


Please cite the Published Version

Lever, John  and Ozgoren Kinli, Irem (2024) Between family and friends: honor, shame, and the politics of eating and drinking among South Asian British Muslims. In: Shame, Modesty, and Honor in Islam. Bloomsbury Publishing, London, pp. 181-196. ISBN 9781350386105 (hardback); 9781350386136 (online)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350386136.ch-011>

Publisher: Bloomsbury Publishing

Version: Published Version

Downloaded from: <https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/634669/>

Usage rights:  In Copyright

Additional Information: This is a chapter which first appeared in Shame, Modesty, and Honor in Islam, published by Bloomsbury

Enquiries:

If you have questions about this document, contact openresearch@mmu.ac.uk. Please include the URL of the record in e-space. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our Take Down policy (available from <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/library/using-the-library/policies-and-guidelines>)

Between Family and Friends: Honor, Shame, and the Politics of Eating and Drinking among South Asian British Muslims

John Lever and İrem Özgören Kinli

Introduction

The Oxford Dictionary of Islam calls attention to the diverse usage of Arabic terms for honor, which is expressed by the display of “ownership of land and resources, family solidarity, the chastity of women and the personal characteristics of courage, generosity, hospitality, independence, wisdom, honesty, self-control” and other personal qualities.¹ According to Mansoor, collective honor is regarded as more important than personal identity for South Asian British communities from Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh.² This is why family members are expected to accept their community’s values to maintain their family’s collective honor system. Weston argues that the protection of collective honor, within South Asian British communities, is considered a “central framework of social control, encouraging the masking of shameful private behaviour with a public veneer of conformity.”³ In her exploration of honor culture in this context, Metlo emphasizes the fact that Pakistani communities use the notion of *sharam* to identify shame, shyness, and modesty.⁴ In complement to this additional conceptual clarification, for Metlo, the idea of honor is best described by the terms *‘izza* (honor, prestige, respect) and *ghairat* (protection of honor, courage).⁵

In their study exploring the underlying components of an honor system composed of control, shame, and a reference community, Baker, Gregware, and Cassidy suggest that honor cannot be evaluated by reference to a person’s own behavior.⁶ Since the honor of an individual is dependent on the actions of other people, these behaviors are always being kept under control by others. Correspondingly, Mansoor asserts that honor is a relational concept, which consists of spoken and unspoken rules.⁷ Honor is described in a relative manner, and a religious person might feel ashamed because of distasteful behavior by a family or a community member. Dishonorable acts have more serious consequences for women compared to men among South Asian British Muslims, with shame being seen as an emotion that is described as a response to a sense of losing of honor. In this context, feelings of shame might appear in the case of

disapproval of certain actions or accomplishments. The main features of honor and shame are acknowledged mostly by sociocultural and familial expectations among members of the community.

According to Peristiany, honor and shame are “social evaluations.”⁸ They reflect “social ideals” since they might be considered as standards to measure representative types of personalities in a given society. All societies have their own unique forms of honor and shame. In her PhD thesis about the perception of honor among the British–Pakistani community in Watford in southern England, Metlo notes that honor serves to construct a person’s individual and communal identity.⁹ Additionally, she argues that honor helps an individual to regulate his/her own behaviors in various social contexts. For Moore, honor is generally understood with reference to community and family relations in a South Asian context.¹⁰ As a gender-related concept, it is mainly centered on male authority. Besides, the notion of female honor is constructed by both men and women. At this point in her study on Asian women in Britain, Wilson suggests that community norms reinforce women’s inferior position.¹¹ According to her, women’s lives are affected the most by these norms. A woman may have ‘*izza*, but it is usually a woman’s husband or father who owns this ‘*izza*. Moreover, Wilson argues that a woman’s ‘*izza* is the reflection of the male pride of the family.

As Shahani confirms,

Honour is ultimately seen as being men’s responsibility, while shame is viewed as being women’s “burden.” Honour is thus actively achieved, while shame is often passively defended, leading to an entirely different set of expectations for men and women. Men are expected to protect women’s honour, while women are expected to preserve it.¹²

Recently there has been an upsurge in research studies that seek to explore the lives of second- and third-generation South Asian British Muslims.¹³ Fransceschelli, for example, asserts that identity is an ambivalent and multifaceted issue among South Asian British Muslim families.¹⁴ It is claimed that their identity involves reconciliation of continuity and change, difference and closeness, between British values, South Asian cultures, and Islam. The younger generation’s identity is thus shaped, in this context, it is argued, by the negotiation of individual and family dispositions, which are accompanied by social impacts where religion, gender, cultures, and class all play a role.

Islam has developed its own distinctive practices and local forms in different parts of the world. In his analysis of production of Islamic knowledge, van Bruinessen argues that diasporic communities constituted by Muslim communities of Western Europe maintain diverse kinds of relations with their countries of origin and with similar communities in other countries.¹⁵ Given the vast diversity of Islamic understandings around the world, we focus solely on South Asian British Muslims’ interpretation of Muslim practices in the United Kingdom. Drawing on empirical material from studies of halal food consumption and practice in Manchester in the north of England, we look to insights from figurational sociology to explore the complex networks of social

and cultural interdependence through which second- and third-generation South Asian British Muslims encounter the prism of honor–shame culture.

Interviews were conducted over a five-year period in consecutive research projects. In general, we asked questions about halal consumption and practice, and while most interviewees talked about the politics of eating and drinking in their communities, a small number also spoke more specifically about honor and shame culture. It is this smaller group that we draw on in this chapter, all of whom have been interviewed more than once. Focusing on changes in the threshold of shame and honor in their everyday lives, we draw on some key figurational concepts to explore to what extent family honor as an “external social control” and shame as an “internal control” have on the “we-I balance,” and on levels of awareness and self-control among South Asian British Muslims. This allows us to explore how South Asian men and women attempt to handle shame and maintain family honor in complex cultural settings where they may be presented with opportunities to consume non-halal food and drinks containing alcohol. The chapter proceeds by initially exploring some of the key figurational concepts that we draw on, before turning to our empirical insights. We conclude with some reflections on our relational figurational analysis for wider understandings of shame and honor culture among South Asian British Muslims.

Insights from Figurational Sociology

According to Norbert Elias, social life should be envisioned as a network of interweaving and interdependent social relationships, which he refers to as figurations. Individuals do not exist independently of figurations, nor do figurations exist independently of individuals. The dynamic and ever-changing nature of figurations is characterized by ever-changing, asymmetrical relations of power, which function as a “structural characteristic of the flow of every figuration.”¹⁶ In this context, Elias uses the notion of the We–I balance to explore shifting relations between personal identity and group identity using personal pronouns “I,” “you,” “we,” “they” as a figurational model.¹⁷ These pronouns are functional and relational: “I” can only be understood with reference to all other positions to which “you,” “we,” “they” signify.

For Elias,

One’s sense of personal identity is closely connected with the “we” and “they” relationships of one’s group, and with one’s position within those units of which one speaks as “we” and “they.” Yet the pronouns do not always refer to the same people. The figurations to which they currently refer can change in the course of a lifetime, just as any person does himself.¹⁸

In this respect, we-groups, such as local communities, kinship groups or families provide security and receive support if required, while more complicated levels of integration “favour individualization” and “greater emphasis on the I-identity of the individual person, and the detachment of that person from the traditional groupings.”¹⁹

Evolution from an earlier phase of development to a more complicated level of integration is also evident in a long-term shift within increasingly complex figurational settings, in the balance between external social constraints (control by other people and external institutions) and internal self-restraints (control by oneself). Elias treats evolving fears of personal shame and embarrassment by demonstrating how self-control is related to embarrassment. As people become more tightly bound to each other, they develop greater degrees of self-discipline and increasing aversion to certain aspects of human behavior.²⁰ The feeling of shame, according to Elias, is “a kind of anxiety which is automatically reproduced in the individual on certain occasions by force of habit” in line with the violation of group rules and norms with which one may identify.²¹ Since perceptions of South Asian shame and honor are closely tied to one’s family, kinship group, or local community, we argue, in this chapter, that concepts of shame and honor among South Asian British Muslims are defined by changing figurational relations between I and We groups. This approach, as we shall see, provides useful insights into the ways in which South Asian men and women attempt to maintain family honor and deal with shame in complex figurational settings in Manchester in the north of England, where the politics of halal food and alcohol can facilitate complex social relations within families and the wider community.

The Politics of Food and Drink in South Asian Communities

In Arabic, the word *halal* literally means “permissible” or “lawful,” and in relation to food, it signifies “purity” and is protected by certain Islamic principles, most notably the avoidance of pork and alcohol; there are also important considerations about the slaughter of animals for food.²² In what follows, drawing on the experiences of a small number of second and third generation Pakistani Muslims living and working in South Manchester, we illustrate the complex cultural contradictions South Asian men and women encounter negotiating the politics of eating and drinking.

Imran is around forty years old, and he grew up in Whalley Range in central Manchester. Married with three children, he is employed as a community worker in a multicultural inner-city neighborhood. We spoke with Imran twice during our research, once in 2017 and again a few years later. Although he was brought up in a Muslim household of Pakistani origin, where eating halal food and the avoidance of alcohol were very important, Imran admits that he is not as strict as his parents about what his own children eat. Although their eating habits attract attention, Imran allows his children to eat whatever they want to eat, although he recognizes this can be difficult. He also emphasizes the need to take account of the prevalence of alcohol consumption, and the religious implications of being drunk and intoxicated vis-à-vis using alcohol for other useful purposes (in medication, for example).

Imran often drinks alcohol, and he likes to eat a wide variety of cuisines, particularly if some of his less religiously strict friends visit the house. Things are completely different with his extended family and their friends, however, as Imran confirms:

If say, for instance, I have my Mum over or my friends, I'll make sure all the food's halal. So there's no alcohol there, it's all halal.

As may be observed by this statement, Imran's Pakistani origin parents and community, as his *we-group*, impose a strict form of social control by relating halal eating and drinking practices to the protection of family honor. This can be tricky, and Imran is aware that he treads a fine line maintaining the honor of the family on many social occasions.

This manifests itself in different ways. When the children of his more strictly religious friends come to the house to play with his children, they often express concerns about what food their children may be offered, but Imran says that he always respects their wishes and doesn't give the children anything not considered halal. Imran is well aware of the pressure to conform with Pakistani culture, but he also admits that his upbringing and working life in multicultural Manchester has presented challenges, and that while "you don't have to conform ... you know there is peer pressure."

Imran clearly feels the responsibility of maintaining family honor, yet throughout his life in the balance has moved away from an overarching focus on the "*we-identity*" of his South Asian family and community toward the *individualized* life encouraged in England, and he attempts to manage the tensions involved the best he can. His individualistic life patterns within Manchester to some extent release him from some of the mechanisms of social control within the South Asian British Muslim community and the *we-feeling* with whom the majority identify. Some of the women in our study had similar experiences, although in slightly more nuanced ways, as we shall see.

Rabia is a single British Pakistani woman aged thirty-seven; she is also bisexual. Originally from Leicester, she completed a degree in the History of Art at the University of Birmingham before moving to Manchester about ten years ago. We spoke with her once in 2017 and again in 2021. For most of this time, Rabia has worked in catering, including a long period as a waitress in a multicultural café in south Manchester (which served halal food) and latterly, in the past few years, at a Michelin Star restaurant outside the city (that did not).

The move to the restaurant appears to have coincided with Rabia developing a less strict attitude toward food and drink. While in her previous job in the multicultural café, Rabia would only eat halal meat, in her new role, she suddenly found herself encountering non-halal food more regularly and being encouraged to try it by new colleagues and friends. She admits that this was initially disconcerting and that over time this influenced her in different ways. Surrounded by lots of new and interesting foods and flavors, Rabia admits that she soon came to think and feel she was missing out.

Rabia talked openly about how, as she eventually succumbed and tried a "non-halal burger," she was really proud of herself, not least because it tasted so good. This in turn had a more profound impact on her life, and she admits that she became more relaxed about going out and frequenting different types of restaurants. She explained the wider change in her outlook in the following way:

I think it's made it a little bit easier ... going into restaurants and stuff cos sometimes I just don't wanna be that person that's, kind of like, oh, is that halal? Do you know

what I mean? Not to say ... that's a bad thing ... But I think it's just a bit more laid back ... more personal choice and I wanna try that food.

Rabia now believes that her own individual tastes should determine what to eat, rather than the wider community culture or religion. The process through which she has become detached from her Muslim we-group, we could say, and more integrated into British culture has led to a greater emphasis on Rabia's individuality and less shame in relation to the violation of Islamic food and drink principles. The fact that Rabia still has the tendency not to consume non-halal food and drink in the presence of her community might be evaluated as an illustration that she used to feel shame when violating community principles.

Rida, another young woman of Indian/Pakistani heritage in her twenties, related similar experiences when eating out. Although she did not talk directly about shame and honor, when we spoke with Rida in 2017, she stated that when she socializes with her non-Muslim friends, she only eats fish or vegetarian options, thus reducing the possibility of shaming herself and violating community honor. Indeed, restaurants present particular difficulties for Muslims. In the context of a globalizing halal food market, where halal food is often available alongside non-halal food on the same restaurant menus, Lever argues that power and status of differentials²³ between established social and cultural groups and those classed as outsiders can decline rapidly, thus leading to unintended social and cultural consequences for those involved.²⁴

While Rabia admits that she now eats non-halal meat regularly, she says that she draws the line at eating pork. Eating pork is totally prohibited in Islam, as outlined in the Qur'an in various places. Beyond that, the Qur'an does not explain further or give any other reasons for the prohibition of pork. There were, however, negative attitudes toward pigs and pork before the advent of Islam, and scholars have argued that it was Jewish law that inspired the Prophet Mohammad to ban the flesh of pigs, which in effect distinguished Muslims from their Christian adversaries.²⁵ This absolute prohibition, which is learned and internalized from childhood, is usually ingrained among Muslim adults, and unlike alcohol, pork has alternatives. Thus, the avoidance of eating pork among Muslims seems to be a distinctive measure of being Muslim, a source of distinction compared to other religious identities. Compared to other food restrictions, we could argue that the prohibition on pork appears to be transformed into a visible self-control rather than an external social control.

Rabia's attitude toward food in general seems to be related to what is practical at a particular time and place, at particular moments in her life. Around her friends in Manchester, she can be open, but around her family and in her home community in Leicester, this is more difficult, and it appears that many things remain unsaid. At times, Rabia justifies her everyday practice by stating that she doesn't feel the need to openly express the way she leads her life when she's in Leicester: "I'm just saying the fact that I eat non halal, but it's nothing for me to shout about." This quotation demonstrates that the transgression to non-halal eating and drinking practices might escalate both feelings of shame for the individual and be perceived as a threat to community honor. At times, it appears that Rabia feels like an "outsider" in Leicester:

I think sometimes culturally ... when I come to Leicester and I visit people and sometimes even with my siblings or people like friends and family and stuff like that, sometimes I'm just a bit like, you know, it's this separate world a bit sometimes, culturally.

Rabia explains this double life usefully when comparing attitudes toward alcohol at the family home in Leicester with her new lifestyle in Manchester:

You wouldn't really touch on it [in Leicester] cos it's not in our culture. It's not part of our everyday life ... Whereas when I go back to Manchester ... It's different ... if I have ... a long time at home [in Leicester] I'd be ... bursting to go over and have a pint with my mates ... because ... I've kind of adopted a different kind of lifestyle.

In small groups in private spaces, away from the family home and the South Asian British community, Rabia is more at ease challenging or moving beyond tradition. It should also be noted here that the consumption of alcohol has never been a rare phenomenon among Muslims despite its formal religious prohibition.²⁶ It also seems that drinking alcoholic beverages does not generate the same degree of self-control and self-discipline that is observed in the case of eating pork products. This is why, perhaps, alcohol use in private gatherings is not accompanied by feelings of embarrassment, while it is accompanied by feelings of shame and honor in the presence of others who might impose external control.

Rabia expresses some interesting reflections on gender, particularly to the way she was treated in relation to her brother growing up. She recalls how her older brother often went nightclubbing when he was quite young in places that served alcoholic beverages and how he came home late at night without informing his parents. Rabia notes that this was much more difficult for her because she was female:

It was obvious what he was doing ... you know, he didn't ask my parents or anything like that, he just did his own thing so that was fine. Whereas with me, it was ... not acceptable.

Rabia also discusses numerous male friends who date non-Muslim women without disclosing these relationships. Recalling a discussion with a male friend about their dual lives, Rabia noted how, although her friend was comfortable hiding his non-Muslim wife from his family over many years, he was very uncomfortable with Rabia's suggestion that her sexuality doesn't hinder her faith. As she noted,

I was having a conversation with him a couple of weeks ago and he was so uncomfortable with ... me saying what I like about my religion.

There is an interesting tension at play here, related to shame and honor, through which having a double life seems to be more acceptable, or justifiable, particularly for men, if the nonreligious aspects of life are not mixed with the religious. Men, it

appears, are much less willing than women to connect and discuss the religious and the nonreligious aspects of their everyday lives.

Shamana is a single British Pakistani woman aged forty-three, who was born and raised in Manchester. Again, we spoke with her twice, once during 2019 and again in 2020. While she seems closer to British culture, it appears that Shamana doesn't want to call herself British, and perhaps more than Imran and Rabia, she has a dual identity that oscillates between Pakistani and British culture. When she was younger, Pakistani culture influenced Shamana greatly, as she pointed out:

Growing up I only ever ate halal food, particularly in the household. And even when I broke the rules by drinking and smoking, eating halal food was the one rule I never broke.

Most of the Pakistani Muslim friends she attended school and college with are still like this, Shamana suggests, whether they are devout, strictly or moderately religious, and most will still only eat halal food. They might drink, they might smoke, they might do all sorts of other things they shouldn't do, but for most, the requirement to eat halal food is the single most important rule they won't break.

Things changed for Shamana, it appears, when she started high school, which involved instant immersion into Manchester's wider multicultural communities. Shamana remembers the time fondly:

I remember my primary school was all Asian, there was like one white individual and one black individual, all literally ... Pakistani. And then when I went to high school it was mixed. I remember liking that mixed, you know.

This was a life-changing experience that slowly started to pull Shamana away from Pakistani culture. Things intensified when she traveled abroad for the first time. First of all, she started eating non-halal food, but drew the line at eating pork. A few years later, this changed when she started eating bacon. She now also smokes (cigarettes and cannabis) and drinks alcohol, all of which she describes as a process: "It was a change. It was a process."

Interestingly, while Shamana believes that there are other Pakistanis living similar lifestyles, she suggests that most either keep it to themselves, don't talk about it, or don't socialize with others living in this way. She elaborates,

I'm not a practising Muslim, as in ... devout or anything, but I've not met another ... that eats pork, and I'm sure they exist, or if they do, they just don't talk about it.

This demonstrates that "outsiders" tend to be invisible, although as we shall see, this invisibility appears to manifest itself in different ways in different social contexts and to have different reactions among different family members and social groups in relation to eating and drinking practices. Moreover, it could be argued that avoidance of haram behavior in the presence of another Muslim signifies a type of external control among South Asian British Muslims, which helps to solidify Muslim identity as we-identity by

the protection of family honor. The consumption of haram (non-halal [not permitted]) food and drink while being away from Muslim communities does not create a sense of shame in that person, whose I-identity matters more than his or her We-identity. In such cases, when the We-I balance tilts toward the I-identity, it could be claimed that abstention from *haram* eating and drinking does not transform from external constraints to internal self-control.

While alcohol is strictly forbidden, Shamana suggests that attitudes are more relaxed about alcohol than they are about pork, and in general, she seems more relaxed about alcohol consumption, even though she now eats pork. This is not the same for everyone, however, and Shamana recalls an interesting story about drinking alcohol along with her brother-in-law. Shamana admits that she likes it when her brother-in-law visits *because* they can go to a pub (a Public House, which is licensed to sell alcohol) together, which is unusual in the family. What she finds strange, however, is his attitude toward these trips, which he likes to hide from his wife:

When he comes and drinks, he says don't tell your sister. I was like, my sister knows I drink. He says, yeah, but your sister wouldn't like me drinking and I'm like, what the hell! That doesn't even make sense ... Very strange.

Shamana believes that in general Pakistani men get away with much more than women in Pakistani culture, and it is her attitude to this fact, in some way, that makes her who she is. This discrepancy is probably related to different gender role expectations and social control for men and women that are widely recognized by Muslim communities. As can be seen, the failure to abstain from unlawful eating and drinking, perceived as a dishonorable act, results in dissimilar outcomes for each gender and imposes distinct sanctions.

Shamana argues that she would not have been vilified to the extent she has been growing up if she had been a boy. She notes that although her brother married a white Irish Protestant girl, when her father visits the brother's house, he still hides certain things to make himself feel better about marrying a non-Muslim, which Shamana feels is ingrained cultural behavior. Shamana argues that such behavior is also common among her married friends:

They all hide it. Some of their wives know that they drink and stuff, but they hide it from their parents, definitely. Whereas I just think that's a bit pointless at this point.

Shamana has difficulty explaining why spouses prefer to hide their consumption of pork and alcohol, even though their non-halal eating and drinking practices are already known by their partners. She has the tendency to interpret her eating and drinking practices as individual decisions, which are influenced by a variety of personal factors. These individual peculiarities might be the reasons why her choices are significantly different from dominant patterns. Yet from a community perspective, family members are expected to conform to community values for the maintenance of collective honor. Drinking alcohol and eating *haram* food should be treated, for the Muslim

community, as an assault on collective honor. It is possible to argue, however, that for South Asian British Muslims, when it appears a potential threat against the value system of family members, protection of collective honor would be more significant than self-expression of their personal identity. Therefore, family members and parents encourage a kind of social control by imposing Muslim eating and drinking standards and restrictions to maintain this collective honor system.

Things are different again across her extended family, however, where these issues can be much more complex and controversial. Shamana provides numerous examples. One involves an uncle that no one speaks to anymore because he thinks the family live a haram lifestyle. She also recounts a recent incident when a religiously strict aunt visited the family home and started looking through cupboards in the kitchen for haram food items:

My aunty, she was saying it was pretty much dishonourable, that it was wrong to have that [product] in my house, and it was wrong to give that to my nieces and nephews.

Shamana reacted strongly when her aunt started disposing of certain products in the rubbish bin, suggesting that she had gone too far.

Compared to Imran and Rabia, Shamana seems more confident and is clearly tilted more toward the I-identity on the We-I balance. At the same time, however, it appears that she also wants to hide some of her activities or at least not speak about them. Most people are like this most of the time, she suggests, with people obeying rules to prevent quarrels or conflict. Obeying halal practices seems to be considered an honorable practice in this Muslim community, even if they are more secular than religious; not obeying halal practices seems to be accepted as a dishonorable practice.

Saeed moved to the UK from Bangladesh over forty-six years ago as a young child. He is married with three children and lives in Longsight in South Manchester. We spoke with him twice, once in 2017 and again more recently. Saeed now works for a Muslim charity, although he previously worked as an academic researcher specializing in Islamic issues. For Saeed, ideas about food and drink lie at the heart of his identity, but he points out that he also has other layers that are informed by his ethnicity, his childhood experiences, and his encounter with the British education system through which he was integrated into British culture.

Saeed is quite critical of the industrialization of halal food. While it has become widely available through an ongoing process of commercialization during his lifetime, he thinks that this expansion has disturbed many Muslims. This has led to concerns, he believes, about whether food sold as halal is halal. Consequently, while some people, including his daughter, have adopted vegetarian diets to avoid the implications of eating non-halal meat, others, as we have seen above, have been compelled to try a variety of new cuisines. Saeed makes some interesting observations about the extent to which South Asian British Muslims avoid shame and dishonor in this changing cultural context. Although younger generations, particularly millennials, are more open about drinking alcohol, he suggests that not so long ago,

there was a time when people, if they wanted to do that kind of stuff, the naughty stuff or taboo stuff, they'd do it quietly indoors or out of sight, it wasn't or publicly socially acceptable just didn't do that.

Today things are different, Saeed suggests, and he notes that many of the people he grew up with in a mixed South Asian (Bangladeshi and Pakistani) community now go to great lengths to rationalize their nonreligious behavior. These people, he argues, engage in a kind of "spiritual balancing act" through which they put particular aspects of their faith into "some kind of abeyance" in the belief that they can make it up later in life.

This is an interesting observation, which demonstrates how religion, culture, and daily life intersect to determine not only eating and drinking choices, but many other everyday practices for South Asian British Muslims. Saeed argues that while subtle cultural differences exist, there is no real difference between Bengalis, Pakistanis, or any other South Asian group when it comes to such things and that, ultimately, this kind of behavior is

a negotiated personalised secularisation, or a form of formal secularism if you like, a compartmentalization of your faith from your everyday life.

Saeed's observations might reveal the fact that the less a person identifies with his/her Muslim community, the less he/she feels pressure to follow halal eating for the sake of protection of community honor. Eating vegetarian due to concerns about whether food sold is actually halal might be interpreted as internal self-control helping to solidify his I-identity for the protection of self-honor. The more he/she appears to follow internal self-controls to conform to religious rules, the more abstention from *haram* eating, we could argue, appears to be related to his/her I-identity.

It is worth stressing again that nonconformity to Islamic dietary laws is characterized as unpleasant behavior, which makes Muslims ashamed not only of their own behaviors, but also those of their family or community members. Special mention should be made here to the figurational sociology perspective that emphasizes the interdependency between individual identity and community identity. It is also worth mentioning the figurational concept of *compartmentalization* at this juncture, which highlights (alongside their interdependence) the psychological, social, and spatial separation of individuals and groups within contemporary societies.²⁷ Among South Asian British Muslims, we contend, honor is thus relatively described in terms of the practices of other Muslims in their close circle. Thus, it is possible to argue that the relationship between identities is relational among South Asian British Muslims, a situation in which their personal identity might be better understood in most cases with reference to their Muslim identity.

It is interesting to note, and perhaps not surprising, that our interviewees might express a personally flexible attitude toward disobeying some halal food practices when differentiating themselves from their community members. Following halal codes in their food and drinking choices, specifically in a community context, thus demonstrates that South Asian British Muslims sometimes make these decisions by

negotiating the competing demands of the public and private sphere. While they may eat non-halal food and drink alcohol in social gatherings away from the eyes of their Muslim community, when socializing at restaurants where *haram* food and drinks are served in the midst of complex cultural gatherings, they may experience an acute sense of embarrassment.

Concluding Thoughts

From the standpoint of figurational sociology, the politics of eating and drinking among South Asian British Muslims seems to be closely linked to their identification with We-groups and the question of I-identity. The more they identify with their Muslim community, the more they feel pressure to follow halal eating and drinking practices and the more they appear to follow external social controls in relations with those who violate religious rules and cultural norms. As we have seen, men are entitled to hold responsibility for the protection of collective honor, while women encounter more serious consequences.

Adherence to religion and Islamic communities clearly determines the everyday eating and drinking practices of second- and third-generation South Asian British Muslims to a lesser or greater extent. Indeed, the more they socialize with people from other cultures and religions, and the more they become detached from their family and community, the less anxiety and shame they feel when indulging in haram eating and drinking practices. Taken together, these findings help to support the conclusion that food plays an important role in the formation and maintenance of religious identities. In the introduction to his book on the physiology of taste, or meditations of transcendent gastronomy, Brillat-Savarin wrote a series of aphorisms, one of which became popular: “Dis-moi ce que tu manges, je te dirai ce que tu es.” [Tell me what you eat, I’ll tell you what you are.]²⁸ Looking to Brillat-Savarin, we conclude that “What and why we do not eat and drink, might also define who we are”!

Notes

1. John L. Esposito, ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 117.
2. Nasreen Mansoor, “Exploring honour and shame for South Asian British Muslim men and women,” (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 2017), 52–3.
3. Henry Jeffray Weston, “Public Honour, Private Shame and HIV: Issues Affecting Sexual Health Service Delivery in London’s South Asian Communities,” *Health & Place* 9, no. 2 (2003), 112.
4. Zubaida Metlo, “The Perception of Honour among the British-Pakistani Community in Watford, United Kingdom” (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2012), 27.
5. *Ibid.*, 46.
6. Nancy V. Baker, Peter R. Gregware, and Margery A. Cassidy, “Family Killing Fields: Honor Rationales in the Murder of Women,” *Violence Against Women* 5, no. 2 (February 1999), 165.

7. Nasreen Mansoor, "Honour and Shame. Through the Eyes of South Asian British Muslim Women and Men," in *Photography in Educational Research. Critical reflections from diverse contexts*, edited by Susie Miles and Andy Howes (London: Routledge, 2015), 209.
8. John George Peristiany, ed. *Honour and Shame. The Values of Mediterranean Society* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965), 9–10.
9. Metlo, "The Perception of Honour," 34.
10. Erin Patrice Moore, "Honor: South Asia," in *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures. Volume II. Family, Law and Politics*, edited by Suad Joseph (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 216.
11. Amrit Wilson, *Finding a Voice: Asian Women in Britain*, (London: Virago, 1978), 5.
12. Lila Ramos Shahani, "A Question Of Izzat: Honor, Shame and Ownership among Sunni Muslims in South Asia and the British Diaspora," *Kritika Kultura* 21, 22 (2013), 7.
13. Harriet Becher, *Family Practices in South Asian Muslim Families* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Michela Franceschelli, "South Asian young British Muslims: Identity, habitus and the family field" (PhD diss., University of East Anglia, 2013); Michela Franceschelli and Margaret O'Brien, "‘Being Modern and Modest’: South Asian Young British Muslims Negotiating Multiple Influences on Their Identity," *Ethnicities* 15, no. 5 (October 2015), 696–714.
14. Michela Franceschelli, *Identity and Upbringing in South Asian Muslim Families. Insights from Young People and their Parents in Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 241–2.
15. Martin van Bruinessen, "Producing Islamic Knowledge in Western Europe: Discipline, Authority, and Personal Quest," in *Producing Islamic Knowledge: Transmission and Dissemination in Western Europe*, edited by Martin van Bruinessen and Stefano Allievi (New York: Routledge, 2011), 1–27.
16. Norbert Elias, *What is Sociology?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 131.
17. Norbert Elias, *The Society of Individuals* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 153–237.
18. Elias, *What Is Sociology?*, 128.
19. Elias, *The Society of Individuals*, 179.
20. Norbert Elias, "On the Process of Civilisation," in *The Collected Works of Norbert Elias. Volume III*, edited by Stephen Mennell, Eric Dunning, Johan Goudsblom, and Richard Kilminster (Dublin: UCD Press, 2012).
21. *Ibid.*, 457.
22. John Lever and Johan Fischer, *Religion, Regulation, Consumption: Globalising Kosher and Halal Markets* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018); Febe Armanios and Bogac Ergene, *Halal Food: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
23. Cas Wouters, *Informalisation: Manners & Emotions since 1890* (London: Sage, 2008).
24. John Lever, "Understanding Halal Food Production and Consumption in 'the West'. Beyond Dominant Narrative," *Cambio. Rivista sulle trasformazioni sociali* 9, no. 19 (October 2020), 89–102.
25. Frederick J. Simoons, *Eat Not This Flesh: Food Avoidances from Prehistory to the Present* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 33.
26. Laurence Michalak and Karen Trocki, "Alcohol and Islam: An Overview," *Contemporary Drug Problems* 33, no. 4 (December 2006), 534–9.
27. John Lever, Ryan J. Powell, R., "Problems of Involvement and Detachment: Norbert Elias and the Investigation of Contemporary Social Process- es. *Human Figurations. Long-Term Perspectives in Human Condition*, 6, no. 2 (2017)..

28. Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *Physiologie du goût, ou Méditations de gastronomie transcendante* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1867), 1.

Bibliography

- Armanios, Febe, and Ergene Bogac. *Halal Food: A History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Baker, Nancy V., Gregware Peter R., and Cassidy Margery A. "Family Killing Fields: Honor Rationales in the Murder of Women." *Violence Against Women* 5, no. 2 (February 1999): 164–84.
- Becher, Harriet. *Family Practices in South Asian Muslim Families*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Bruinessen, Martin van. "Producing Islamic Knowledge in Western Europe: Discipline, Authority, and Personal Quest." In *Producing Islamic Knowledge: Transmission and Dissemination in Western Europe*. Edited by Martin van Bruinessen and Stefano Allievi, 1–27. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Elias, Norbert. *What Is Sociology?* New York: Columbia University Press, 1978.
- Elias, Norbert. *The Society of Individuals*. New York: Continuum, 2001.
- Elias, Norbert. "On the Process of Civilisation." In *The Collected Works of Norbert Elias. Volume III*. Edited by Stephen Mennell, Eric Dunning, Johan Goudsblom, and Richard Kilminster. Dublin: UCD Press, 2012.
- Esposito, John L. (ed.). *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Franceschelli, Michela. "South Asian Young British Muslims: Identity, Habitus and the Family Field." PhD diss., University of East Anglia, 2013.
- Franceschelli Michela, O'Brien Margaret. " 'Being Modern and Modest': South Asian Young British Muslims Negotiating Multiple Influences on Their Identity." *Ethnicities* 15, no. 5 (2015): 696–714.
- Franceschelli, Michela. *Identity and Upbringing in South Asian Muslim Families. Insights from Young People and Their Parents in Britain*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- Lever John, Fischer Johan. *Religion, Regulation, Consumption: Globalising Kosher and Halal Markets*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018.
- Lever, John. "Understanding Halal Food Production and Consumption in 'the West'. Beyond Dominant Narrative." *Cambio. Rivista sulle trasformazioni sociali* 9, no. 19 (2020): 89–102.
- Mansoor, Nasreen. "Honour and Shame: Through the Eyes of South Asian British Muslim Women and Men." In *Photography in Educational Research: Critical Reflections from Diverse Contexts*. Edited by Susie Miles and Andy Howes, 208–23. London: Routledge, 2015.
- Mansoor, Nasreen. "Exploring honour and shame for South Asian British Muslim men and women." PhD diss., University of Manchester, 2017.
- Metlo, Zubaida. "The Perception of Honour among the British-Pakistani Community in Watford, United Kingdom." PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2012.
- Michalak Laurence, Trocki Karen. "Alcohol and Islam: An Overview." *Contemporary Drug Problems* 33, no. 4 (2006): 523–62.
- Moore, Erin Patrice. "Honor: South Asia." In *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures. Volume II. Family, Law and Politics*. Edited by Suad Joseph, 216–18. Leiden: Brill, 2005.

- Peristiany, John George, (ed.). *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965.
- Shahani, Lila Ramos. "A Question of izzat: Honor, Shame and Ownership among Sunni Muslims in South Asia and the British Diaspora." *Kritika Kultura*, no. 21/22 (2013): 1–11.
- Simoons, Frederick J. *Eat Not This Flesh: Food Avoidances from Prehistory to the Present*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994.
- Weston, Henry Jeffray. "Public Honour, Private Shame and HIV: Issues Affecting Sexual Health Service Delivery in London's South Asian Communities." *Health & Place* 9, no. 2 (2003):109–17.
- Wilson, Amrit. *Finding a Voice: Asian Women in Britain*. London: Virago, 1978.
- Wouters, Cas. *Informalisation: Manners & Emotions since 1890*. London: Sage, 2008.