknowledged and accentuated, gay identity may be de-valued and attenuated. The constant re-evaluation of identity contents seems to function in ways that optimize Muslim identity.

While there are existing theories and perspectives which speak to the issue of how individuals cope with multiple and sometimes conflicting social identities, we argue that IPT offers some unique insights into these issues via its focus on multiple levels - as evinced here in our discussion of both intra-psychic and interpersonal issues – and its attempt to systematically delineate a set of identity principles guiding identity maintenance. While social identity and self-categorization approaches have provided insight into the mechanisms which might trigger the salience or activation of social categories (e.g. Van Rijswijk & Ellemers, 2002), such an approach typically omits any exploration of the extent to which individuals explicitly think about the perceived compatibility between multiple identities in their self-system (which in IPT is called "psychological coherence") and seek ways to address any incompatibilities. Our analysis suggests that many of our gay Muslim participants felt both Muslim and gay identities to be salient in certain situations and remained acutely aware of potential incompatibilities at times. We argue that IPT offers additional insights into such phenomena above and beyond those offered by social identity or stigma approaches.

It appears that while some British Muslim gay men continue to perceive a polarized, unambiguously negative view of gay identity in Islam, they will either disidentify with the sexual or religious ingroups or deploy strategies for manifesting religious "authenticity." Given the tendency for many Muslims, regardless of sexuality, to prioritize Muslim identity as a kind of super-ordinate "core" identity at the heart of the self-system, it is not altogether surprising that sexual identity, when perceived to be incompatible or threatening towards Muslim identity, may be relegated to a lower status or sometimes concealed. What gay Muslims in our sample are doing in some ways echoes recent observations about gay men and lesbian women seeking to highlight higher level shared identities as a means of deflecting and/or avoiding homophobia (Schmader et al., 2013). Many of these strategies are unlikely to be productive in the long-run, since individuals are unable to realize a socially and psychologically fulfilling sexual identity and may continue to fear exclusion from the religious ingroup. Herek and Garnets (2007) have convincingly demonstrated that it can be highly beneficial for those who are the target of sexual prejudice to adopt a sexual identity which can buffer mental health against the threat of prejudice and discrimination, and it is noticeable that many of our gay Muslim men are eschewing this option due to its perceived incompatibility with Islam.

The most effective long-term strategy would be a discernible change in social representations of homosexuality in Islamic cultures and settings, in order to de-stigmatize gay identity and facilitate both Muslim *and* gay self-identification among British Muslim gay men. While this article highlights some of the core issues involved, the task of reducing stigma and encouraging multiple identification will need to be undertaken by a variety of actors - researchers, policy makers, educators and religious leaders alike.

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