



Between conflicting cultures: the lived experience of young Muslim women's negotiation of identity and sexuality

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### ABSTRACT

Building upon past research this study aimed to develop knowledge of the negotiation and re-working of identity in British Somali females. It explored influencing factors on identity and used research (Minwalla 2005, Whittaker 2005, and Dwyer 2000) and philosophy (Merleau-Ponty 2009) to prove sexuality's influence upon it. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was used to interpret the findings of six semi-structured interviews. Positioning theory was utilised to analyse the findings and draw conclusions of a discursive and narrative model of the positioning of participants. Contextual factors within asserting ones identity were found, namely gender, culture, familial/peer relationships and religion. The study demonstrated how young Somali females attempt to assert identity through conflicting positions imposed in each context. Participants were found to be in conflicted positions at three levels of analysis, which in turn conflict with each other. The core level was the positioning participants placed themselves in, between Islam and British Culture. The secondary level included the rights and duties positioned on them by the Somali community; at the third level was the positioning gave to them by the wider British context, this included the taboo issues which participants had to negotiate identity and sexuality within.

KEY WORDS:	IDENTITY	SEXUALITY	CONFLICT	ISLAM	CULTURE
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## Introduction

Somali people immigrated to Britain after civil war in 1991. The first generation of British Somali youths are now coming into adulthood as part of an Islamic displaced community. Dwyer (2000), states that such communities must find new ways to belong and assimilate identities in relation to their new habitat. The construction of identity in Britain could prove difficult because of differing societal ideals, De Voe (2002) notes that gender, ethnic identity and social equilibrium in the Somali community, become a conservative focus in attempts to maintain a pre-refugee status. It could incur from this notion that as Britain becomes more liberal the Somali community may become more conservative to preserve their culture. Young Somali's who live within both, could experiences clashes of culture because of this (Dwyer 2000).

Furthermore Sexuality within western discourses is a liberal and open domain; it is understood to influence identity, impacting on ideas, expressions and practices (Maxwell 2007, Minwalla 2005). Muslim communities have been found to have rising ages of marriage and rates of divorce in Western countries (Imtoul and Hussein 2009) this implies an ascription to western values and ideals in issues of sexuality. It appears important to address the context and position in which young Somali's live. Females are believed to live in a more confined, conservative position De Voe (2002). Somali females' identity should be understood by the factors which determine its position namely, culture, religion and sexuality (Maxwell 2007, Minwalla 2005, Imtoul and Hussein 2009, Kam-Tuck Yip 2009). In-depth study will clarify the contextual positions they are put in, illuminate the positions they place themselves in and grasp how the positions relate to each other.

## The Importance of Sexuality

Phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty (2002) states of sexuality *"It has links with the whole active and cognitive being"* for Merleau-Ponty (2002) Sexuality is not instinctual or a mechanical response to a stimuli. Sexuality is not purely anatomical or conscious. He praises Freud for demonstrating that all human actions have meaning, and for reintegrating sexuality into our being. Merleau-Ponty (2002) attempts to demonstrate that sexuality is not just an agenda driven by the genital. Sexuality has a higher function *"it is the general power, which the psychosomatic subject enjoys, of taking root in different settings, of establishing himself through different experiences, of gaining structures of conduct. It is what causes a man to have a history"* (Merleau-Ponty 2002).

Sexuality projects our conduct towards time; our need to leave a legacy (Merleau-Ponty 2002). Sexuality also plays a part in our interactions with others it can negate moral conduct therefore is key in our being in the world; neither purely physical nor psychological. For Merleau-Ponty (2002) our sexuality is not reducible to consciousness it is a functioning as important as our intellect and motility and is in fact unified with them. What is important to be understood is that our sexual lives have meaning; sexuality is an important factor in understanding ourselves it is not just a physical drive but is part of our existential being. It therefore is just as important to study as cognitive functioning; hence, it can be interpreted that to comprehend our identity we must account for the influence of sexuality on it. Bouhidiba (1998) *"The*

*fundamental bond is essentially erotic. Becoming, alternation, opposition, diversity and all other forms of relation have, in one way or another, an erotic significance.”*

## **Sexuality and Islam**

Assessing sexuality specifically within an Islamic context Bouhdiba (1998) states that sexual relations in Islam are not taboo but centrally important, it is to create and therefore a re-enactment of God's act of creation. Bouhdiba states that sexual intimacy is central to life, to God's will and is in fact *“the very sign of divine power”*. For Bouhdiba the Quran perceives the act of love to be a sign of the divine, and of human's power. Within its lawful context sexual intimacy is celebrated within many quranic texts<sup>1</sup>.

## **Islam and Society**

Society's role changed the fundamental perception of love, sexuality and the feminine theorised in the texts of the Quran. It was an unbalanced relationship of the spiritual, sexual and societal which led to a permanent tradition differing from the ideal Quranic doctrine. *“Leads to social exclusion of women from the group, further emphasises sexual division and derealizes women. The man gets major status, the women eternal minority. The woman is nothing more than the man's shadow.”*

## **Current Research**

Dwyer (2000) in 'Negotiating Diasporic Identities' examines how young Asian Muslim women in the U.K negotiate identities in terms of *“changing familial gender ideals and gender relations and against racialised gender stereotypes”*. She then analyses how young women renegotiate these identities. The methodology utilised interviews, participant observation and group discussion; which yielded the richest data, this was transcribed and analysed to draw conclusions. Dwyer perceives identity as contextual and relational instead of fixed. She notes how gendered assumptions have shaped identity, but found new cultural identities as an aid to the construction of alternative gendered identities.

A heavy influence on gendered assumptions was the familial culture. Family honour, the upholding of *'izzat'* was a strong responsibility of the young women. This was linked with dress and many young women found themselves a topic of communal gossip if seen in English clothing, which was seen by the community as a representation of departing from the traditional moral code. The family strictly monitored attire and was found to have a high expectation on what was regarded as appropriate femininity. Females are regarded as the guardians of religion and culture; they are expected to pass it on to the next generation and they who are a living, breathing representation of it. Class had a heavy influence on this also; it was found that the young middle class women were not underneath the same scrutiny as their working class peers as they were removed from the larger community. Young women

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<sup>1</sup> Adelwahab Bouhdiba Sexuality in Islam p.8, this is explained in detail.

were found to be in a 'double-bind' as their dress subjugated them to stereotyping from British peers. Young Muslim women were found to ascribe to Quranic scriptures instead of cultural values to create what Dwyer coined as 'Hybrid' identities. The new form of identity allowed them to unite British and Asian-Islamic ideals for example covering their bodies to Islamic standards with a mixture of Asian and British clothes.

This study shows how adopting new identities can be used by young women to progress and reconcile cultural conflicts. It shows the double bind of adopting an Islamic identity as it can appease the family and community whilst hindering young women because of stereotyping from the indigenous British people. It also exposes negotiated identities as an important issue which has to be dealt with on a daily basis. Limitations include the diverse sample used; the study perhaps would have been more precise by using women of the same ethnicity and social class then comparing them to women who differ. By grouping them together it can be assumed that experiences were presumed to be similar, which limits the study by not accounting for relativity and individual differences.

Minwalla et al (2005) in Identity experience among progressive gay Muslims in North America: found a dual identity with three dimensions: ethno-cultural, religious and colour identities. The men felt at the bottom of colour hierarchy, impacting on their feelings of attractiveness and their sexuality. Critical problems highlighted religious and familial contexts as well as social and racial. Whilst many turned to Allah as a guide; some to reject their sexuality, others felt betrayed by Allah as they further understood their sexuality in terms of its religious contradictions and at first turned their backs on Islam. A large fear was the impact the men's sexuality would have on familial relations; they were under huge pressure from their parents to marry, it was also noted that 'coming out' would isolate the family and impact on siblings (especially females) opportunities to marry. As in Dwyer's findings a reclaiming of Islam was highlighted with the men, many reconstructed their ascription to being Muslim in an attempt to renegotiate their dual identities.

The study used ethnographic methods and exercised in-depth interviews on six Muslim male participants from various ethnic backgrounds. Participant observation was employed to construct pilot interviews and all participants were volunteers from Al-Fatiha an Islamic group "*for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or questioning their sexual orientation and gender identity*". The interviews were transcribed and micro analysed using coding methods to discover themes, these themes were then confirmed using the notes from participant observation.

This study highlights the impact of colour on sexuality and its further effects on identity, further study could intentionally focus on Identity. It found identity, cultural and religious conflicts and demonstrated how sexuality impacted each with real life consequences. Limitations include the sample size and the nature of the sample i.e. only willing participants, this impacts how feasible it is to generalise results as there is possibly many other perspectives on the issues raised.

Whittaker et al (2005) explored the psychological well being of young Somali Muslim women in Britain. The study was cross sectional and employed both individual and group interviews, each was transcribed and analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The participants were recruited from a Somali

community centre. Although some participants had lived in England all or the majority of their lives, others were new to the country. Within a psychological and socio-political context the researchers explored “*positive emotional and mental health, life satisfaction, affect (happiness), and coping abilities*” (Whittaker et al 2005). The study is significant as psychiatric disorder has been found to affect child refugees at double the rate it does their host peers. Open questioning was used and similar themes were found, these were then combined into “higher order and sub- themes” (Whittaker et al 2005).

Three main themes were documented as ‘resilience and protection, identity and beliefs, and finally concealment, secrets and distancing’. As found in the above two studies the young women’s community influenced many of their actions and interactions. The stigma given to mental health by the community for example evil spirits, impacted on how women sort council, and coped with issues. Beliefs were also found to conflict between scientific and traditional ideas of mental illness this exposed conflicting sets of identities and norms from differing cultures. The community both gave support yet inhibited some access to it because of stigma’s attached to actions; religion was also used in this instance to seek solace. In common with the above studies the women again used direct religious values instead of cultural norms to redefine their ascribed identities, beliefs and values.

This study is a leading investigation into the area of refugees and mental health. Adding to this was the utilisation of IPA methods and its successful use in group interviews; however this could be improved by focusing on fewer topics in more depth (Smith 2004). An important find was how culture and religion seemed to be fused; that many demands on the young women were familial or communal but not necessarily religious. However because of the small sample size it is a matter of perspective as to if the results can be generalised. A further limitation was the cultural differences between researcher and participant; this could inhibit communication and the researchers admitted working to understand the content before analysis could commence. The research highlights religion and cultures influence on identity and mental health, future research could focus on the need to hide emotions and the influence of the community on identity. Validity and the ability to generalise results could be emphasised through using a larger sample or longitudinal research.

The above research found many conflicts within the constructing of identity of Muslims within a western culture. Positioning theory (Harre 2009) looks at conflicts within our discourses, analysing encounters between people with focus on how our rights and duty determine actions, within interactions. Actions are the position we take, or are positioned into which develop during the process of an encounter/s and also through people’s ideas and claims within encounters of our character. Of this Harre said “*Positioning theory focuses on bringing to light the normative frames within which people actually carry on their lives, thinking, feeling, acting, and perceiving against standards of correctness.*” Meanings are understood in terms of the individuals position in their world, and the conflicts which arise from given “*moral presuppositions*” Harre (2009).

## Research Aims

Building upon the findings of Dwyer (2000), Whittaker (2005) and Minwalla (2005), the aim of this study is to investigate the identity and sexuality of young Somali Islamic women. To further understand the predicament of these young women the research aims to apply positioning theory Harre (2009) to give a narrative of how identity and sexuality are constructed and negotiated within British society. The research shall test the previous findings of:

- The existence of a dual identity and its dimensions including religious, British and ethno-cultural identities (Minwalla 2005).
- Sexualities influence on the lived experience of dual identities (Minwalla 2005).
- The existence of separate familial and communal ideals from those of young Somali women and its affects (Dwyer 2000), Whittaker 2005).
- What conflicts take place in the construction of identity and how they are managed, (Minwalla 2005, Whittaker 2005, and Dwyer 2000).

## **Methodology Design**

The research conducted semi-structures interviews. All interviews where then analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). By looking at the research aims it can be concluded that IPA was best suited to interpret the data, Smith (2004) states "IPA aims to explore in detail participants' personal lived experience and how participants make sense of that personal experience".

## **Materials**

The apparatus used included a Dictaphone to record the interviews and a laptop to transcribe them.

## **Participants**

All participants shared a common ethnic, religious and class background. Each where selected from the area of Toxteth in Liverpool, a working class area. All Participants where Somali females and classified themselves as Muslims (N=6). All Participants entered the U.K as children or where born in the U.K, their ages ranged from 19-24. The majority of participants where students, either in further or higher education (N=4) one student was a graduate whilst the other was unemployed. Participants were recruited using a snowball sample which started with friends of the researcher. The participants' identities are anonymous as a condition of their willing participation.

## **Procedure**

Each interview was recorded individually and privately in a room with only the researcher and participant. Participants where firstly briefed on the research and given the right to withdraw. Each interview started by using the interview questions, no time limit was imposed on giving answers. If participants disclosed rich data or highlighted a specific area of interest the researcher would probe at this to gain a deeper understanding of the participants meaning. All the interview questions where derived from the themes found in the above previous research or where in fact taken from questions used in the research for example; is sexuality influenced by both cultures? (Minwalla 2005). Each participant was asked if they would like to add anymore content after all the core questions were answered, after this participants where debriefed. On average each interview lasted an hour, no additional interviews were conducted on the participants.

A pilot study was first conducted; this looked mainly at identifying emerging trends of changing behaviours in sexuality among young Somali women. The interview suggested that there was more depth to this subject. Thorough research indicated that this was more an issue of identity which then became the main focus of investigation. All transcripts where then analysed using IPA, this begins with a detailed analysis of a case; when a number of acceptable conclusions can be drawn



(subthemes) a detailed look at the next case can be taken. After all cases have been analysed a cross case analysis can be executed to establish if subthemes are similar or unique. The subthemes of each interview were collated and final themes were constructed from re-occurring subthemes across each participant. IPA allows a reflexive look at how the researcher interprets the meanings found during analysis. Positioning Theory, Harre et al (2009) was then used to interpret a theory from the results.

### **Reflexive Account**

I am of African, Chinese, Irish and Jamaican origin and was brought up in a Christian family in the Toxteth community. Having grown up in close relationship or as an acquaintance of the participants this enabled a level of proximity which would usually have to be achieved before commencing the study. This was not taken for granted and I was aware that participants may have been weary of this and feared that whatever they say may be reported back to the community, therefore the anonymity conditions were focused upon intently and taken seriously. Being of an ethnicity which is arguably unique I empathise with many racial and stereotypical contentions the participants came up against and they identified with me on some level in this respect.

Mentioning my religious upbringing acted not as a hindrance but an enhancement to participants identifying with me as they recognised that I may also suffer from conflicts of religion and culture that are prevalent to them. Growing up within Toxteth and in the company of many Somali people I was somewhat experienced in their culture before the interview; however research was still conducted into the religion and culture. I have often questioned the reason for this research; it was mainly considered because of the experience of one of the participants a close friend who became pregnant outside of marriage. However I must acknowledge that to a degree this is a struggle I understand to be experiencing myself. Because of this I have made conscious efforts to not become too subjective during the interviews and the analysis, and constantly tried to be reflexive during this process.

### **Ethics**

Ethical approval was received via Manchester Metropolitan University, in terms of ethical practice set out by BPS guidelines.

## Results

**Table 1:**  
**Final Themes and Subthemes found through IPA**

<b>Final Themes</b>	<b>Theme 1</b>	<b>Theme 2</b>	<b>Theme 3</b>	<b>Theme 4</b>	<b>Theme 5</b>
	Ascription to British culture.	Concealment, secrets and distancing.	No fully informed education on taboo issues like sexuality.	Recognition of gender inequalities.	Try to negotiate and assert British and Somali culture with Islam.
<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Theme 1</b>	<b>Theme 2</b>	<b>Theme 3</b>	<b>Theme 4</b>	<b>Theme 5</b>
<b>A</b>	Cause of conflict between parents and girls.	Hide things from their parents and community.	Find their information mainly from friends, self research and media.	Believed to be cultural not religious, i.e. girls carrying family honour	Being more informed on each.
<b>B</b>	Young Somali's are ascribing to western behaviours and activities.	Perpetuating cycle of keeping things hidden.		Use religion to rationalise this, 'Hybrid identities'.	Deciding what's best and how to balance them.
<b>C</b>	Ascribe also to openness and tolerance of British culture.	Break downs of communication between parents and girls, as they cannot share all.			Believes it involves a strong sense of self. For example resisting peer pressure.

## Theme 1: Ascription to British Culture

Participants identified the emergence of a trend in which young Somali people ascribe to British cultural values and behaviours including; changing attitudes and behaviours towards issues of gender, drug taking, sexuality and sexual activity. Not all the participants said they partake in these activities although all said this is something which is going on in the Somali community, nationwide. For example, Isabella was talking about fusing Islamic, Somali and British identities and mentioned;

*“It’s an alright bar I guess, it’s run by a Somali Guy actually. Anyway I walked in there with a few friends and stuff, and I tell you what I saw, a bunch of girls wearing the full dress. And I was standing there thinking how could they mix up you know, clubbing, partying and drinking at the same time.”*

*Page 7, lines 27-30*

This indicated that both males and females within the Somali community have ascribed to the clubbing scene in Britain. Attitudes and behaviours towards sex had also changed as the participants mentioned that many Muslim women were now engaging in sexual activity, Isabella said of this;

*“Like Aliyah for example we talk about sex like you know what I mean, we talk about sex and stuff. And Kamiah she lost hers like way before (laughing) years before we did.”* Page 11, Lines 17-18

Drug taking was also identified, Jada said;

*“I’ve seen loads of Muslim people smoking cigarettes so I’ve grew up thinking that’s ok, or I’ve seen loads of Muslim boys smoking weed so I thought that was ok I haven’t myself but I’ve seen loads of Muslim boys do it.”* Page 14, Lines 34-36

This supports the trend of ascription to British culture and also an inadequate education on such issues (theme four). Many participants’ said that their parents don’t have a thorough understanding of British culture therefore issues which may seem trivial to them can act as a cause of conflict between the participants and their parents. Tamar said;

*“My aunties really close cos she’s like in her twenties so cos she’s young and she grew up as well... as a teenager she came here I think she applies, she knows what’s out there she’s more aware than my mum! My mum’s a bit naive on some topics, so I think my aunties more aware she’s speaks more English and she just understands me more. She knows where you’re coming from”*

*Page 16, Lines 16-19*

The participants all spoke of ascribing to British values of openness and tolerance. This seemed to be a desire that they wished their parents would ascribe to as it would allow them more open communication with their parents, this was identified during analysis (*Unapparent affect to participant*)<sup>2</sup>. Positioning theory highlights encounters the participants face of religion and culture assign them to a position of

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix

conflict; as their ascription to British culture conflicts with their parents positioning of the participants' rights and duties.

## Theme 2: Concealment, Secrets and Distancing

All Participants said that they are selective about the people they disclose information to, Sian said;

*"We do keep it hidden cos, my parents, if they do find out or, even like ...it's nothing big, but to them it's something big like, if we want to go on holiday away abroad and that... Or if I say to my mum, ah, I want to go out clubbing and that, she'll totally disagree with it and that....we planned like a holiday abroad but like, we do like say to them it's to do with education."*

*Page 2, Lines 9-14*

This highlights the issues which act to break down communication and cause conflict among parents and participants. As stated participants are secretive about their activities even among friends, Isabella states;

*"There is a limit on what I can say and what I can't say basically, do you know what I mean. And I don't like it. And that's why I don't really associate with that many people from that area.... for example, yeah, I kissed him last night everyone would look at you like, do you know what I mean. Everyone automatically would put a bad reputation on you."*

*Page 11, Lines 7-14*

Indicating a re-occurring cycle; young Somali women acknowledge that they have to be secretive for fear of parents or the community finding out their personal business. Yet will ascribe to cultural norms and which may bring scandal upon another person, hindering their reputation; Jada mentioned;

*"If I was my sister, I wouldn't tell me nothing. I don't know. I only trust me aunty and she trusts me. She tells me everything and I tell her everything. And if my sister's tell me something, I tell her. If me brother...if I hear stuff about my brother, I tell her. I always, that's me."*

*Page 9, Lines 10- 13*

A direct affect of this has been found to be a breakdown in communication with parents, as participants feel they cannot go to them with issues that are common among women their age in Britain. They would have liked to use them for a primary source of knowledge on important issues like sexuality but feel it's not possible, (themes four) when asked about this Khadija said:

*"Yes if they just give you their opinion rather than just force things on you and just judge you, if they would just give it you you normally then that would be fine." Page 14, Lines 13-14*

It was noted from Sian;

*“Yeah, some people still lie and still like pretend to do stuff and give like two identities to their parents.”*

*Page 16, Lines 5-6*

### **Theme 3: No fully Informed Education on Taboo Issues, like Sexuality**

This was indicated quite plainly, as their main source of knowledge for such issues were friends their own age, self research on the internet and what they learned from media i.e. television programmes. Sexuality was interpreted by participants to be about sexual intercourse. The meaning of each question on sexuality had to be explained and it was apparent that participants lacked understanding of sexuality in terms of gender, morality, experiential being, femininity, general values and opinions. When asking Aliyah about the difference between Somali and British cultural views on sexuality she said;

*“Yes it is different because in the Somali one you’ve got to follow your Islamic views and that like you’re not allowed to have sex before marriage but in the British culture you can have sex after the age of what eighteen is it? Sixteen, Sixteen something like that. In the Somali culture you’re not allowed to have sex at all if your sixteen, eighteen unless you’re married.” Page 6, Lines 31-34*

This shows that she interpreted my question as a question of sexual activity not sexuality. Participants have been positioned by parents into believing it is their duty to not inquire into taboo issues like sexuality Isabella supports this;

*“If I had got the chance I would have, but it’s just like I know them , I know my parents to well it’s like ‘what sex! How dare you bring the word sex in my house! Are you doing it, Are you doing it?’ (laughing). See when parents just poke you they’re like ‘that’s such a disgusting word’; it’s like you know what I’m not even going to go there with them. So I just picked up sex from when I was at school, when I was a kid it would either be from school, TV, or my own knowledge, just picking things up as I go through life basically.” Page 6, Lines 21-26*

It was common for them all to say they would not ask parents out of fear of judgement as shown in the above quote. It also showed that the young women were keen to acquire knowledge from a mature and valid resource. This however was even blocked by British peers, positioning them into a cycle of unawareness Khadija said of this;

*“Yeah I’ve had friends where they’re all talking about sex and stuff and you talk with them and then just look at you as if to say ‘ why are you talking about it? You’re not meant to do anything full stop’. But I’m just talking about it because I want to know, I might want to say I’m going to do it as well.” Page 11, Lines 31-34*

It's been found that Young Muslim women engage in sexual activity outside the normative constructs (Imtoul, Hussein 2009) they may go into this without a mature and informed knowledge of sex or sexuality i.e. emotional factors (Hillier, Harrison, Bowditch 1999). This could potentially lead to making regrettable decisions. This issue seems to be particularly difficult for the participants to negotiate; it seems they need more support to make informed decisions on their actions. Khadija mentioned in relation to this;

*I've seen that with Somali girls where they chose to get into a relationship, they think it's going to go somewhere, and then they take it to that next level and then it's just gone (Page 13, Lines 28-29)..... That shouldn't happen because they're going to make a lot of mistakes along the way, If they had their parents to talk to they wouldn't make so much mistakes and have to go through this alone, they could just tell their parents and their parents would help them through it." (Page 14, Line 19-21)*

#### **Theme 4: Recognition of Gender Inequalities**

Participants spoke of rejecting gender inequalities which they saw as cultural and not religious. Individuality is recognised and it was noted that devout participants also agreed with this Jada said;

*"It is culture! It is culture. Cos I've just noticed like when they say oh he's a boy, he can do that. I say what makes it okay if he's a boy. What makes it okay?" It doesn't say in the religion that's its okay! Well why is it okay?"*  
Page 5, Line 13-15

Participants described males as having a more liberal existence and rejecting religious values. Positioning theory explains this as the different rights and duties positioned upon males and females within the Somali community. Participants rejected this notion, yet would not physically oppose it, Sian stated;

*"That's something that we did come across when we were younger. We used to say like, how can the boys allowed to go out?" Why are they allowed to do stuff and, why have we always got to be at home and stuff like that?" Or when we do go out, why do we have to keep it hidden from you and that?" But em, it the same thing, he's in the place, I'm in the place just...both ways, religious wise it's both wrong. But to the parents they tend, as they said they tend to mix religion and culture together. Culture wise a guy's allowed to go out and girls are not."*  
Page 2, Lines 1-6

A lot of this is attributed to Family Honour which is carried through females, who are positioned into the pressure of upholding the family's status particularly to increase their potential for a good marriage. Khadija contributed;

*"In Somali culture they really judgemental; proper judgemental it's all about the families, like that families higher than that family. It's like that girl done this, so you got to do ten times better than her it's like a competition."*

*Interviewer: "How do you feel about that?"*

*Khadija: "I hate it, I don't like because what they do that's them, everyone should live their own life."*

*Page 15, Lines 18-23*

### **Theme 5: Try to Negotiate and Assert British and Somali culture with Islam**

The participants are all aiming to find ways to make the three influences work in a way which complement each other. Three features (subthemes 5a, b, and c) were found to be important in the attempt to accomplish this. They are; enhancing their knowledge of Islam, Somali and British culture. It was found that participants often referred to Somali culture as 'their parent's culture, participants were found to look to religion instead of culture to guide them (Dwyer 2000). For example Tamar said;

*"Yeah. When I was growing up, I didn't understand the culture all that much. But throughout my teenage years I couldn't turn to culture because I just...I didn't understand it, cos I'd never experienced it's something my mum would...but, so, I turned more to my religion. Cos that helped me get views and values, and morals. So I got all my morals, ideas, opinions and stuff, from my religion. And that helped me make my identity stronger, growing up, rather than culture which I really didn't have experience in."*

*Page 4, Lines 30-35*

A few participants referred to British culture as being about 'sex and drinking'. It seems important to be better informed as some females may be ascribing to a false notion of British culture, which could in fact be a media portrayal. Isabella;

*"I can't bring Islam and God with like the British culture, you know because the British culture is all about drinking and going out, there's certain things that are just different you know what I mean?"*

*Page 7, lines 6-9*

Those who had further knowledge seemed to find it easier to negotiate and assert religion and cultures. Tamar;

*"I think if you learn the best of each culture, learn the best of each one. I think it's if you pick and choose which bits you want from British culture like openness and being more tolerant. From my culture it would be I don't know talking with your mother and stuff like marriage and weddings so bringing them to Islam I think always fits in."*

*Page 13, Lines 1-4*

Participants stated that to negotiate and assert cultures with religion you need to know them well enough to decide which parts can fit in with Islam. This could be seen as repositioning themselves to gain a positive position instead of a clashing positioning of identity; they believed a strong sense of self would allow them to successfully negotiate and assert their identity. Jada;

*"I've got close mates who understand what I'm doing. Understand me. That don't pressure you and be like, oh, why aren't you?" Oh, that's so wrong, or, cos I've just distanced myself. And I've got loads of like close family and friends and everything and everyone that don't tempt me to." Page 6, Lines 17-20*

## **Analysis**

*"There are local and even idiographic implicit/explicit practices implying powers, abilities, or status levels which support ascriptions of duties; and vulnerabilities, incapacitations, social deficits, which, in turn, support rights-ascriptions and claims." Harre et al (2009)*

### **Level 1: Participants Positioning**

Participants core positioning is fundamentally within Islamic and British culture; they believe their duty is to Islam and the right to assert their identity is through British culture, found by Dwyer et al (2000), Whittaker et al (2005). Conflicts at this level come from trying to negotiate their identity within British Culture and Islam. This conflict could occur among their 'native' peers as participants find pressure and temptation in the life style of many of their British friends. Individuality is significant in this as it was found that the participants who were more devout to Islam displayed better skill in balancing religion with British culture, they could assume 'hybrid identities' Dwyer et al (2000). Participants that were less devout knowingly rebelled against Islamic teachings and ascribed more to British culture; it was evident that they positioned themselves as conflicted by this. Participants reject parts of Somali culture i.e. gender inequalities.

### **Level 2: Somali Cultures Positioning**

There are many conflicts and constraints at this level, Islam is the main element which binds participants' to their culture; firstly because Somali culture and Islam are fused (Whittaker 2005) and secondly because of teachings such as obeying your parents. What rivals this is the geographical context of the Somali community within Toxteth. As stated above by Harre et al (2009) the local context implies powers, which influence rights and duty. Within Toxteth the Somali community live and congregate within the Granby street area with its centre being the mosque. The participants described a village mentally where all are watched and everyone knows each other's affairs. As found by Whittaker et al (2005) this inhibits the freedoms of the participants and positions them into their duty of family honour Minwalla et al (2005), by their parents and community. Participants mentioned that in larger cities where the community is dispersed and unable to act as an institution, young men and women position their behaviour and identity in whatever way they wish albeit positive or negative.

Further conflict occurs as the community is not integrated with 'native' British culture. Without a full grasp of it, the publicised negative behaviours of British culture are more threatening and parents try to discourage the participants from partaking in it. However participants have to negotiate and partake in British culture in their daily discourses. This adds to parental conflicts with participants as there is a lack of



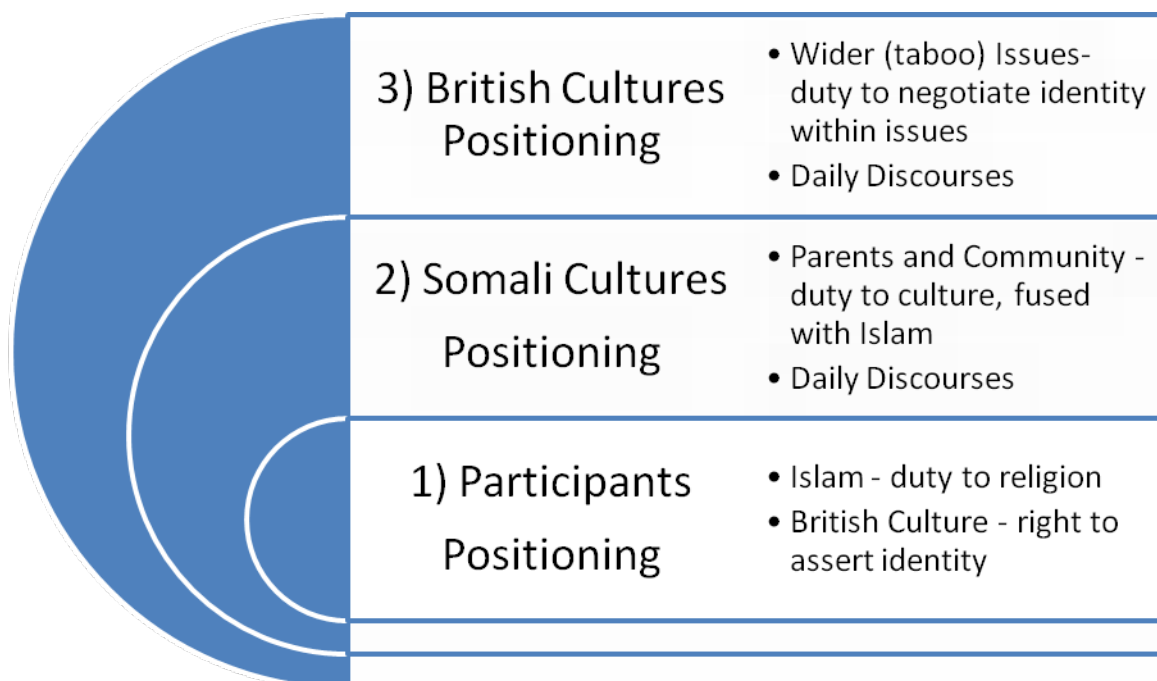
understanding of the different cultures that parents and the participants ascribe to and are integrated with.

### Level 3: British Culture Positioning

British culture is a periphery as well as core construct within participants' negotiation of identity and conflicts. The participants live and work in Britain and are inevitably surrounded by its culture. It positions not only the participants but the Somali community in conflict from a peripheral as well as core context. On a peripheral level the community is not completely informed of British culture nor integrated with it, this is the position the community took and has inevitably led to a conflict of the unknown. The British community has allowed this position of alienation and has therefore positioned it thus. This has encouraged the peripheral conflict of misunderstanding between the Somali community and British Culture.

British Culture demands integration of all its youth from primary education onwards and has socialised the participants within this and its sub-cultures. They participants have acknowledged growing up British and are therefore positioned by British culture into a conflict between the majority culture and their ethnic culture. *Figure 1* demonstrates the three levels of positioning which participants give themselves, and are positioned into by British and Somali culture.

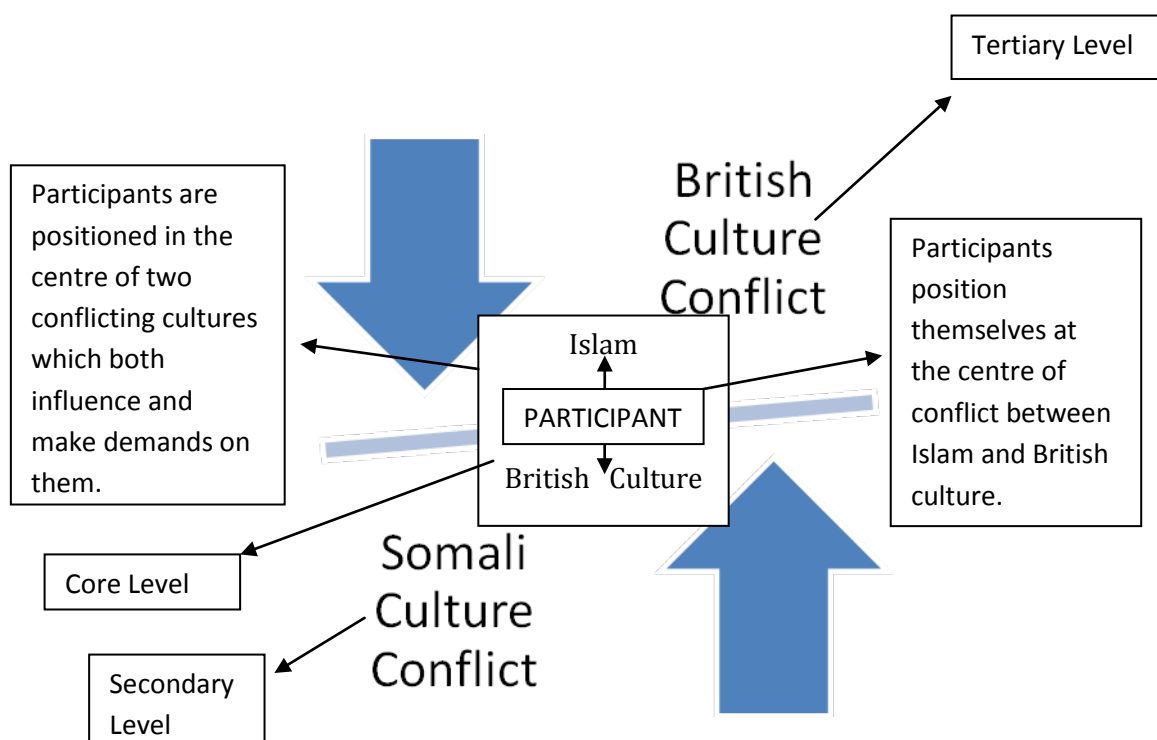
Figure 1: An illustration of the Three Levels of Conflicts and Positioning



## Sexuality

Within this conflict of positions sexuality is constructed. Each level and conflict acts to determine the position from which sexuality is understood as part of the participants' experiential being. As stated in the results sexuality is not completely comprehended by the participants and is only understood as sexual activity. This is because each conflict in British and Somali culture has positioned the participants into secrecy about their curiosity and education on this issue. Participants metaphorically speaking learn and construct their sexuality in the dark *"This positioning sits in conflict with the preferred non-sexual identity young people are offered by the official culture of many schools"* (Allen 2008). Sexuality has not been able to mature on informed knowledge and is itself, in a position of conflict with the forces which negotiate its conduct. Sexuality was used to demonstrate how identity is negotiated for the participants, Minwalla et al (2005). It can be deduced that the conflicts the participants are positioned in act to hinder the realisation of a mature sexuality and an open, flourishing identity. Figure 2 shows the conflicting relationship between the three levels of positioning.

Figure 2: Illustration showing the Relationship of Conflicts



### Storyline: Negotiating and asserting identity –

*Participants attempt to find a harmonious balance between Islam, Somali and British culture.*

## Discussion

The research has found through Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith 2004) and Positioning Theory (Harre et al 2009) that participants are positioned into a conflict of identities at three levels. At the Core Level participants position themselves into conflict between their Religion and British culture, which they mainly ascribe to. At the Secondary Level they are positioned by the Somali culture into a conflict of rights and duties which parents and the community believe they should ascribe to. The Periphery level of conflict is with British culture which clashes with Somali culture, these two levels of conflict filter down, demanding and influencing participants' impressions of their rights and duties towards identity and sexuality. At these three levels of conflict identity and sexuality are negotiated. Each level of conflict acts to inhibit the participants from comprehensively exploring the aptitude of their identity and sexuality. The potential of the participants' conscious identity is therefore obstructed by the oppressive nature of the three levels of conflict.

The reviewed research of Minwalla et al (2005), Whittaker et al (2005) and Dwyer (2000) supports the themes reported in the results section, apart from theme three which was a new finding. Theme one reported an ascription to British culture (Whittaker et al 2005), (Dwyer 2000) and the conflict which resulted from a turn from Somali culture. Minwalla et al (2005), Whittaker et al (2005) and Dwyer (2000) all reported, as found in theme four that participants use religion as a means to assert a new 'hybrid' (Whittaker et al 2005) or 'dual' (Minwalla et al (2005) identity, this is in reaction to gender inequalities which participants viewed as cultural. Theme two Secrets, Concealment and Distancing as used by Whittaker (2005) demonstrated the reaction to conflict which is prompted by ascribing to British culture. Theme five demonstrated how participants aimed to negotiate and assert their identity. The above research all stated a re-focus on Islam as key to this; participants instead stated that a thorough knowledge of each domain (British and Somali Culture, Islam) was central to a balanced identity.

This research has therefore found in addition to past research, that participants want a 'balancing act' instead of a focus purely on religion as with past research. Prompted by Minwalla et al (2005) was the third theme (*no fully informed education on taboo issues like sexuality*) Minwalla's research identified the problematic construction of sexuality and its affect on identity. The third theme looked at this in depth and its findings are supported by Minwalla (2005) and Imtoul, Hussein (2009).

The study differs from the past research as positioning theory has allowed the research to construct a narrative of the conflicts of participants and how they seek to negotiate and assert identity and sexuality through this discourse, adding strength to the study. Building on this, the methodology was similar to past research by taking a qualitative approach; semi-structured interviews yielded extremely rich data. By analysing this through IPA the study continually reflected upon the design of past study (Whittaker et al 2005), (Smith 2004).

Whittaker (2005) found how religion and culture became fused, which is supported by this study's findings. Positioning theory built on this and found the fusion of Somali culture and Islam facilitated conflict by confusing the rights and demands the

participants believe they must ascribe to. However this research focused on fewer topics than Whittaker, permitting a more in-depth content to be achieved.

Dwyer and Minwalla highlighted how identity is negotiated and the many conflicts during its construction, including sexuality. This research attempted to improve upon Dwyer's method by keeping the participants from one area, class and ethnicity. This allows the assumption of similar experiences of all participants and sets up the study for comparison with other groups. It however does limit the findings ability to be generalised, as they would only apply to working class Somali females whom live within a geographical Somali community. As with Minwalla the sample was small dictated and only willing participants were involved, this limits generalising of findings as other participants may have yielded different data. A further limitation was that only one researcher was involved, if more were involved in the analysis the findings may have been less subjective and other themes may have been recognised of higher significance. However having one interviewer who knew the participants was still an asset, as it enabled proximity and enhanced an environment where participants felt able to disclose information.

Repetition of this study would prove arduous because of the researcher's relationship to the participants. Improvements for future study could include a comparison with Somali males, or Somali females living in middle class surroundings (De Voe 2002). Also it would be interesting to measure the extent of influence of the geographical community by looking at those who live in dispersed communities, *"Yes like Liverpool is a smaller city but if you go to London they've completely forgot about the Somali culture, the Islamic culture it's just the British culture, they're just interested in that."*(Khadija, P.9, Lines 5-6), (Dwyer 2000). It could prove important to find out the exact implications of an uninformed sexuality education (Imtoul, Hussein 2009); also to see if this is prevalent among their non religious peers (Hillier, Harrison, Bowditch 1999).

## Conclusion

The research aimed to find the existence of a dual identity (Minwalla 2005) this was observed and found to be focused upon British culture and Islam in the form of a hybrid identity as named by Dwyer (2000). The research also aimed to find if familial and communal ideals were separate to those of the participants. This was found to be an affect of ascribing to a hybrid identity and a cause of contention between participants and familial/communal relationships. This conflict was observed by Minwalla 2005, Whittaker 2005, and Dwyer 2000, the research aimed to gain an in-depth grasp of this. This was achieved as the study found through positioning theory that conflict took place at three levels; each serving to obstruct the development of identity and sexuality.

The research aimed to find how sexuality influenced identity; it was found that seeking to develop sexuality caused conflicts of identity between Islam and British culture, as participants didn't know what to ascribe to. This was influenced by conflicting positions from Somali and British culture Imtoul and Hussein (2009) state *"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"*. This was found to be demonstrative of other issues of identity as participants had to down play

curiosities on many issues and assume an identity which was not fully cultivated. The research aimed to see how this was managed and found as aforementioned that participants partake in hybrid identities. Unlike the research of Dwyer, Whittaker and Minwalla, participants aim to dissolve conflicting positions within identity and assert their own hybrid identity; not by focusing purely on Islam, but by negotiating a three dimensional balance of Islam, Somali and British culture. A thorough integration of the British and Somali community would promote knowledge and understanding between conflicting cultures; this could facilitate an environment where both identity and sexuality are able to develop positively.

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