

Identity, religion, and clothing: The lives of British Muslim women

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Abstract

The continuing discourse around Muslim women's bodies has predominately occupied itself with ideas of 'traditional' Islamic dress such as the Hijab, Burka, and the Niqab. Rarely has the image of the Muslim woman moved away from these popular discourses to show the various other forms of dress worn by British Muslim women. Whilst acknowledging that traditional Islamic dress may be useful in understanding the lives of some British Muslim women, it isolates the experiences of Muslim women who may not use 'traditional' Islamic dress. This thesis focuses on interrogating concepts of 'choice' and 'negotiation' through dress in order to understand how Muslim women experience everyday interaction, and how this then impacts on their notion of self and identity construction. This thesis draws on literature and theoretical contributions around Black feminism, particularly Intersectionality, and Islamic feminism as a tool to locate and understand the Muslim women's identity through the use of dress. The aim of the thesis is to understand how Muslim women make choices about their clothing. It seeks to examine the meanings attached to clothing as expressions of self-identity, especially in relation to religion and gender. In addition, it aims to understand the identity negotiation processes that Muslim women embark on in response to anti-Muslim hate. This thesis uses a qualitative research approach to investigate the aims and objectives using three focus groups and eight semi-structured interviews. This thesis also demonstrates how application of intersectionality both theoretically, and as a methodological tool could be useful for researching Muslim women in order to provide an avenue for them to discuss their own lives, in their own ways and in their own terms. As research around #MosqueMeToo is still emerging, this study is one of the first to emerge with discussions from British Muslim women that openly discuss their views. This research validates the lived experiences of anti-Muslim hate for British Muslim women who are both veiled and non-veiled in the current socio-political climate.

Glossary of terms and definitions

Veiling practices of Muslim women (as can be seen illustrated below) are varied and the images are just an example of some of the dresses this thesis refers to. Although there are many more forms and versions of dress that are practiced, the image (below) can be used as a guidance to show the use of the terms in which they are referred to in this thesis.

Figure 1 (Faye 2016, online): Muslim women and different styles of veiling:



Dupatta – Long piece of cloth worn by women specifically in South Asian culture. It is used by draping over shoulders or chest and/or over the head as a veil.

Hayaa – Used in context of modesty, self-respect, shyness, and shame. It is the discouragement or avoidance of doing anything that is deemed to be 'bad' or 'forbidden'.

Inshallah – God willing, or if God wills it. Very commonly used as an expression much like 'hopefully'.

Izzat – This term is used in by South Asian culture to address issues around maintaining 'honour', 'prestige' or the reputations of the individual or community.

Madrasah – Learning school for the recitation of the Quran usually set within Mosques or homes

Mashallah – God has willed it. Used in praising, thanking, or expressing joy or to show appreciation

Maulana Saab – Name given to respected religious leaders in religious institutions who are either scholars of religion or teach reciting of the Quran

Namaaz – Daily prayer ritual prayers observed five times a day. In Arabic it is referred to as *Salah*

Sabak – Translated as ‘teaching a lesson’ or use in terms of homework set in the recitation of the Quran

Shalwar Kameez – Loose pleated trousers (shalwar) worn typically by South Asians with a long shirt (kameez) also with a dupatta (see above)

Sharam – Translated as ‘Abashment’, to do with shyness, shame, or the feeling of embarrassment

1. Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background context

There are presently 1.8 billion Muslims¹ (24% of the total world population) across the world. The biggest demographic living in the Asia-Pacific region in countries like India, Malaysia, Pakistan and the largest in Indonesia. As a religion Islam ‘...has embedded itself in six distinct linguistic and geographical zones; Arabs, Black African, Persian, Turkic, South Asian and Malay...’ (Lewis, 2007, p. 2). The diversity amongst the Muslim community worldwide shows the ‘...multiplicity of identities, stories, ethnicities and migration histories ...’ (Lewis, 2007, p. 1) contained within this population group. The Muslim population is also diverse in terms of differing religious sects, practices, and beliefs of which the largest two are ‘Sunni’ and ‘Shia’. The current population of Muslims in Britain stands at 3.3 million (5.1% of total population) the second largest religious group after Christianity (Office for National Statistics 2018 Census). The multiplicity of the global Muslim population is reflected in the growing numbers of British Muslims who come from a diverse range of communities and ethnicities who call Britain their home.

To add to this, Britain also has varied historical migrations from a range of countries with some settlers arriving from previously colonised lands i.e. India/Pakistan while others arrived from countries such as Turkey, which was once seen as a great powers themselves (Lewis, 2007, pp. 2-4). The British Muslim population also includes British converts to Islam who are ‘new’ to the religion, or others who are either second or third generation Muslim. Bearing all this in mind, we can understand why the various relationships and attitudes to matters in everyday life may differ (due to the historical demographics of the

¹ According to Pew Research Centre 2015 estimate stats available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/09/muslims-and-islam-key-findings-in-the-u-s-and-around-the-world/#:~:text=There%20were%201.8%20billion%20Muslims,the%20fastest%2Dgrowing%20major%20religion>.

Muslim populations in Britain). For many Muslims, Islam is either implemented in their everyday lives or culturally practiced but may also be seen as a ‘new’ way of life for some. We, therefore, need to recognise that there is no singular relationship between British Muslims and the West (Lewis, 2007, p. 1).

On the contrary, in the West, Muslims are often seen and reported as a homogenous group, in which their identities are historically and regionally stripped, and instead they are only seen through the religious lens (Ahmad and Sardar, 2012, pp. 3-4). What is meant by this is that Muslims are only seen as belonging to mainly Arab/ Middle Eastern culture where Islam derives from, and as having the same sets of beliefs rather than an understanding that there is more than ‘one type’ of Muslim. To add, the ‘...British Muslim identity not only carries a historical baggage, but it is also framed by global events’ (Ahmad and Sardar, 2012, p. 3). This means that incidents like the ‘war on terror’ and the rise of militant groups like the Islamic state of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) who continue to assert their use of religious doctrine to justify their own agendas –global events such as this continue to be the discourse in which Muslim identity is seen to be framed. This not only affects the British attitudes towards Muslims who may make a link between Islam and acts of violence, but also impacts and affects the attitudes and relations of Muslims who may feel their religion has been hijacked by such groups. Furthermore, British Muslims are also impacted by state surveillance programmes such as ‘Prevent’² which arguably promotes a culture of suspicion of Muslims through an increased surveillance. They continue to be seen as ‘potential threats’ which for many has arguably impacted their day to day lives (Abbas 2019, Cohen and Tufail 2017).

² Prevent programme was set up as a counter terror strategy under the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (CTSA 2015 in 2011 by the U.K government. It has been heavily criticised as a discriminatory practice that unfairly targets Muslim communities (see Cohen and Tufail 2017).

Although current discourse debatably sees Muslims as ‘potential threats’, as a more recent phenomenon, studies (Said 1978, Abdullah 2015, Kerboua 2016) had long identified that Muslim bodies were already seen as ‘threats’ and as an opposition to Western values. However, other studies (Ahmed and Matthes 2017, Cesari 2013, Sunar 2017) have demonstrated how events like 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’ have added fuel to the flame by seeing Muslims as ‘other’ and a ‘threat’ to Western democracy. Furthermore, it has been argued that in the post 9/11³ world we have become more accustomed to learning through media outlets rather than the educational systems (Macaedo 2007). Arguably, mainstream media and social media outlets have become a significant source of knowledge and input into how we then see and perceive the world (Watt 2012). We continue to see the rise in use and access to social media platforms as ways of accessing, discussing and spreading of information (Chadwick and Vaccari 2019). Some of these discussions have also been around the spreading of ‘fake news’⁴ where it is argued that dangerous and misinformative propagandas and lies have resulted in many anti-Muslim hate crimes globally⁵(Alibašić and Rose 2019, p466-467).

To continue, this narrative of creating false or biased views on Muslims has in particular been noted in studies on visual representations of Muslim women (Watt 2011,2012; Fallah 2005; Jiwani 2005; Kassam 2008) which show the Muslim world as homogenous without considering the lived experiences and the many differing socio-cultural and historical differences. Furthermore, due to the political situations which have arisen in the past decade

³ 9/11 is often the term used for talking about the four coordinated terrorist attacks which took place in the United States on September 11th 2001 by the terrorist groups Al-Qaeda. The attacks took the lives of 2,996 people and injured over 6,000 others.

⁴ The term ‘fake news’ has been used to describe the spreading of misleading or inaccurate information (see Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. 2018. HC 1791 Disinformation and ‘Fake News’: Final Report. London: House of Commons). <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcumeds/1791/1791.pdf>

⁵ Examples such as some of the Buddhist monks in Myanmar spreading of fake news which led to attacks on Muslim communities. Or in India where fake allegations were spread about Muslims slaughtering cows (which are seen as sacred to Hindus). Or in Bosnia and Herzegovina where Croatian security set up recruiting agents planting explosives and weapons inside Mosques to indirectly spread fake news in order to target and place blame on the Bosnian Muslims (Alibašić and Rose 2019, p466).

surrounding the global terrorist events (such as the ones talked about earlier), they have given way to the justification of anti-Muslim hate by far-right parties such as Britain First and the English Defence League. These types of far-right parties have often used and pushed anti-Muslim rhetoric in their speeches. This rhetoric has arguably also been picked up by media outlets to further instigate language that labels Muslim bodies as ‘jihadist’ and ‘fundamentalist’ and through this use of language it is argued that the media creates aspects of ‘otherness’. Furthermore, the imagery through the depiction of these terms is argued to be “invisible and absorbed unconsciously” (Kellner & Share, 2007, p4) by wider society that then furthers the idea of ‘otherness’ towards Muslim communities. These visual metaphors then act as a catapult into projecting binary and simplistic mode of argument of ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Watt 2012, p33).

Furthermore, the mainstream media also continues to talk about migration being a key issue and creates an illusion that Muslim communities are ‘taking over’ (Cohen 2002). There is also a constant talk of ‘segregation of communities’ which further added to the idea that Muslims would not integrate with wider society with the focus of tensions on ideas that Muslims want to form a separation from the rest of British society. However, numerous studies (Philips 2004, Runnymede Trust 1997, Sayyid 1997) have pointed towards the geographical and migration reasons as to why such areas have become dense and popular (such as easy access to shops offering halal foods). Studies such as the ones conducted by Shaw (1988) and Lewis (1994) show factors such as mosques, schools and other religious facilities which combine areas of Muslim migration to be main reasons as to why Muslims consider moving to certain areas (Dwyer 1998, p55). Likewise, Cohen (2002) argues that as many people came here as economic migrants, they settled into certain towns and cities which had a shortage of workers in factories such as Bradford, Blackburn etc. These studies paint a different picture showing the reasons why areas of certain communities have settled around other migrants and rejects the view that mainstream media pushes through perceptions of Muslim communities

‘not assimilating’ with wider society. Consequently, British Muslims have over time continued to develop their own identities and have various effects on Britain as a whole adding to the growing multinational society. Given the (discussed) context that surrounds British Muslims, this thesis is focusing on the lived experiences of British Muslim women in this study, specifically in relation to the way they use ‘dress’ in their everyday lives.

Given the shifting contextual, situational, and historical positions of British Muslims, let's first discuss here what exactly is meant by the term ‘British Muslim’? And what do we mean by the term ‘Muslim’? I have argued earlier the complexity of being ‘Muslim’ cannot be assigned to a certain geographical/historical location but is composed to a myriad of ethnicities and nationalities who class themselves as Muslims. So, by being classed as ‘British Muslim’ as compared to being ‘Muslim’ in other countries can arguably be a different experience. As an example, someone living in a Muslim country can experience and practice Islam arguably with greater ease than a Muslim living in a non-Islamic society, this could therefore alter the way in which one recognises their religious experiences to other ‘types of Muslims’.

We also understand that within Islam there is a huge variation in the sets of beliefs and practices and differing sects that Muslims belong to but are often forgotten about or not discussed within Western social/ political landscapes. However, whilst there is this variation most central theological positions within Islam remain similar such as the belief in Allah as one, prophethood, and belief in the Quran and Sunnah. What also needs to be emphasised is that religiously being a Muslim is different as for some being culturally ‘Muslim’ is just as influential as being religious, while others use the term in a way to express their ‘identity politics’ through the expression of labeling themselves as certain sects of Muslims (Lewis, 2007, pp. 3-4). The definition of being ‘Muslim’ will, therefore, be discussed in the upcoming chapters and I will outline how it will be used in this thesis.

The issues around the studies of British Muslim identities show that there has been specific hostility towards Muslims in which the term ‘Islamophobia’ is habitually used (Runnymede Trust 2017). The term was first picked up in 1997 by the Runnymede Trust Report where it was first described as "unfounded hostility towards Muslims, and therefore fear or dislike of all or most Muslims." (The Runnymede Trust, 1997, p. 1). More recently it has been clarified more specifically in the current social and policy context:

‘Islamophobia is any distinction, exclusion or restriction towards, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.’ (Runnymede Trust 2017, p7).

Furthermore, the all-party parliamentary group (APPG) inquiry into having a working definition of Islamophobia also proved to be controversial. In the report that resulted from the APPG’s Islamophobia inquiry defined ‘Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness’ (All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims 2018, p11). However, as mentioned earlier the term ‘Muslim’ is not only loosely fitted around religion itself but also it implies that cultural practices play a far greater role in the use of the term. Whereas the term ‘Islamophobia’ breaks down into the term ‘Islam’ and ‘phobia’ and implies a greater connection to religion ‘Islam’ than considering these cultural factors. To add, the definition also fails to differentiate between ‘race’ and religion in that it fails to clarify the differences between racial identity markers and religious ideologies. This fails to fully distinguish what may be termed as racism to what may be specific to Islamophobia itself. To talk about prejudices and the hostility faced by Muslims I feel it is far more accurate to use the term ‘Anti-Muslim hate’ because it specifically focuses on cultural racism (Modood and Werbner, 1997). The recognition that it is much more than hostility towards their religious beliefs and is more to do with the fact they are often seen as

what Patel (2012) describes as ‘brown bodies’. The term ‘brown bodies’ is used here to mark a racialised aspect that is linked to belonging or looking middle eastern/Arab heritage as the underpinning of the visual representations of Muslims (Patel 2017 p3). This will also be discussed in later chapters to show the way in which ‘brown bodies’ are often marked as indicators of being ‘visible Muslim’.

There has been a concern about the way in which Muslims are viewed in contemporary society-specifically in the West. Incidents like the 9/11 attacks in America, London bombing in 2005, Bali bombing in 2002, series of co-ordinated attacks in Paris 2015, and the attacks on Sousse beach Tunisia in 2015 shook the world, with the aftermath causing a rippling effect on Muslim communities who went on to experience a backlash of hate and fear from mainstream society, most notably the white Western quarters. It is suggested that as a result of the anti-Muslim hysteria which followed these events, the number of reported hate crimes against Muslims drastically increased. Muslim women, in particular, have become the main target of this hostility (see Tell Mama Report 2015). More recently the veil itself has been linked synonymously with ‘terror’ as an object of ‘fear’ and ‘othering’ as Spencer, 2006 notes, veils and hijabs have come to act as a ‘visual cue to bolster claims of the “alarming” rise in Islamic militancy’ (Patel 2017page number?).

In focusing on British Muslim women’s choice of dress, this project explores the motivations and symbolic meanings attached to clothing, whether they are religiously based or otherwise. The term ‘Islamic dress’ I use is loosely formed because I argue the idea of ‘Islamic clothing’ is contested as there are various definitions and interpretations of the scripture itself: “...and not display their beauty except what is apparent, and they should place their khumur over their bosoms...” (Qur’an, Surah 24; Verse 31). For some Muslims, this verse of the scripture is very straightforward and this reference from the Qur’an is used to argue for traditional Islamic dress such as the hijab, burka etc. However, for some, it is seen as ambiguous

as some women argue that it refers to wearing modest clothing or the idea of modesty i.e. using clothing to cover parts of the body (such as the chest). Therefore, I will be using the term ‘traditional Islamic dress’ here as a means to address all the different types of head covering (hijab, niqab, burka etc) and ‘modesty’ to address the use of clothing in a way that Muslim women feel follow Islamic guidelines.

Academic research has largely focused on talking about Muslim women’s dress in terms of the traditional Islamic dress that I described earlier (hijab, burka, niqab etc) where there has been a wide range of studies on the perspectives of women who wear the traditional Islamic dress (Droogsma 2007; Wing and Smith 2006; Ruby 2006; Afshar 2008; Shirazi 2001; Zempi 2016). These academic studies have been vital in understanding the perspectives of Muslim women who have given a wide range of reasons for adhering to traditional Islamic dress including reasons such as religious piety, taking control of their own bodies, avoiding the male gaze, the resistance to oppression, sexual objectification, and also the assertion of and affiliation to their Muslim identity. However, although the research is highly useful in understanding the reasons and motivations behind women’s traditional Islamic dress it does not show the Muslim women who choose to dress differently. The over-focus on traditional Islamic dress itself again highlights an emerging problem of homogenising Muslim women. Furthermore, failing to recognize and isolating these differing groups (i.e., women who do not veil) under-represents the wider group and also reinforces the idea of a singular Muslim identity, which is so frequently seen in the media today. In addition, I argue that it situates Muslim women in a narrative of victimisation and presents them as having no agency over their identity and dress. In light of this, this study aims to explore the construction of Muslim women’s agency in the UK. At a time when the shifting focus is largely on Muslims in the UK both politically and in the press, this research is timely because of the socio-political focus on Muslim bodies. There has also been an over-bearing focus on Muslim women and the

traditional Islamic dress both academically and in the media, which takes away from understanding of some Muslim women's lived experiences. Framing the topic around the negotiation of identity with religion and clothing is an aim to see to what extent their lived realities (if at all) are related. One of the goals in this thesis is therefore an attempt to show different uses of dress in a wider community of Muslim women and the ways in which they relate to the understandings of Islamic dress.

Although there have been attempts to highlight the different 'types of Muslims' (Kabir 2016) which show that there are 'practicing Muslims', 'cultural Muslims' or 'secular and ethnic Muslims'. There is very little, or no effort put into identifying the differences and thoughts within this group, in particular, the diversity amongst Muslim women. Thus, through inclusivity, this project aims to acknowledge some of these differences and understandings of Islamic dress.

This thesis asks how the women in this study make choices about ways of dressing and in what ways this is an expression of self-identity. In drawing on the work of Chris Allen (2014: 137), this refers to a situation where one is "visibly recognisable as Muslim", due to either/or phenotypical and cultural factors. Specifically, being visibly recognisable as Muslim - hereafter referred to as 'visible Muslim' is relevant to this project because it includes Islamic attire such as the hijab, niqab or the burka (Allen 2014, p143). The project asks questions about the challenges that British Muslim women face, when their 'Muslim-ness' is visible. It also asks about the construction of identity through the use of clothing and how they feel their identity is influenced by their experiences.

1.2 Chapter structure

In order to address the concerns of this thesis, this project will be split into six chapters. The chapters challenge and discuss the narrative of British Muslim women through their lived experiences through their own words. The following chapter outlines the existing literature on gender, religious (Islamic) dress, identity, and race/racism (especially post-racism) in contemporary British society. In order to address the concerns of this thesis, this chapter examines important work on Black feminism and Intersectionality. Whilst acknowledging that Intersectionality refers to a broad spectrum of identities and ‘intersections’ (such as sexuality, disability, caste etc) this thesis chooses to focus on ‘race’, ‘religion’, and ‘gender’ given that these intersections are prominently featured in contemporary society in debates and discussions around Muslim women. It also focuses on the distinction of Muslims women’s experience compared to other BAME bodies. Furthermore, the chapter also examines the racialised and gendered power structures which dominate mainstream society based on sustaining ‘male privilege’ and ‘white privilege’. It goes on to discuss Islamic Feminism and its formation, and ideas around ‘Muslim women’s’ formation of an identity. Given the research’s focus on traditional Islamic dress, it addresses discussions around Islamic attire and the changing course of the representation of the traditional Islamic dress in the West.

The third chapter covers the methodology this research has taken to explore the lived experiences of the women in this study. It begins with a discussion on the epistemological stance adopted during this thesis by exploring why an interpretive intersectional approach is chosen for this research. The chapter discusses the three focus groups, and eight semi-structured interviews that are used to collect data. It also addresses use of thematic analysis in this research to analyse the data collected through reflexivity. This chapter also discusses the

in-depth rationale behind the choice of methods used to underline any key issues that are addressed for ethical consideration.

The fourth chapter covers the concept of modesty and how Muslim women in this research negotiate, manage, and understand dress through this concept. This chapter covers the cultural as well as the religious significance of modesty for Muslim women. It covers the idea of modesty through the physical elements of dress but moved beyond the physical to explore discussions around manners, morality and etiquettes that also play a role in understanding the concept of modesty. The chapter also explores the personal journeys of some veiled women to adopting Islamic dress, as well as the continued exploration of the journeys to manage and negotiate dress of those who choose not to adopt Islamic dress.

Chapter five will move on to examine how Muslim women use negotiations of dress in response and relation to sexual harassment. The chapter shows how the application of an intersectional approach has enabled a deeper look into the discussions of sexual harassment surrounding British Muslim women. This chapter explores the struggles and challenges of sexual harassment in the context of British Muslim women, picking up on concepts of '*hayaa*' and '*izzat*' which are seen to be closely imbedded with personal, cultural, and sometimes religious understandings. The chapter follows some of the narratives surrounding #MosqueMeToo movement which were discussed in the focus groups and some interviews.

The sixth chapter looked at links between anti-Muslim hate in relation to dressing. It discusses ways in which Muslim women experience and negotiate dress in challenging anti-Muslim hate. Elements of racism within and beyond Muslim communities were discussed through looking at incidences of anti-Muslim hate. The difference of these hate crimes towards veiled and non-veiled women is explored. As a response to anti-Muslim hate the concept of 'safe spaces' through understanding of a sense of belonging within the Muslim community is

addressed. In addition, narratives around some Muslim women negotiating dress will also be explored in this chapter.

Finally, the seventh chapter offers a conclusion that reflects on the findings in this research. It reflects on the choice's women have made in regard to dress and modesty, dress, and negotiations to countering sexual harassment, and dress and challenge to anti-Muslim hate. It picks out key areas that this research had uncovered as well as explores what original contributions to knowledge have been made. Some of the limitations of the research are outlined, as well as areas for future research. Furthermore, it states ways in which this and future research could be implemented to gain a better understanding into the lives of British Muslim women.

1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

This thesis will explore the meanings that Muslim women attach to clothing, in particular traditional Islamic dress. The study will use the concepts of 'choice' and 'negotiation', to understand how Muslim women experience everyday interaction and how this then impacts on their notion of self and identity construction.

The overarching aim of this research project is to explore British Muslim women's use of dress to express identity. Accordingly, the objectives of the research project are:

- (i) To understand how Muslim women, make choices about clothing.
- (ii) To examine the meanings attached to clothing as expressions of self and identity, especially in relation to religion and gender.

(iii) To understand the identity negotiation processes that Muslim women embark on in response to anti-Muslim hostility.

2. Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will be an exploration of the academic works that assist in engaging with narratives that aid in understanding where British Muslim women are situated within Western society. It will explore how theories around Intersectionality and feminism have paved a way in locating the nuanced contexts surrounding BAME women. It goes on to explore the specific ways in which ‘Muslim bodies’ are under constant surveillance through racial profiling as well as being seen as objects of fear.

In addition, the religious underpinnings of Muslim women are also explored showing the plural nature of Muslim religious identity. Islamic feminism is also an emerging concept that helps inspect the nuances of Muslim women’s identities and therefore this chapter elaborates on its theoretical frameworks. Earlier (introduction) it was discussed that the Muslim women in particular are looked on as fringes of society because of the way they choose to dress, this chapter explores some studies surrounding this topic. This chapter is therefore taking a careful look at identifying the literature surrounding British Muslim women in order to establish a base for this research.

2.2 Intersectionality and Muslim women

Academia and social discursive literature in the West were largely developed around the era of ‘European Enlightenment’⁶. However, scholars such as Edward Said (Colonialism), Jacques Derrida (Deconstruction) and Michael Foucault (European power and knowledge) have previously emerged to critically question the period of European Enlightenment and the

⁶ The 18th century was seen as the golden age of rational and scientific development in the West where ‘universal truths’ and sciences produced rational knowledges around social, political, religious and economic issues

centrality of secular discourse. Similarly, it is argued that mainstream Western feminism evolved from the first and second wave of feminist movements in Europe and America. Since then, scholars such as Audre Lorde, bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins have argued that the first and second waves of feminism have largely been focused on modernistic and positivist assumptions of universal truths. They argued that these have been problematic in understanding women who are already seen to be on the margins of Western societies such as those belonging to ethnic minorities.

Consequently, ‘black feminism’⁷ (Lorde 1984, hooks 2014, and Collins 2000) emerged in the 1960’s in response to sexist civil rights movements and racist feminist discourses, which privileged whiteness. In the works of notable Black feminist scholars such as Audre Lorde, bell hooks and Patricia Hill-Collins (Lorde 1984, hooks 2014, and Collins 2000) who argued that Black women were subject to multiple forms of oppression such as classism, racism, and sexism. Its aim was to assert that the oppressions of Black women were not being addressed and there needed to be a way of answering to the multiple levels of oppression faced by these women. Black feminism recognised that the identity of Black women was complex and needed to be understood in terms that were different to mainstream feminism which often focused on the very gendered and racialised study of ‘white women’. Black feminism challenged the Western feminist narrative of ‘speaking for all women’. Black feminism claimed that Black women’s experience is positioned as fundamentally different to ‘white women’s’ (Brenner and Luce 2006). What Black feminism started to include was an understanding of the historical position of Black women and how it played out i.e., how the

⁷ The term Black feminism was first applied to African American women who recognised the feminist consciousness but stated that their own positioning as African Americans was different to ‘white feminists’. Although the term ‘Black’ is understood as a racial signifier of women from African backgrounds it can be applied to any individual who embraces the Black feminist thought. It therefore is a term that is used to describe politicised positioning, rather than one that is biologically based.

historical context of the slave trade had shaped their position in society (and continues to structure the lived experiences of Black women in contemporary contexts).

To continue, the emergence of Black feminism occurred due to a growing awareness of and resistance to racial and gendered oppressions that Black women faced. Black women felt that their concerns (class and racial tensions) were not reflected in the reality of bourgeoisie ‘white’ feminism. They were also faced with the gendered hostility of Black men who felt that they would ‘sell out’ their race in favor of their gendered rights (see Taylor 1998 on ‘Shirley Chisholm’, p19).

However, the ‘third wave’ of feminism (which recognised that Black feminism needed to be included in its discourse) was not until the 90’s. Black American feminists were the first to argue that Western feminism did not and could not speak for and represent their experiences and they argued that it was deeply problematic that only one essential category of ‘women’ could really relate to their experiences. Furthermore, the construction of ‘triple oppression’ through race, gender and class was created but this did not tackle the multiple and continuing ways in which for example sexuality or disability could speak for vastly different subjectivities of women.

As a result, Intersectionality was introduced as a way to tackle the differing realities of women and to move away from the idea of ‘universal feminism’ (Salem 2013, p3-4). Intersectionality then became a highly significant way of understanding and using theory to be inclusive of ‘all women’. This became the basis from which key Black feminist writers arose such as Patricia Hill Collins (1990) and Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) who critiqued the notion of a singular and fixed essential identity. Instead, they argue that identities are varied, complex and flexible, and thus the experiences of Black and minority ethnic (BME)⁸ groups cannot be

⁸ (BME) Black, Asian and minority ethnic is used as a preference term to refer to members of non-white communities as it addresses the different types of ethnic communities I talk about (Patel and Tyrer 2011, p2).

reduced to one simplistic essential category – rather oppressions vary depending on gender, age, class, and race. Crenshaw (1989) developed the term ‘Intersectionality’ to refer to the ways in which BAME women are often discriminated through a combination of racism and sexism. Intersectionality falls between a post-modernism and post-structuralism critique. Post-structuralism rejects that there are absolute truths about the world and post modernism argues that grand narratives such as ‘universalism’ cannot and do not speak for all people. Intersectionality argues that women do not fit neatly into a specific category of ‘sexism’ or ‘racism’, so their experiences and discrimination is critical to the study of BAME women. Intersectionality is then a cross-sectional way to look at the ways in which identities often overlap and are negotiated in everyday spaces.

To continue, it is acknowledged from existing literature that there are varied (racial, ethnic, cultural and religious) identities, for example, Dwyer (2000), Mirza (2013), and Ahmed (2003; 2000). It is also recognised that there are multi-layered identities, for example, Crenshaw (1989), Brown (2006), and Ruby (2006). So, in order to understand and to do justice to the ways in which these identities work and relate, it is vital to look at Intersectionality as a concept. We need to use Intersectionality as a way to understand the ways in which these complex and differing identities work as Mirza (2013) points out:

‘...Intersectionality refers to the converging and conterminous ways in which the differentiated and variable organizing logics of race, class, and gender and other social divisions such as sexuality, age, disability, ethnicity, culture, religion and belief structure the material conditions which produce economic, social and political inequality in women’s real lived lives.’ (Mirza, 2013, p 6).

Intersectionality then becomes a tool for us to look at what ways these intersections work within the wider social context. Avtar Brah (1996) argues that these

complex identities cut across national boundaries and create new forms of identity which challenge and continuously change in relation to their place. Additionally, Intersectionality also examines the ways in which this experience is lived in embodied subjectivity (Mirza, 2009). In reference to this understanding, intersectional feminists also argue that there needs to be a wide scope through which to view the BAME body, thus it is vital to pay attention to the ways in which historical, cultural, social customs have shaped the ways in they are understood and challenged.

However, Intersectionality does not come without its challenges. Critiques of intersectional theory such as McCall (2005), suggest that Intersectionality looks at far too many various identities at once and as they are all so fluid and subject to change it becomes very ambiguous. The ambiguity that is referred to here is about how identities are varied and unique and therefore are open to constant interpretations. In her paper on the complexity of Intersectionality, McCall (2005) states that Intersectionality has, arguably, been the most important theoretical contribution for women's studies (McCall 2005, pp. 1771). However, McCall (2005) argues that research practice has unique methodological demands as Intersectionality is looking at the complexity of social life. McCall debates that scholars have largely overlooked the complexity of Intersectionality and have not shown how Intersectionality can be used to underpin methodological issues that Intersectionality brings forward. The paper addresses three approaches that attempt to manage and satisfy the demands in studying the multiple, intersecting complex social relations or what McCall states as 'complexities' (McCall 2005, p1772-1773).

In the first approach, McCall (2005) refers to 'anticategorical complexity' which is the approach of poststructuralist and de-constructivist feminism. Here, McCall argues that theoretical assumptions like 'categories' i.e. 'gender', 'race', 'sexuality' etc. are far too simplistic to capture the complexity of lived experiences. Instead, we need to first study the

social processes of categorisation that include workings of inclusion and exclusion, boundary drawings and boundary maintenance (Nash 2008, p5). The assertion away from ‘simplistic categorisation’ then allows for a closer look at how and where boundaries are created and what processes are involved in the inclusion and exclusion of these boundaries. By decentralising categories and looking instead at their inner workings and placing of categories, it allows an open expression of the process of categorisation to be exposed as well as recognising how they then place themselves more accurately.

The second approach ‘intracategorical complexity’ (which is adopted by many Black feminists) looks at marginalised women’s identities as a starting point to reveal the complexity of their lived experience. Although it attends to the dangers of categorisation (what the first approach highlights) it instead focuses on the problematising of exclusionary practices in the act of categorisation. In this way, this approach shows ways in which marginalised women’s experiences cannot be reduced to simple categories. An example that I present here are looking at categories like ‘Muslim’ (religious) and ‘women’ (gender), does not mean that women who fit into both categories may have or share the same experiences; for example, experiences such as levels of religiosity⁹ may be different, or in what ways they see their assertion of gender playing a role in their identities as Muslim women.

Finally, the third approach ‘intercategorical complexity’ adopts a quantitative method to focus on exposing the relationship between inequalities and categories themselves. This approach uses analytical categories strategically as a way to show the links with

⁹ In order to address this research, it is vital to understand the Abrahamic monolithic religion of Islam and its key divisions. There is a core belief in the oneness in God, prophets, revealed books, angels, predestination and the day of resurrection-It is important to acknowledge that there is religious plurality within Islam itself. There are three main sects - Sunnis, Shias and Kharijites and each sect developed distinct jurisprudence schools within these sects. These main sects were split first mainly due to political reasons but later on developed and split over theological and juridical reasons. The largest group of Muslims belong to the Sunni sect, second largest to the Shia and the rest fall into the other categories (Khuri 2006). This religious plurality shows the diversity in thoughts amongst the Muslim population themselves. As this research is not focused on these differences specifically, they will not be addressed explicitly in the findings but will be acknowledged through sampling in the methodology.

inequalities. This approach may be useful in investigating ways in which inequalities work within building themselves in categories.

What McCall's work highlights here is that through carefully placing use and critiques of categories Intersectionality can be used to move away from the critique of 'essentialism' in use of Intersectionality. Furthermore, Davis (2008) argues that it is precisely the left ambiguity and open-endedness of Intersectionality which allows for its success in becoming a good feminist theory which allows endless realms for exploration and differences among women in particular (Davis 1986 cited in Davis 2008, p 69-70). Conclusively, I feel the use of Intersectionality is powerful theory to utilise in order to gain knowledge of understanding identity but needs a deeper consideration.

Chandra Mohanty's production of 'The Third Woman' is a critique of Western feminism which assumes that all women share similar experiences and needs. The idea that 'universal womanhood' will tackle power relations in patriarchal society and an assumption that there are equal power relations between all women. Women are then categorised as sharing some of same oppressions (Salem 2013, p3). It is also argued that hegemonic imperialism has led to the construction of a 'third world woman' who is seen as a victimised, constrained, ignorant and poor. Mohanty argues that because Western feminism sits within the global context it lacks awareness of self-reflexivity to engage in producing non-imperialist work on marginalised women.

The key feminist debates around religion and agency stem from a depiction of religion as an oppressive external force that affects personal subjectivity. However, studies such as that by Mack (2003) and Mahmood (2004) affectively show women's agency in both accepting and challenging social norms in acts of obedience to God. Salem (2013) argues that the construction of the third world women as passive victims of their society is similar to the

construction of religious women who are seen as oppressed victims of false consciousness. It is also argued that Western feminism takes an exceptionally opposing view to religion as a patriarchal system that oppresses women. When it comes to Muslim women, we can see why views of passive victims are intensified as Muslim women are seen belonging to the idea of the third world women and their religion as a means to continue to control these in society.

Salem (2013) argues that since Western feminist literature had situated itself around static, homogenous discourses that produced Orientalist works, it is now crucial that the debates around choice of defining of what can or cannot be classed as feminism are fully explored. These ideas are argued to perpetuate religion such as Islam as 'patriarchal' however Salem (2013) argues that this idea is simply not present in the lived realities of many Muslim women. There is a need, therefore, to question who gets to define and categorise what is or is not examples of feminism but move to what centring experiences rather than definitions of what should or should not be feminism.

To continue, religious texts have largely been seen as 'belonging to men'. Historically it has been men who studied, interpreted, and spoke on behalf of religious scripture. Salem (2013) argues that the Islamic feminist project can be seen to be a way in which Muslim women are exerting power through challenging in reinterpreting of the scriptures of the Qur'an and Hadiths. Muslim feminists generate critical readings of the Qur'an. Through the reinterpretation of these texts Muslim women have arguably gained legitimacy in allowing their voices to be present in religious debates and wider society.

Therefore, we can now begin to articulate the multiple layers of identity in reference to BAME women. One of the main aims of this research is to focus on Muslim women as a point of interest, therefore we need to capture and specify meanings that shapes Muslim women's identity. One of the discourses that is highly debated is Muslim women's

dress and its link with their identity. Homa Hoodfar (1993) argues that even within Black feminist discourse the Muslim woman is still scrutinised for her choice of clothing, as Islamic attire such as the hijab is often linked with ideas of 'oppression'. She argues that feminists have let fellow Muslim women down by isolating them from feminist discourse and have fallen into the colonial bias (Hoodfar, 1993, pp. 5-6). The idea that the Muslim women's bodies continue to be looked at as 'oppressed' she argues is '...an indicator of the persistence of orientalist and colonial attitudes towards Muslim cultures.' (Hoodfar, 1993, p. 12). As a result, Muslim women's views are constantly ignored or undervalued because we continue to see the idea of liberation through the lenses of Western women's rights and movements. This is where the arising topic of Islamic feminism is useful, as Islamic feminism is specific to the challenges and struggles of Muslim women in particular.

Hence, throughout the Muslim world, there has been an increasing emergence of women who have sought to gain hold of their own identities - identities which they formerly had to choose between. The 'Muslim identity' which was the surrounding of religious/spiritual and cultural formations around Islam, and their 'gendered identities' which was their day-to-day experiences as women and fights for gender equality. There had and has been a growing need to negotiate between the two but now the emergence of the ideals of Islamic feminism is seeking to join them both together by using the fight for justice through Islamic tradition. A group called 'Musawah' which means 'equality' in the Arabic language was formed in 2009 which did just that:

'Musawah was officially launched in 2009 at a meeting in Kuala Lumpur that brought together 250 Muslim activists, scholars, legal practitioners and policy-makers from forty-seven nations. It seeks legal reform in the retrospective countries.' (Musawah 2009: no page).

They sought to challenge male-centered interpretations of the Qur'an and use them to fight for justice and equality. The framework from this now global movement emerged from the Malaysian 'Sisters in Islam' Movement which challenged for the rights of women with the use of Islamic texts. The world focused in on the happenings in the Arab spring in 2010/2011 in particular in Egypt when women became highly involved in the political struggles of that time. This global movement of Musawah challenges rights of women different from mainstream Western feminist movements around the world as it works from within and has religious Islamic tradition at its core. Its main principle is not to disentangle the Muslim and gendered identities, but it seeks ways in which both justice and equality for women can be argued for from the coming together of these identities. From this perspective, women should no longer feel the struggle to choose between their religious beliefs and their feminist consciousness.

Badran (2011) points out that Islamic Feminism has provided two theoretical advances through breaking down the family as a separate domain instead of the private/public continuum and also dismantling the patriarchal construction of the family to form an argument against gender inequality. However, she argues that much more work is needed to move '...from a patriarchal to an egalitarian model of the family' (Badran 2011, p78). Furthermore, she argues that this method of holistic Islamic feminism which is aiming to be export Muslim women's rights to global and local terrain is a threat to local cohesion and may also result in further marginalisation of non-Muslim citizens (Badran 2011, 78-79). On the other hand, Mir-Hosseini (2011) argues that movements such as Musawah although they are Muslim-led they do not exclude other activists and voices pointing out that there are several secularist women which are among them (Mir-Hosseini 2011, p75).

As discussed earlier, the origins of Black Feminism saw mainstream Western feminism as being for 'white women', therefore not inclusive for the experiences of racialised

minorities. Similarly, Muslim women also felt that mainstream feminism was not useful for understanding their struggles and oppressions. The Western interpretations of feminism which emerged in the colonial era was looked upon as alien and anti-Islamic as it was seen to disrupt the cultural ways of life (Badran 2011). This led to national secular feminist movements as ways to fight back from the colonial rule and gain independence and seek religious reform. Secular feminism argued equality for the secular public sphere, unlike the later emerging Islamic feminism which argues for rights within the religious domains (Badran 2011, p80). Therefore, the historical and social significance was of paramount importance to understanding the lives of Muslim women. Like Black feminism, the Muslim world had its own relationship to the West. Colonialised lands brought about ‘oriental’ misconceptions of these women.

However, unlike Black feminism (which shares similar Judaeo-Christian values) Muslim women engaged in the understandings of feminism through Islam itself. Muslim women looking at what religious rights Islam grants them and what it could offer to their own understandings of equality. However, as religion is often contested to be ‘part of the patriarchy’ it has meant that even to this day a lot of feminist movements are not inclusive of some of the ideals which Muslim felt are their right i.e., use of the veil:

‘...the Western scholarly tendency and the colonial impulse to present ‘a one-dimensional image of Islam, encompassing a seamless society of Muslims’, which has precluded any analysis of the socio-economic significance of veiling practices throughout history... as well as overlooking ‘the actual variations in the way Islam has been and is being practiced’ ...’ (Martino and Rezai-Rashti 2008, p420).

Islamic feminism then emerged in the late twentieth century articulating arguments from within the independent critical examination of religious text by women. Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi was amongst the first scholars to study the religious

scriptures such as the hadiths¹⁰ (Prophet's Sayings) and expose false misogynistic hadiths through using Islamic methodologies (Badran 2011, p80). Islamic feminism is and was used mostly through a scholarly intervention such as women's rereading and investigation into the Qur'an which led to changes in views of certain aspects that previously remained unchallenged. Issues such as wife-beating, for example, were looked at and challenged and it was argued that this was not condoned in the Qur'an (as many women were led to believe) and in the earlier phases groups such as Sisters In Islam distributed pamphlets in order to reach a wider audience (Badran 1999, 2009 cited in Badran 2011, p81). Muslim women's communities in the West also were key in the foundation texts within Islam such as African-American theologian Amina Wadud who '...articulated a theory of gender inequality based on her Qur'anic hermeneutic work first published in Kuala Lumpur (Wadud 1991) and later in New York (Wadud 1999).' (Badran 2011, p81). Another Pakistani scholar Asma Barlas (2002) produced work that deconstructed patriarchy and inequality and even gave strong evidence for patriarchy as being 'non-Islamic'. This was later translated into different languages and used as foundational texts regarding Muslim family laws (Badran 2011, p82).

Furthermore, towards the end of the colonial era and rise of despotic regimes in Muslim countries, there was a vacuum left which was filled by Islamic movements which further perpetuated the colonial strict version of Islam and then left Muslim women in the crossfire from events such as 9/11, the war on terror and invasions of Afghanistan. Through

¹⁰ The Qur'an provides the basic injunctions for Muslims.

The Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad- is the customary Prophetic behaviour which together make up Shariah (legal path)- the legal position of Islam. The Sunnah is a vast corpus of recorded sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad with his Companions.

Hadith are written records of these actions which began during the Prophet's lifetime but grew immediately following his death and depend upon chains of reliable narrators (ijtihad). There are 3 types of hadith:

- The continuous (Mutawatir)- reported by many reliable sources and so no possibility of fabrication.
- The well-known (Mashur)- reported by two or more Companions of the Prophet
- The Single (Ahad) narrated by single individuals but adhering to stringent rules for inclusion as part of the Sunna. There are also three categories of reliability of hadith that affect whether they can be used for the Sunna- Authentic (Sahih), having highly reliable chains of transmission; good (Hasan) by trustworthy narrators but who are known to have made some errors and weak (Da'if) if transmitted by those whose memory or integrity is doubted (see Kamali, 2003).

this phase there was a felt increasing urgency in which Muslim women wanted to take up action in order to confront these voices that did not speak for them; Islamic feminism was a revolutionary way of addressing the close relationship they carried for both their gender and religious identity (Mir-Hosseini 2011, p74). This is both a reaction to ‘return of Sharia’ and the ‘war on terror context’ and the emerging misrepresentations of Muslim in the West. Movements such as Musawah and the now ‘Iranian Green’ movement embody the justice of Islam side by side with the justice for equality (Mir-Hosseini 2011, p75).

Additionally, El Guindi identifies two strands of Egyptian ‘First Feminists’ one which was more affiliated to Western looking feminism Huda Sha’rawi and another which was more culturally based and did not affiliate itself with the Western feminism Malak Hifni Nasif. There also emerged a third strand of Islamic Feminism from Zaynab Al-Ghazali which looked at woman’s rights from within Islam and rejected the Western woman as an ‘ideal’ and argued that Islamic feminism is a new paving for Muslim women. The idea that ‘It is feminist because it seeks to liberate womanhood; it is Islamic because its premises are embedded in Islamic principles and values’. (El Guindi 1999, p71) was key. This concept brought about the emergence of the third strand of Islamic feminism which argued the idea of *Ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and is the core for the majority of Islamic feminists today. *Ijtihad* - reframes and redefines what it is to be a Muslim i.e. it allows the option of personal independent reasoning when coming across religious texts rather than the strict understandings which only allows for the authority to God (Moll 2009, p46). Although many Muslims may perform *Ijtihad* to clarify their faith, only specially qualified jurists may issue legal judgements to make legal rulings. However, for Islamic feminists, the idea of *Ijtihad* resonates:

‘by appealing to the believer’s logic and reasoning, relying on arguments and sources outside religion, and imposing their vision of Islamic law through the machinery of a modern state,

they have inadvertently paved the way for an egalitarian reading of the sha'ria' (Mir-Hosseini 2003 cited in Moll 2009, p53).

This has paved the rights of 'ordinary people' to start participating in matters of religion, people who do not speak Arabic or are not 'covered up' (Anwar 2005 cited in Moll 2009, p47). This formerly independent reasoning was not favoured by earlier scholars who argued that it was only the learned scholars who could dictate and interpret the meanings of the Holy Scriptures. *Ijtihad* is, therefore, a new way of acknowledging and engaging with religious texts, particularly for Islamic feminists. This has led to a new way of actively involving and challenging some patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an and Sharia in particular.

However, Moll (2009) argues that Islamic feminism lies on the 'margins of Islamic discourse' because although it presents itself as following from within the teachings of Islam, many of its regimes and relations move away from Islamic interpretations (Moll 2009 cited in Al-Sharmani 2011, p4). She argues that the parameters in which Islamic knowledge is produced and disseminated are very distinct from its classical religious knowledge and many of its writings are scholarly English text, or policy briefs which do not engage with the wider audience it is so-called speaking for (Moll 2009 cited Al-Sharmani 2011, p4-5). Likewise, another critique of Islamic feminism indicates the very problem of this being grounded in Islamic religious tradition itself. As Rhouni (2008) points out that there is a tendency of essentialism in Islamic feminism. She argues that an understanding for religious texts in Islam is a complex issue process because Islam itself is not a homogenous religion, but in fact is made up of multiple and various levels of religious sects and schools of thought. Therefore, it is not limited to understanding one type of Islam but multiple interpretations that are both personal and limited to individual subjectivity. However, Al-Sharmani (2011) argues that '...there are first and foremost existentialist and ethical truths that intrinsic to Islam.' These are understood

and offer to reframe the Islamic framework by law making and social regulation (Al-Sharmani 2011, p9).

Although such critiques of Islamic feminism exist, I argue that they overlook the fact that it is a complex, growing, and dynamic approach that is adding to the body of literature around feminism in the Islamic world. Its rejection of colonial/racial bias also adds a whole new dimension in understanding the ways in which Muslim women are challenging classical feminism. The emergence of Islamic feminism as a bridge between the Black feminist critique and the inclusion of religious and spiritual feminism allows it to form a stronger foothold for grounding ways to show marginalised women's agency. Studies such as Zine (2004) and Hunt (1999) not only mirror and adhere to the inclusion of faith-centered women but also encourage ways of looking at these women from a new formation of feminist epistemology. At its core, Islamic feminism promotes religion and gender equality as what Zine (2004) would describe as uncovering interlocking discriminatory practices such as 'race', religion, gender, class which may lead to gender inequality and sexism. Islamic feminism, therefore, provides a good platform to understand ways in which Muslim women, in particular, operate to negotiate the contextual and wider discourse practices that help shape British Muslim women of today.

2.3. Framing of the Muslim body

It is essential to look at the ways in which the Muslim women's identity is framed in the current climate relevant to the theories discussed earlier. It can be suggested that after events such as 9/11 there has been a gradual shift in the way in which Muslim women's bodies are viewed. The shift has been from looking at these bodies as 'passive' to viewing them as 'bodies of fear' (Ahmed 2003). Although we have made this shift away from orientalist ideas of 'passive women', Muslim women continue to be labelled. With the media using terms like 'Jihadi

bride' they are no longer deemed 'passive' but as 'complacent accomplices' to terror. To support this shift the scholarly interventions of transnational postcolonial critical race feminists '...show how the Muslim female body has become a battlefield in the symbolic war against Islam and the perceived Muslim Enemy 'within'.'(Jiwani 2006; Razack 2008; Smith and Thobani, 2010, cited in Mirza 2013, p.6).

Moreover, Sara Ahmed argues that metonyms are often used like 'Islam' and 'terrorist' in the media and politics even when arguments are made to disprove the links. These expressions are used in order to closely associate the word 'terrorism' to 'Islam' as if these words are almost interchangeable (Ahmed, 2003). To continue, she argues that through this method there has been a continuous label attached to these identities on which '...a sign sticks to a body constituting it as the object of fear...' (Ahmed, 2003, p.389). We have to understand these types of 'external' factors that contribute to seeing Muslim women in a negative light. However, we also need to recognise that the agency of Muslim women's identity is complex as it aims to spread and reach out to a wider transnational Muslim community or Ummah (Dwyer 2000, p. 477). Therefore '...Identities of young British Muslim women must be seen as discursive formations, constituted within particular social, cultural, and economic relations.' (Dwyer, 2000, p 476). This allows for new ways of testing intersectional relations that work through society today.

To facilitate this, we can use the means of the critical race theory framework (Crenshaw 1988; Matsuda 1987; Williams 1991) to understand the arguments and challenges presented today. Critical race theory argues that power structures which dominate mainstream society are based on sustaining 'white privilege', and that racism is engrained in the fabric of society and is used as a means to exert its power. An example of this power can be found when we look at institutional racism and in particular when we look at BAME bodies who are subject to scrutiny through racial profiling. It is argued that racial profiling is a reminder of Black

people's 'place' in society and is used as a means to control people of colour and also as a way to inform minorities that they are under constant surveillance (Khoury, 2009).

In addition, racial profiling is used as a method to enhance the visibility of BAME bodies through the use of 'race' to permit the routine of 'an indicia of suspiciousness' (Khoury, 2009, p56) whereby certain bodies are seen as more deviant than others. In the current climate with the ongoing political tensions of Brexit and the ongoing concerns of refugees from predominantly Muslim countries like Syria, Muslim bodies have been the focus of circulating media headlines and political debates. There is a certain hierarchy created (Tarlo 2007), one in which 'Brown bodies' are viewed as 'suspicious'. Groups such as Tell Mama (who specialise in collecting cases of anti-Muslim hate crime) report that almost 95% of the attacks occur on 'visible Muslims' most notably women who practice veiling. It is evident from such reports that the target for these hate crimes are racialised in the sense that they relate specifically to people looking 'Arab and South Asian' and who are arguably associated with looking 'visibly Muslim' (Ahmed 2003, p392).

Furthermore, Patel (2017) talks about 'race consumption' in which she argues that an era of colonialism has led to a 'colonial mindset' one which seeks to 'civilise' and educate BAME bodies, which in turn is a form of racism itself (Bolaffi et al 2002, p112-113). Women's bodies, in particular, are constructed through a form of 'exoticism' through the post-colonial gaze in which it is seen through the 'White man's gaze' by seeing the 'veil' as a 'sexually teasing' or as 'culturally oppressive' 'The BAME women here is powerless, mute and vulnerable to the white Western male sexual gaze and/or exploitation (Patel, 2017, p76).' In her study focusing on white converts who practiced veiling, Franks (2000) talks about their 'white invisibility' being taken away because they are no longer looked at as 'white bodies'. In one scenario she was looked at as the 'white woman' who chose to wear a meter of scarf, however, this was in no way associated with the Islamic faith but was instead looked at just a

fashion accessory. It is argued that converts who wish to take up the veil on Islamic principles are seen as 'traitors' to their 'race' because they have denied their 'superiority' as 'white bodies' and have chosen a more 'oppressive' and 'backwards' step (Franks, 2000, pp. 923-24). Through this, we realise that not only is 'race' an important factor but that the veil itself embodies connotations that reflect and reveal the Muslim woman's identity.

In addition, there has been a constant shift to move religious attire out of the workplace throughout Europe, the banning of religious items has led to discrimination against women who choose to wear the headscarf. Studies have shown that women who choose to veil or use traditional Islamic dress are less likely to be offered jobs especially those that required frequent contact with the public as well as they are often more targeted towards discriminatory practices at work compared to women who choose not to veil (Ghumman and Jackson 2010, p14-18).

Furthermore, terrorist attacks around the world in the past sixteen years have gradually become more and more common, recent attacks in the Manchester arena bombing and similar attacks in Paris by extremist groups such as ISIS have created a rippling effect in the West which has had not only detrimental effects on its victims and their families but studies have shown that these events have created a negative impact on the Muslim population as a whole (Liepyte and McAloney-Kocaman 2015, p789-93). Muslims are often viewed and presented as a homogenous group who are refusing to integrate or 'move forward' with modern society and who instead are moving towards extremism (Khiabany and Williamson, 2008, pp. 70-71). Khiabany further informs us that a report commissioned by Ken Livingstone about the representation of Muslims in the media found '...that 91 percent of the articles about Muslims in Britain is framed in a negative manner and that there is a widespread reporting of inaccuracies about Muslims' (Khiabany and Williamson, 2008, p. 74). Additionally, there is a perception of 'over- tolerance' from British society where it is argued that '...if there is

anything amiss in this, our European homeland, it is the consequence not of evil, but of too much goodness; over-tolerance towards people from different cultures is our Achilles' heel.' (Fekete cited in Khiabany 2008, p.78).

2.4 The 'religiosity'¹¹ of Muslims

It can be argued that in Western discourses Islam is seen to follow only the very narrow, simplistic view often projected by the mainstream media. The narratives surrounding the understanding of Islam fall short because they fail to recognise and address the vastly different sets of practices of the followers of the faith. This limited view within Western society of the Islamic faith has led to an overall bias in understanding the Muslim identity. Previous studies on British Muslims have focused exclusively on first-generation migrants who have often come from mostly South Asian backgrounds (Ahmad 2001). The current literature looking at Muslims in the West tends to have a very focused and narrow understanding:

'The investigation is restricted to (1) 'Muslim' (i.e. Arab/Asian) regions of the world;3 (2) theological/philosophical issues;4 or (3), if touching upon Islam in the West, 'problem issues', typically the hijab and burqa/ niqab affairs, honour killings, forced marriages, radicalization. Numerous studies investigate the multiple meanings of veiling, paying attention to the religious sources of the discussion, and legal/political implications for the secular European public space (e.g., Gaspard and Khosrokhavar 1995; Dwyer 1999; El Guindi 1999; Franks 2000; Lorcerie 2005; Bowen 2006; Scott-Wallach 2007; Werbner 2007; Kilic, Saharso and Sauer 2008; Laborde 2008)' (Silvestri 2011, p1234).

This over-focus on a set population has undermined other British Muslim minorities i.e., Black Muslims and white British converts, which in turn, undermines the plurality of the Muslim identity which needs to be investigated further. Studies which are recent

¹¹ 'religiosity' what I mean by this term is in reference to the different ways in which Islam is practiced and the differing sets of beliefs.

to the British migration landscape focus on second and third generation set of Muslims who are ‘daughters’ or even ‘granddaughters’ of these migrants also show significant changes in attitudes and issues around British Muslim women (McKenna and Francis 2019, Akhtar 2014). The need to access and articulate the differing experiences of British Muslim women is paramount with the need to study changing relationships of British Muslims (inclusive of other British Muslim minorities) in Britain today.

Furthermore, given that my research puts being a ‘Muslim’ woman at its core, I feel it is important to distinguish the different levels of what ‘being Muslim’ involves because it will allow a greater understanding of the women in this thesis who will inevitably differ in their own personal religious stances. Islam has also been categorised as ‘non-organized’, ‘nonofficial’, ‘informal’, or ‘individual’ by various studies (see Jeldtoft 2011, Silvestri 2011). Modood and Ahmad (2007) give a more illustrative version which they broke down the different stance of what ‘being Muslim’ meant to individuals:

- ‘1. ‘Traditional Islam’ – reasoning from faith and first principles but doing so in the way of the traditional ulemma or, more likely, in a way not opposed to traditional Islamic learning.*
- 2. ‘Modernist Islam’ – reasoning from faith and first principles but doing so in ways that draw upon modernist ideas within an Islamic methodology (Ijtihad).*
- 3. ‘Philosophical Muslim’ – reasoning from first principles but without much systematic reference to Islam and drawing more on modern Western theory ethics and principles, including arguments about multiculturalism, equality and so on.*
- 4. ‘Existential Muslim’ – arguing in a more existential and pragmatic way, for example, linking the communities and institutions that one belongs to, say, Muslims and the Labour Party, or Muslims and racial equality institutions. Or to treat being ‘British Muslim’ as a hyphenated*

identity in which both parts are to be valued as important to oneself and one's principles and belief commitments.' (Modood and Ahmad 2007, p194).

This breakdown of Muslim identity is favourable because it shows the different links that one attaches to their self-identity. It also shows the ways in which Muslim identity can be interpreted. Furthermore, we always hear the role of the 'moderate Muslim' in media and politics after terror attacks. But what exactly is meant by moderate Muslim? Modood and Ahmad(2007) argue that '...'moderates' now added a discourse about the urgency of reinterpreting or re-reading Islam in an effort to retrieve and revive notions of tolerance, equality, and compassion.' (Modood and Ahmad 2007, p190). To add, their study defined 'moderate Muslims' as:

'...moderate Muslim' here is meant Muslims who are anti-terrorism (whether in the name of Islam or otherwise) and who are opposed to the invocation of Islam in militant political rhetoric. More specifically, they are opposed to the 'clash of civilizations' thesis, as espoused by, for example, American neo-conservatives and radical Islamists (another potentially controversial term), which claims that Islam and the West are two monoliths that are at war with each other and that the war is inevitable and stems from a deep civilizational difference and antagonism..' (Modood and Ahmad 2007, p190).

This definition of a 'moderate Muslim' does not sit well with the Muslim population at large as they identify it as a very controversial term (see Jeldtoft 2011). Participants in Jeldtoft's (2011) study acknowledged that as this is used negatively by the media. The connotations it carries imply very strict regulatory guidelines defined by the West as to what a Muslim should be. To understand this idea better it is important to acknowledge the difference between moderates and what we class as 'non-moderates' ones who adhere to the ancient teachings of the Qur'an without the acceptance of *ijtihad* which was discussed

earlier (moral self-reasoning and understandings of the texts). They adhere to the very basic and verbatim understanding of the Qur'anic texts and do not apply the current socio-political climate within this context. Again, this is a difficult position to claim as we cannot frame every 'non-moderate' Muslim as a radical or extremist because of their understandings of the Qur'an because although their beliefs are different, there are also many law-abiding citizens who do not associate themselves with the atrocities committed in the name of Islam (Modood and Ahmad, p190-191). Additionally, in a deeper sense, the 'moderate Muslim' also refers to the relationship in interweaving Western values and culture with those of the faith. In a way, this idea of hybrid identity aims to bind both the British and Islamic cultures/beliefs/values together. This amalgamation is what countless Multicultural studies have aimed to look at for example how the formation of identity is shaped by the emerging of two different cultures.

Furthermore, there is also an over assertion of Islam as taking centre stage for looking at Muslim identity to see 'the significance of Islam for all aspects of life' (Kibria 2007, p. 2) as being Muslim sometimes becomes a public or even a political identity i.e. political led groups such as Isis¹². By focusing on just the religious expression of Muslim identity and life, we run the risk of reifying 'Islam' as the principal identity for Muslims and making Muslims 'all about Islam' (Abu-Lughod 1989; Jeldtoft 2009).

Conversely, very few studies actually highlight how Islam is lived in the realm of the everyday in minority contexts (see Ostberg 2003; Jeldtoft 2008) and less so in the case of British Muslim women. I argue that we need to see 'being Muslim' as part of not seeing/assuming Islam is a 'primary identity' (Schmidt 2003, p. 163). When we do, we can start to look at what Jeldtoft (2011) classes as the 'everyday lived religion'. Nancy Ammerman argues that 'everyday implies the activity that happens outside the organized religious events

¹² Isis- stands for the 'islamic state for Iraq and Syria' an extremist militant group which has taken much of the responsibility for latest terror attacks around the world.

and institutions. ...Everyday religion may happen in both public and private life' (2007, p.5) I contend that adopting this 'everyday lived religion' framework allows us to investigate the minority agency on a micro-level or as 'Being Muslim is not just about Islam, but about making sense of the world.' (Jeldtoft 2011, p1147). For these Muslims:

'Living Islam for this particular group is all about the everyday life and making sense of their world. Being private about your religion, and thus being less visible in the public sphere, can thus also be a minority strategy which works for Muslims to give them greater space to navigate in relation to critical majority discourses on Islam' (Jeldtoft 2011, p1148).

The discussion of the private Muslim identity therefore goes beyond the religious parameters to argue that being 'Muslim' is also about the socio-cultural factors. A study (Dwyer 1998) of young British Muslim women found that Muslim identity both reinforced and contested constructions of local communities, for example in her study the girls reiterated the idea of being Muslim with belonging to the Pakistani-Mirpuri communities.

Additionally, a large study conducted (1,847 Muslim-Americans took part) to look at Islamic practice in the United States showed how religiosity conditioned covering among Muslim-American women and found various factors overall that contributed to the way in which they chose to practice their faith either through dress or using other factors. By looking at religious practice through 'multiple variable lenses' (discussed earlier), they identified that religiosity was often contextualised through single 'monolithic' texts i.e., only looking at a single school of thought around Islam. It was important to understand the ways in which these practices were complex. Most notably this study showed ways in which dress is intrinsic in certain settings such as attending mosque and through use of it in prayer (Westfall et al 2016, p773). The study focused on three different levels (1) Muslim socialisation (2) Religious Lifestyle (3) Religious abstinence. Their findings suggested that people that categorised

themselves as ‘Asian’ were less likely to wear the head covering compared to their white counterpart, through this, we understand the ways in which certain cultural and wider issues are associated with the choice of Islamic dress. However, the African American community felt marginalised by both the American and Muslim community and they were still marked as the ‘other’ the respondents also more notably looked favourably to the headscarf (Westfall et al 2016, p780-81).

Although Islam may not be a primary part of someone’s identity it nevertheless has to be acknowledged that other factors such as cultures, tradition, narratives and the ummah may unconsciously inform individuals’ everyday decisions and encounters (Silvestri 2011, p1231). The approach to seeing religion from an outset, i.e. by seeing women who ‘happen to be Muslim’ rather than implying religion as their primary identity. By taking this narrative it allows for a more intersectional look at the way in which religion operates but more importantly allows it to become a backdrop in the discussions of their everyday lived experiences. This suggests ‘...that attachment to an understanding of religion manifests itself in multiple ways, in a person’s lifetime and in different social milieus’ (Silvestri 2011, p1232). Conclusively, my reading of literature around Muslim identity understands that ‘... Islam may not be easily dismissed as a secondary element in the gendered experiences of Muslim women. Rather, Islam partially constitutes Muslim women through its conjunction with other socioeconomic markers.’ (Brown 2006, p417). Whilst recognising that other factors like social class, sexuality, caste (as examples) may also play a part the understanding of Muslim women’s identities. However, literature around this topic has suggested that there is a strong identity link with religion as being a forefront in understanding Muslim women’s identities and as a crucial point to be explored when considering the daily experiences of Muslim women.

2.5 The 'foreign' Muslim body

However, it is still vital to consider other socio-economic factors when we look to how the events of 9/11 and the 7/7 bombings have made an overwhelming shift and focus on the embodied Muslim women in public spaces (Meeto and Mirza 2007). The media has used the veil as a symbol of fear and deviance, i.e., terror-panic context, Islamophobia. Moreover, the veil is used by the media as a way of evoking 'fear' (Tarlo 2007, p139). There has been a shifting discourse in the way in which the veil is looked at: '...after 9/11, the orientalist gaze that looks upon the veiled woman as an object of fantasy has been replaced 'by the xenophobic, more specifically Islamophobic, gaze through which the veil, or headscarf, is seen as highly visible sign of despised difference.' (Donnell cited in Khiabany and Williamson 2008, p. 83). This 'visibility' of the veil can be seen to trigger the idea of 'otherness'.

Furthermore, the marker of difference also comes from the colonial mindset of viewing Islamic societies as inferior and 'backward'. The veil has almost become a symbol of the 'oppression' and 'degradation' of these women through the Western perspective. Thus, as Ahmed (1992) argues '....it became the open target of colonial attack and the spearhead of the assault on Muslim societies.' (Ahmed 1992 cited in Ruby, 2006, p62). In addition, the Muslim women's demand to be 'different' (i.e., wear the veil) is seen as a rejection of the welcoming embrace or 'gift' of the multicultural 'host' society' (Mirza 2013, p13) which further alienates and ostracises women who are visibly marked as different. Additionally, it is argued that the politics of racism in Britain has moved from '.... biological descendants to cultural inheritance.' (Ainurliza 2010, p1) The shift between 'colour' in the 1950/60's to 'race' until 1980's and then to ethnicity in the 1990's has shown ways in which society has shifted its ongoing relationship to the subject of 'race'. The new emerging shift which is argued is focused on 'religion' in the new millennium and in particular Islam and Muslims (Ainurliza 2017, p1-

2). What we now understand by this, is there has been a reoccurring change in the framing of the Muslim body in Britain which orientates itself in and around discriminatory ways of looking at Muslim women as the 'other'. This change then encourages the representations of Muslim women to be categorised into contingencies that are categorically out of their control.

An example of literature (Cooke 2007) which helps map out the framing of the Muslim woman is when we look at Cooke (2007) who coins the term 'Muslimwoman'¹³ to describe the ways in which Muslim women are 'homogenised' through the erasure of their diversity (Cooke 2007 p,140-141). The essay looks at the way in which Muslim women derive their agency from a set identity which seeks to class them as silent and invisible. She describes the term as follows: 'The Muslimwoman is both a noun and an adjective that refers to an imposed identification the individual may or may not choose herself. The Muslimwoman is not a description of a reality; it is ascription of a label that reduces all diversity to a single image.' (Cooke 2007, p140). This ascribed label attached to these women seeks to overlook national, cultural, historical and ethnic diversities from this broad group as '... The veil real or imagined, functions like race, a marker of essential difference that Muslim women today cannot escape.' (Cooke 2007, p140). Cooke argues that Muslim women are recognised and marked out as stereotypes that surround the ideas around Muslim women (discussed earlier) whether they chose to veil or not.

Furthermore, she uses Manuel Castells (1997) 'primary identity' to underpin the 'Muslimwoman' as an identity that resonates globally developing into a new type of cosmopolitanism- where this new identification of the Muslim woman is either disabling or empowering women across the world (Cooke 2007, p141): ' Muslimwoman cosmopolitanism

¹³ In her own words '...The Muslimwoman is both a noun and an adjective that refers to an imposed Identification the individual may or may not choose for herself. The Muslimwoman is not a description of a reality; it is the ascription of a label that reduces all diversity to a single image.' (Cooke 2007, p140).

works across borders to weave a hybrid cultural system that disturbs the hegemony and desired homogeneity in others of both neo-orientalists and religious extremists'. (Cooke 2007, p152). Cooke argues that the emergence of feminist interpretations is challenging and changing the traditional understandings of what it means to be a Muslim woman and the use of the public space allows for the negotiation of meanings and understandings of what it means to be a Muslim woman ... 'by linking piety with politics they are resisting pressures to be obedient, silent wards of men' (Cooke 2007, p147). Cooke touches on a few points that she feels have become prevalent post 9/11. Muslim women she argues are feeling more compelled to take their religion more seriously as an identification of self (a theory which I wish to explore in this research). They are also forging virtual relationships with transnational communities for information to be pooled. And finally, they are functioning as a complex primary identity – Muslimwoman (Cooke 2007, 150). She argues that the virtual space of the internet is allowing for anonymity and functions as a veil in itself for women to continuously express their views (Cooke 2007, p149). To add, through the use of the medium of the internet (which allows for the flow of ideas for many of these women) studies such as the one done by Cheruvallil-Contractor (2016) on motherhood and young British Muslim women show that there is an evident re-reading of foundational Islamic texts that are challenging the patriarchy by use of both faith and feminism. This change is therefore critical in understanding the emerging way in which the landscape of British Muslim women is operating and through the use of their own agency (Cheruvallil-Contractor 2016, p25-26).

Additionally, a study found that there is an overwhelming emphasis of misrepresentations of Muslim women in the mainstream media in Britain (Contractor 2012, p107-108), similarly, these patterns are emergent in another study in the West (Khibani 2009). Although there is a complex understanding to the Muslim women what these studies found was that there is oversimplification of Muslim woman and dress being categorised as 'oppressed'.

For many who chose to adhere to the Islamic dress code, it can be seen as spiritually based, or as anti-racist statements or as rejection over the Western ideals of young slim beautiful women or even assumed affiliation to a particular type of class. But these facts are often left ignored (Bullock and Jafri 2000, p37). As Spivak (1988, p92) puts it, we have become obsessed with the idea of white men saving brown women from brown men. This idea which Leila Ahmed (1992) refers to as 'Colonial feminism', this literature around popular representations of Muslim women is evaluated in many of the studies (Bullock and Jafri 2000; Spivak 1988; Khibani 2009; Cheruvallil-Contractor 2016) around Muslim identity because these studies continue to show the ways in which popular culture in the West targets and shows their identities.

Furthermore, Kutty's (1997) work of looking at Muslim women's representation in popular culture shows that there are Orientalist categories that are prescribed into understanding ways in which Muslim women are represented. The 'mysterious/exotic/ harem bellydancer' which fantasises over the covering of the veil to reveal a hyper-sexualised hidden identity was a common phenomenon. Also, the 'oppressed/backward' identity which is more than often used to represent the hijab/veil from a Western perspective and often pitted against the feminist ideals of moving away from an equal society. And finally, the 'militant Muslim woman' who is often displayed with guns and full Islamic covering representing a threat to Western society's security and freedom. This idea reinforces societal pressures to 'educate and save' women, which Abu-lughod (2002) contests '...Projects of saving other women depend on and reinforce a sense of superiority by Westerners, a form of arrogance that needs to be challenged.' (Abu-Lughod 2002, 789). In addition, she states that obsessions and fantasies of veiling seen through 'The colonial Harem' (1986) need to be addressed as both undermine the agency of Muslim women. In addition, Skeggs states that 'The contemporary White, Western, civilizing system is a system of classification, a process of regulation and normalizing, which

drawing upon historical legacies, has always defined Black women as ‘other’, ‘different’ and ‘sexual’.’ (Skeggs cited in Afshar and Maynard 1994). So, in order to move away from this misrepresentation of Muslim women which has long been illegitimately assigned we need to understand their own varied identities.

In addressing the issue of British Muslim identity which can be defined as ‘...a quasi-ethnic sociological formation’ (Meer 2008 cited in Tinker and Smart 2012, p644) this conceptualisation is a result of blurred boundaries between the ethnic/ religious identity. Moreover, it notes that the Muslim identity is an intersection between the self-assigned and externally ascribed (Tinker and Smart 2012, p644). In order to understand Muslim women, it is important to understand the complexity of identity and its formation. As stated earlier the Ummah forms many commonalities amongst Muslims all over the world as the core values of Islam are underpinned and thus ascribed externally. The self-formation of Identity is the subject of creating oneself through the opportunities and circumstances that are either present or you choose to surround yourself with, or what Douglas describes as ‘state of mind’. This ‘state of mind’ not only acknowledges who we are but also considers who we want to be, who we want to be with and how we wish others to see us (Douglas 2009 cited in Kabir 2016 p 528). In addition, Kabir (2016) through the study of Muslim women in Australia, Britain and U.S.A showed that Muslim women’s identity is negotiated, situated or circumstantial. This study showed the flexibility and varied identities of Muslim women across these three countries and indicated the complexities information of identities. Thus, this study will aim to take into account the varied and complex roles these identities play, information of what it means to first be ‘Muslim’ but also ways in which this affects the way they feel about the Islamic ‘dress code’.

2.6 The Identity of Muslim women

The construction of identity is also a highly talked about topic in the social sciences, a number of ways in which external factors contribute to the ways in which people learn about self and others in society. Identity is process that is more often considered to be the evolving process of 'becoming' rather than 'being' (Dillon 1999 cited in Peek 2005, p 217). A number of factors such as family, social class, religion, and education as well as ethnic and cultural are some of the ways through which identity is constructed. Sociologists for example McCall and Simmons (1978), Goffman (1959), Rosenberg (1978) have written extensively on this subject. While some labels such as gender or our ethnicities may well live with us forever, other labels such as marital status or our political and religious identities can be changed either through course of time or upon our own choices. Literature surrounding this topic (McCall and Simmons 1978; Goffman 1959; Rosenberg; 1978) suggests that the way in which we experience the world is due to a number of factors which initiate our understandings into the construction of self. Identity theory is an attempt to link the self with wider social structures. In the aspect of understanding the construction of Muslim identity in particular Hijri (1965) suggests that for her participants the Muslim identity was very important and played a huge role in integrating religion with everyday life.

Additionally, as religion is seen as a personal and social basis for Muslim identity, we need to look at the ways in which religious identity develops and is understood. Numerous sociologists have looked at religion through maintenance of group identity, especially in relation to ethnic minorities, through this they tie ethnic and cultural factors strongly with religious identity. When looking at the identities of immigrants, studies (Kurien 1998; Rayaprol 1997) have shown that due to avoidance of alienation and confusion of the new society people often turn to religion as a way to connect with their sense of self and built a community where

they ‘fit in’ by creating spaces of comfort such as religious institutions so they can re-establish familiar socio-cultural activities. The socio-psychological benefits as well as economic, support, friends offered to help overcome social isolation (Peek 2005, p219).

When we look specifically at Muslim religious identity, we can see that there are three stages which Peek (2005) identifies as ‘developmental’ into recognising the religious identity in which their faith became more intense and their religious practice increases. Peek (2005) found that in the first stages of development i.e. when the participants were young children very little critical reflection was given to the idea of ‘being Muslim’. Similarly, Adams and Marshall (1990) recognise that social and individual identities with children are more likely to develop when they are adults but as children these identities are just assigned without any given critical reflection. Individuals are argued to absorb the social norms and values and internalise formations of identity from parents and peers (Peek 2005, p225). To add, Peek found that in his study of younger teenagers in American schools that because of the combination of fear of stigmatisation, personal lack of religious understanding, peer pressure and the pressure to assimilate there was a tendency to hide and conceal their religious identity. However, when we compare this to the U.K and to certain areas with a larger Muslim population such as Bradford specifically, this concealment of identity did not happen, in fact their religious identity was used as a way to assimilate with other peers in schools (see Dwyer 1999). So if someone who self identifies as a ‘Muslim’ at the age of 6 that label and its identity may alter through the course of time and at 18, being a ‘Muslim’ may mean completely different to what being Muslim at the age of 6 meant. Furthermore, ‘Age, history, social contexts and what we generally call life combine to alter virtually all senses of self and identity over time and place’ (Afshar and Maynard 1994, p127). The individual identity therefore can shift overtime due to any of these factors and personal experiences.

Furthermore, cognitive conception of religious identity is argued to develop as the recognition of the role and understandings of religion develop and the study states that this was a time that they began to identify themselves as Muslim. In this study they found in the stages of entering college they began to have links with new Muslim friends, and this led to them forming and becoming part of organisational social settings which allowed them to explore their religious identity further. These religious organisations then provided a safe space in discussing and practising their beliefs (Ammerman 2003, Sherkat and Ellison 1999 cited in Peek 2005 p 228). Additionally, research on converts to religion showed that they also formed similar assimilation to these organisations and groups that allowed them to adjust and ‘fit in’ to their new religious identities (Snow and Machalek 1984, Stromberg 1993 cited in Peek 2005, p228). Other studies (See Dwyer 1999 and Peek 2005) also found that where religious identity becomes important the participants move away from their cultural norms and values of their parents. Students in both these studies chose to assert their religious identities and reject ethnic, national, and cultural identities arguing it as un-Islamic (Peek 2005, p229).

It is interesting to recognise that in the study conducted by Peek (2005) the declared and more asserted religious identity came across as a response to the tragedy of 9/11. In the study, the events after 9/11 led the students to pray more often and increased their need for spiritual guidance. The students in this study started to study the Qur’an to help respond to the many inquiries they faced after this event, in a way the events of 9/11 inadvertently led Muslims to learn more about Islam which over time strengthened their religious identity. They also felt that as their religious identities became more important to them, so too did the importance of representing Muslims and Islam in a positive light to try and manage the backlash that they felt they were receiving from the public at the time.

Similarly, scholars have noted that in times of crisis and group threats, there becomes an overwhelming need to increase group solidarity (Durkheim 1984, Coser 1964,

Smith 1998). Stronger individual religious identity may result in a more collective and cohesive group identity. We can then see how ‘...Age, history, social contexts and what we generally call life combine to alter virtually all senses of self and identity over time and place’ (Afshar and Maynard 1994, p127). The individual identity therefore can shift overtime due to any of these factors and personal experiences. So if someone identifies as a ‘Muslim’ at the age of 6 that label and its meaning for the individual may alter through the course of time and at 18, being ‘Muslim’ may mean something completely different to what ‘being Muslim’ meant at the age of 6.

We also know that clothing and fashion play a key role in people’s presentation of self as ‘Clothing plays a vital role in displaying one’s identity to others; it acts as ‘kind of visual metaphor for identity’ (Droogsma, 2007, p. 296). Clothing practices are also important because they underline the social meanings they acquire as part of learned body techniques (Lewis 2009; Craik 1994). Droogsma (2007) states that her study of American women who veiled indicated that they see the veil as an act of resistance to patriarchal norms in society. The veil, in the case of this study, then helped the women keep control of societal norms (fashion etc.) and resist aspects of patriarchal society. Additionally, Droogsma states for these women it provides them with control of their most intimate and private aspects of life such as family or husband. The show of body is controlled to only allow the gaze to close people (Droogsma, 2007). Also, the veil allowed freedom from pressures of fashion and exploitation and sexualisation of women (Droogsma, 2007, p. 310) and it also served as a ‘behaviour check’ (behaviour in accordance with Islamic principles) before they act. For the women interviewed who did not wear the veil other aspects of their behaviour were important to them such as regulating modest clothes and also walk etc. (Siraj 2011, Droogsma, 2007).

In addition, it is argued that society is socially constructed to view women as objects of gaze. With the use of hijab, the woman has control over this gaze and there is a ‘gaze

reversal' (Afshar, 2008). By narrowing the body that is open for exchange thereby... 'The veil 'destabilises and refigures power relations' (Brenner 1996 cited in Franks 2000). This destabilisation perpetuates its rejection of dominant discourses that are prevalent in mainstream society. Additionally, studies (Ruby 2006, Siraj 2011, Mirza 2013, Droogsma 2007, Tarlo 2007) show that there is a public and private use of the veil. They use the veil interchangeably as a way to negotiate their agency and allow it as a means to mark spaces:

'Hijab as a garment, while making her out as separate, offers a Muslim woman the means to move between the private (domestic) and the public spheres and to be a spectator (or participant) in the public world of men.' (Franks, 2000, p. 919).

The dress is also a key symbol of how individuals wish to represent and present themselves both as individual members and as part of a wider group (Rafaeli and Pratt 1993). In the case of Muslim women, the Ummah (Global Muslim network) can be seen to form the group identity (Humphries & Brown 2002, p929). Anthropologist Hannah Papanek who worked in Pakistan describes the burqa as a 'portable seclusion' (Abu-Lughod 2002 p 785). This not only allowed women to use it in terms of gaining wider access in public spaces but was a marker as a role in which she could go about uncontested as a religious affirmation that allowed her access to the otherwise fenced territory. The idea that the covering gives agency to the woman is often overlooked and not presented in Western discourse is an example of how the myriad of Islamic dress is not understood as Abu-Lughod argues:

'Not only are there many forms of covering, which themselves have different meanings in the communities which they are used, but also veiling itself must not be confused with, or made to stand for, lack of agency' (Abu-Lughod 2002, p786).

Abu-Lughod argues that the many forms of coverage are used differently in different types of contexts. The idea that 'veiling' in the West is often seen through a singular

lens which often focuses on the extremes of Islamic dress, for example, the niqab (face covering) in the media even while most British Muslim women do not wear it. Furthermore, Abu-Lughod (2002) argues that there is the lack of understanding from western discourses of how a dress and ideals of modesty both Islamically and culturally are defined.

We know that people use dress to present identity, for example, EMOs, hippies, meaning that “We have become responsible for the design of our own bodies” (Giddens, 1991). No longer is the body conceived as a fixed essence. The changes that it undergoes are no longer regarded as wholly dependent on natural physiological processes. ‘The headscarf disrupts the visual field in a national and increasingly European context in which men and women, boys and girls, expect to see these bodies’ (Fanon 1965; Partridge 2003; Scott 2007; Ewing 2008, cited in Partridge 2012). The fact that Muslim bodies remain covered is not only unpleasing to the Western gaze but also means they are looked at as suspicious. As they cannot be consumed with pleasure and because they are inaccessible, they become looked at as potentially dangerous (Partridge 2012). Furthermore, ‘hijabophobia’ was a term coined by Zine 2006 as it stems from Islamophobia but is rooted in sexist and racist discourse in essentialising the Muslim women (Hamzeh 2011, p484) it is the fear that covering and veiled practices are a threat to equality and Western democracy as well as a complete lack of understanding of the veil represents and why women wear it. It is an ideal framed in colonial bias and a result of misunderstandings and misrepresentations that are given by Western media.

However, interestingly, it is the revivalism of Islam in non-Islamic countries which has seen many women adopt and change the way in which they dress. This emergence of re-establishing and connecting with the ancestral identity and upholding often stricter views than their own parents before them. Haleh Afshar in her study of a group of immigrant West Yorkshire women uncovers that integral issues that are important for these women. In her study of three generational women living in one household she points out that Muslim women in this

community have been appointed the site of honour and shame and the key to this is often linked with how they choose to dress (Afshar cited in Afshar & Maynard 1994). Furthermore, Afshar (1994) points out that modesty and morality are the key aspects of Muslim women's identity which is centered on sexual purity and apparent modesty (Afshar cited in Afshar and Maynard 1994, p134). Moreover, Mahmood (2001) through the study of Egyptian women's mosque movement argues that veiling is a sign of sophistication and re-interpretation and revival of Islamic feminism through focused desire to be closer to God as 'Islamic orientated feminist movement that is challenging injustices and reinterpreting the religious tradition' (Abu-Lughod 2002, p788). The rejection of post-colonialism and feminism is seen through the Islamic dress itself to be embedded with an assertion of a belonging to a Muslim identity:

'Encoded in the dress style is an affirmation of an Islamic Identity and the morality and a rejection of Western materialism, consumerism, commercialism, and values. The vision behind the Islamic dress is rooted in these women's understanding of early Islam and, as earlier presented, in primary and secondary textual sources. But is a contemporary movement about contemporary issue.' (El Guindi 1999, p58).

Additionally, Muslim women are seen to adopt the veil '... as a symbol of political independence, nationalism, and revivalism and as a conscious rejection of Western values. They have evolved and developed a new sense of self and a new perspective on their place in society and history.' (Afshar cited in Afshar and Maynard 1994, 134-135). This new perspective adds to the fact that there is an emerging trend in which Muslim women seek to reinsert their religious identity. Similarly, Afshar (1994) argues that the French refusal to allow two young women to wear headscarves to school in 1989 fuelled anger which led to Muslim women in France and elsewhere asserting their religious and cultural rights and a rebellion against the political context. Furthermore, the war on terror accentuated this feeling of separation for many Muslims as they felt their religion and culture was under attack but within

this context, they also sought out their strength as a global Muslim community and defiance to the political agenda which they saw was increasing working against them (Afshar cited in Afshar and Maynard 1994, p143-144).

The hijab in certain spaces acts almost as a territorial boundary from the outside world (Mernissi 1991 cited in Johnson 2017, p281). This boundary Johnson notes is of particular interest as she demonstrates ways in which the layers of cloth act as a barrier of neutralisation from outside spaces and the comfort spaces of the home. At home, although there is the removal of the cloth there is also no removal of the understanding spaces created by the house. There are also references in this study to show the shift in which types of scarves are worn, most notably one of the participants of the study explains her choice of wearing a plain scarf to her university. Johnson argues this is to do with ‘hypervisibility’ of being a Black Muslim women. Studies such as Franklin (2001, 144) also show how Black bodies have to navigate themselves over concerns to not ‘look foolish under the white gaze’.

To add, Haw (2009) in her research talks about the ‘mythic feedback loop’ in order to explain how individuals link the internal ‘self’ to the ‘external’ and argue that it is ‘...a symbolic function to shape the internal sense-making of individuals. The loop, therefore, breaches the boundary between the internally ‘felt’ world of the individual and the external world of social action by linking thinking, feeling and action.’ (Haw 2009, p365). For instance, recall how in 2003 Shabina Begum a 13-year-old Bangladeshi girl, was excluded from her school for refusal to remove her jilbab. Begum later went on to win a court battle on the matter stating: ‘Today’s decision is a victory for all Muslims who wish to preserve their identity and values despite prejudice and bigotry...A consequence of an atmosphere that has been created in Western societies post-9/11, an atmosphere in which Islam has been made a target for vilification in the name of the ‘war on terror’ (Gerard 2006 cited in Haw 2009, p366).

To continue, through this statement and academic research on Muslim women (Mirza 2013; Ruby 2006; Haw 2009; Brown 2006), we begin to see the links between the Muslim dress and sense of self. Furthermore, Dwyer (1999) in her study of young British Muslim in two schools in the northwest of London found that ‘dress was one of the most important means through which young Muslim women negotiated their gendered identities.’ (Dwyer 2000, p481). The study argues that dress becomes a signifier of the identity of young British Muslim women. Muslim women continue to take up the veil as a sign of assertion to be recognised and respected in feminist, social and political discourses (Hoodfar 1993). For followers of Islam, the dress has often been interpreted as the use of the veil and it is argued that the ‘Hijab is a multidimensional embodiment of interwoven subtle values and practices - the visual, spatial, and ethical’ (Hamzeh 2011, p2). In addition, Tarlo (2007) describes the hijab as the term ‘metamorphosis’ in which she argues the use of this ‘hijab transforms not only their sense of self but also their relationship to others and the wider environment’ (Tarlo 2007, p139). The idea that the hijab itself is a very complex garment which is subject to own and wider opinions which becomes part of a multi-faceted identity.

To investigate the complexity of the hijab, literature such Waninger (2015) talks about ‘hijabista’ which is someone defined as a Muslim women who dresses stylishly while in an aim to adhere to the practices of Islamic dress code (Kavakci and Kraeplin 2016, p3). This argument is often echoed in relation to seeing the hijab as a form of clothing that is used to ‘fit in’ in society. Marshall (2010) presents the idea of a ‘specular economy’ whereby there has been a heightened awareness in the ways with which we present ourselves and how we are seen by others as a means to understand the world through the use of social media (Marshall cited in Kavakci and Kraeplin 2016, p 7). We have become obsessed with the ideas of sharing of personal information in public examples like the Kardashian who have grown in fame through use of such social media which often promotes a certain lifestyle. The article argues through

looking at three ‘hijabistas’ that the identities are heavily influenced by Western mainstream culture rather than the traditional religious identity one in which is market driven and her ‘fashionable body’ is given more significance than her religious.

However, some current literature i.e. Tarlo (2007), Droogsma (2007) looks at Islamic dress code in terms of identity, it is very specific in terms of the fact it recognises only ‘traditionally thought Islamic dress’ but fails to recognise the idea that the Islamic dress code goes beyond the focus of covering via the use of the veil. Literature (Dwyer 2000, Ruby 2006, Mirza 2013) has shown that the Islamic dress code itself can be seen in terms of modesty, for example, choosing to wear certain length of clothes. The term ‘hijab’ refers to more to the modesty in behaviour rather than garment itself (Ruby, 2006). In terms of the way they dress it is important to look at the way in which these women scope their agency through the use of dress and what meanings they attach to it. Contrastingly Ramji’s (2007) study on dynamics of religion and gender in young British Muslims showed the negative effects of wearing the hijab were noted, as being ‘marked out as different’(p1177) or ‘drawing more attention to yourself’(p1176). Interestingly this study showed that participants felt that Muslim women were often too focused on when it came to the idea of modesty as compared to men who they felt were often less observant of the practice even though it is a requirement for them (Ramji 2007, p1184).

Furthermore, as Franks (2000, p918) argues ‘the headscarf is, of itself, neither liberating nor oppressive, and that the power relations with which it is associated are situated not only in the meaning with which it is invested but also in the circumstances under which it is worn.’ She recognises that the most important aspect is to look at ‘ circumstances’ in which Islamic dress is worn showing that it is actually just as much of an internal personal decision as the external factors which help understand the reasons behind the veil and why one wishes to use Islamic dress. Similarly, El Guindi recognised the external factors in which veiling and

other forms of Islamic dress emerged ‘... the voluntary wearing of the hijab since the mid-seventies is about liberation from imposed, imported identities, consumerist behaviours, and an increasing materialist culture. Further, a principal aim has been to allow women greater access to Islamic literacy.’ (El Guindi 1999, p71). The idea was that for these women dress was a marker of imposing their own identities whilst fighting against what they deemed as a negative culture that opposed their ideals. The discourse around the veil encompasses and requires a careful look at the societal narratives and the ways in which they generate meaning behind the Islamic dress.

Furthermore, Johnson’s study (2017) also showed public spaces of comfort, the idea that certain spaces allowed these women to feel comfortable i.e., at mosque and also areas that were highly Muslim populated they did not feel hyper-visible and felt a comfort in spaces that were seen as more open and accepting of the Islamic dress. Although this study highlighted and addressed a lot of different dynamics into looking at the British Muslim women, it was again looking at participants in reference to the wearing of the veil. It may have been particularly interesting to see how these ‘spaces of comfort’ differed when looking at the ways in which women who do not veil practice the same strategies of understanding comfort.

In addition, Tarlo (2010) recognises the emergence of Muslim lifestyle magazines, Hijab fashion blogs, online ‘modest clothing’ lines all of which ‘...participate in the reframing of hijab as an item of clothing of both fashion and faith, thereby challenging popular representations and perceptions of it as a signifier of Muslim otherness and unchanging traditions.’ (Tarlo, 2010, p225). I argue that the recent ‘Modest wear’ catwalk at London fashion week, Dolce and Gabbana’s new ‘abaya collection’ (Vogue 2016), and high street brand H&M’s use of a veiled Muslim model are all examples of a new emergent change of the British Muslim women’s identity. This recent ‘trend’ of the shifting discourse on the identity of Muslim women is not only a very recent phenomenon, but one that needs to be explored

because it adds to the perplexing identity of British Muslim women. In addition, Moors (cited in Lewis 2013, p19-20) argues that the emergence of Islamic consumer culture has shifted the wide availability of different forms of Islamic dress led by the fashion-conscious young Muslim women. This new phase in the shifting Islamic dress allows us to understand the shift in the adherence of traditional Islamic dress.

The shifting discourse around the Islamic dress also shows the fluidity it was adopted by Muslims who are a minority in the West where Islamic dress was not as easily available to use their own understandings and ideas of modesty to create 'Islamic attire' from high street brands such as H&M, Mango or Zara. Brands and Muslim women alike use the high street as a way of negotiating their styles of dress in accordance with their perceived ideas around modesty (Lewis 2013, p49). Studies (see Tarlo 2010; Lewis 2013) have shown simple factors such as adherence to wearing loose-fitting clothing have also contributed to 'ideals of modesty' which need to be explored.

Social media has also added a huge interactivity within the younger Muslim generations who use it to actively engage in shaping and encouraging the way they live day to day lives. Lewis (2013, p50) argues:

'Women are using the internet to share ideas, rate styles, comment on mainstream provision and intervene in debates about modest behaviour, extending the opportunities offered offline by the establishment in print of faith-based style media in the first half of the 2000's.'

Via the use of social media outlets like Instagram and Snapchat, Muslim women have been exposed to far greater numbers and ways in which to class and decide on their Islamic dress sense. Furthermore, Muslim women bloggers have also taken on ways to outline fashionable styles of Islamic dress (Moors cited in Lewis 2013, p23-24).

We often dress and change into different types of clothing throughout the day, and these changes are done according to our different spaces and audiences we adapt to (Woodward 2005 cited in Johnson 2017). Studies like Azeezat Johnson (2017) who looked at Black Muslim women's experiences, negotiation, and positioning in relation to the idea of 'comfort dressing' in the home is extremely vital as it is an under researched area of looking at Black Muslim women in particular. Although her research paves a way to looking at new forms of understanding Muslim women's dress, the research can be developed by looking at Black Muslim women who do not wear a veil. Johnson herself (2017) points out this new focus is '...understanding the fluidity of our identities, changing in relation to the different audiences we engage in.' (Johnson 2017, p280). There is an over-fixation with the headscarf and those spaces which are marked out as increasing popularised thanks to the media and political climates.

In addition, Studies such as Johnson (2017) have highlighted these differences in which she explores what comfort/discomfort means to these women without the preposition to over-focus on their actual public Muslim identities. The aim of this study was to underline the fluidity of Muslim women and the ways in which their dress differs from public spaces. This study's focus on Black Muslim women which is argued are often overlooked as discussed earlier the focus to look at 'other types' of British minorities, I feel, here is an important one. This study will also aim to understand the variants in which these women are associated and negotiate their own practices of dress. The marked veil is therefore not the focus of this study but will underline some key aspects into exploring how forms of dress are negotiated and interpreted by these women.

2.7 Conclusion

Conclusively, the academic literature has shown that the agency of Muslim women's bodies relies on cultural, political, and social contexts, which are in themselves fluid and fluctuating. We, therefore, need to address how women's choice of clothing is used to represent identity through these shifting dynamics? Finally, how do these dynamics change these women's perception of their identities? My research will, therefore, confront issues around some of these debates through these alternating contexts. Literature has highlighted but not fully explored ideas of identity used through Islamic dress code for women who take different approaches to Islamic dress through different religiosity. It will also comment on the 'new trends' around veiling with the hijab and ideas of modesty 'becoming fashionable'. This research I feel is also timely as the ongoing debates surrounding Muslim women dress is talked about with more European countries (The Netherlands, Austria) and globally (Chad, Cameroon, Quebec) following suit. The academic literature has also shown how gendered epistemology within an Islamic paradigm can add to the growing body of literature surrounding debates on identities of Muslim women. As Islamic feminism is a fairly new and emerging topic covering aspects of nuanced and complex understandings of Muslim women, this project will build on employing internal subjecthood as a new way of looking at their identities.

3. Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Whilst undertaking empirical research, it is essential that careful consideration is taken when choosing and designing the methods to ensure the collection of data for the purpose of this thesis. Therefore, in this chapter I start by discussing the epistemological stance that I have taken with this project. In this project I have used a snowball sampling method for focus groups and semi-structured interviews with British Muslim women. The focus groups consisted of the women in a local community centre in Manchester, whilst the women who I interviewed were from different parts of the U.K. This project uses a thematic analysis as a means to analyse the data that is collected which will also be discussed in this chapter. And finally, this chapter concludes by a discussion of my reflections, and the ethical issues of this project.

The social sciences have various philosophical traditions which research finds itself situated in. The fundamental of sociological research ‘is concerned with people and their life contexts, and with philosophical questions relating to the nature of knowledge and truth (epistemology), values (axiology) and being (ontology) which underpin human judgements and activities.’ (Somekh et al 2005, p1). Social science by nature differs from its views than from the ‘natural sciences’ because it concerns itself with understanding meanings and context around individuals and wider social groups and relations. There are two approaches in terms of where social researchers often position themselves positivist¹⁴ and interpretivist¹⁵. Positivism has a long-held tradition in the natural sciences but also in the earlier research in sociology. Whereas Interpretivist epistemological frameworks have also widely been used by anthropologists and social researchers alike but have been less commonly been used in the

¹⁴ ‘An epistemological position that advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond’ (Bryman 2008, p697)

¹⁵ An epistemological position that requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action, (Bryman 2008, p694).

natural sciences (Somekh et al 2005, p7-8). Whilst Positivist understanding assumes a fixed and measurable reality, interpretivist methodology aims to question what it is like to be in the world? As well as how we can understand someone else's experiences of the world? Its depth and meaning of understanding social action set it apart as a meaningful epistemology to use when looking at humanistic interactions.

Whilst positivist epistemology uses quantitative methods for example statistics, surveys, questionnaires etc. in trying to understand and locate phenomena. Interpretivist epistemology uses qualitative methods, for example, in-depth interviews, auto-ethnography, participant observation, photo-elicitation etc. Interpretivism also provides what Wang (2013) has argued as 'thick data' (rich and in-depth) as a challenge to 'big data' (breadth and scale) presented in the positivist approach. The interpretivist approach considers the importance of context, understanding meanings and assessing everyday life which is also key my objectives for this research. Although the positivist use of large-scale data may be useful in some areas of research (for example large studies in which the researcher aims to look at ways to gain a general consensus on the topic) I argue it would be unsuitable for this research given that this study does not seek to represent the lives of a myriad of British Muslim or even Muslim women worldwide. Rather it seeks to understand the lived experiences of the women who have taken part in this project in order to understand their relations to identity, religion, and clothing.

3.2 Epistemology

As discussed in literature review chapter, there are multiple strands of feminism, from the very early Eurocentric ideas around feminism and moving towards Black feminism which is an inclusion of 'race' and gender. I went on to discuss how this paved a way for 'intersectional feminism' which aimed to be inclusive for all. Finally, I looked at Islamic feminism as a way

to assert how religious identity marks an important but fundamental foundation for a growing number of Muslim women. This section reflects those arguments which go in detail to inform how I shaped my epistemological stance and a reflection on how and why I had then chosen Intersectionality as a framework for my methodology.

Feminist standpoint

As we had established in the earlier literature chapters, there are different types of Feminisms (Harding 1987; Smith 1974; Haraway 1988; Collins 2000) which argue for rights and equalities of all. To add to this, Dorothy Smith (1974) states that sociology has been focused and built within the male social universe, thereby it does not acknowledge the views and experiences of women. As my research is specific to the study of marginalised women it is important to acknowledge the experiences of these bodies through an adaptation of feminist standpoint theory. Harding (1987) argues that ‘women’s experiences, informed by feminist theory, provide a potential grounding for more complete and less distorted knowledge claims than do men’s’ (Harding 1987, sp184). In addition, Haraway (1988) proposed women’s situated knowledge can be used to inform empirical inquiry. The use of feminist standpoint theory gives ‘voice’ (Foss and Foss, 1994) as it aims for a richer diverse understanding of the women of my research.

Furthermore, Sandra Harding (1991) argues that the interpretivist epistemology aims to challenge ‘scientific knowledge’ that is well endowed by positivists. Interpretivist empiricism then challenges the traditional assumptions that positivist epistemology places where it imitates ‘nature as a machine’ (Harding 1991, p114). Particularly as the social sciences concern themselves with human interactions, this reflects the ‘non mechanic nature’ within which social researchers work. This thesis aims to look at the lives of the Muslim women who take part in this study and encapsulate their views and understandings. Furthermore, it

aims to understand and articulate the concerns within the social context and see how well it is reflected onto current literature and look to fill any gaps current literature fails to address (as discussed in the earlier literature chapter).

Furthermore, I argue that feminist standpoint theory recognises and reflects ways in which women's agency works. Feminist standpoint theory promotes research on women should be done for women, by women and where possible with women (Doucet and Mauthner 2002, p40). I recognise that as a British Muslim woman myself, the lens through which I will conduct this research will be different compared to another researcher. However, it is argued that this is a strength and as feminist standpoint theory states the level of my subjectivity may uncover underlying meaning. As I also consider myself a practicing Muslim my knowledge about Islam and its key concepts also helps me understand ways in which these women may refer to certain ideas about Islam. However, to make sure these women's voices are being reflected rather than my own I will be using prompts (discussed later in the methods) in an attempt to 'map out' their identities.

My standpoint derives from the fact that I am a British Muslim woman of Pakistani heritage with what I describe as a liberal Sunni upbringing. As race, religion, and gender are key aspects of this study my experiences as a British Muslim woman can be seen to as relatable to the women in my research. The knowledges that I have gathered through my everyday lived experience is the reason this research is of great significance to me because I have always wanted to understand how other Muslim women use clothing and identity. However, standpoint feminism argues the need to be self-conscious, and self-aware and to develop interpretations of new realities that you may come across (Collins 1991, Harding 1991). What it highlights is an understanding that although my experiences may be similar in some way they do not represent the experiences of the women in this study. Also, that I may

come across experiences completely different to my own that I may not be familiar with, so therefore it is important to include these in my research.

In light of this, standpoint feminism has some challenges which I claim need addressing. First and foremost, the issue of essentialism. Although it is argued that women's experiences differ from men, it does not mean that all women's experiences are the same. Every woman's experience is different and understanding this difference can be challenging. A lot of feminist texts (see the women from a Western perspective which does not take account of marginalised women's experience. Earlier feminist anthropologists who tried to capture experiences of women from the East are now largely thought to have misunderstood the cultures they studied. The representation of identity through clothing is something that is important for this study the 'lived experience' for women in this study then is an important factor to uncover. Although earlier standpoint feminism did not address the issues of essentialism constructively, many standpoint feminism theorists recognise the various degrees to which women's experiences can differ. A development on this idea is driven largely from the Black feminist critique. Similarly, Mohanty (1988) argued that women cannot be seen as a singular homogenous group. It is argued that although women share similar biological attributes, they do not however, share the varied sociological and anthropological universals (p65).

Black feminism

Consequently, the Black feminist critique further develops itself in recognising that the way in which Black women experience the world is unique and specific, and needs to be understood through the 'matrix of domination' (Hill-Collins 1990) in which issues power structure mean that ethnicity, gender, social-economic status, age and sexuality alter and shape their experiences of the world. By placing women at the centre of analysis, we empower and uncover

not only the experiences of this marginalised group but also disclose the mechanisms through which Eurocentric masculinist perspectives work (Collins 2000). In addition, Bhavnani (1994) argues that feminist epistemologies such as those from Black feminist writers like Patricia Hill Collins and Angela Y. Davis are different because they suggest that ‘...histories of the feminist movement in both of those countries are fraught with racisms and exclusionary practices.’ (Bhavnani cited in Afshar and Maynard 1994, p27). Therefore, Black feminist epistemologies point out the vital role that these histories have played in producing radicalised, gendered and class-based inequalities and that they are ‘embedded in our creation of knowledge’ (Bhavnani cited in Afshar and Maynard 1994, p27).

However, as valuable as Black feminist critique has been to feminist theories, it still locates itself within the struggles of Black American/African experiences which contest some of the dichotomies of this study. They do not bridge the gap or understanding of what is deemed as ‘brown bodies’ or people who associate themselves with the Islamic faith. The experiences of Black people often centre on their racialised identities rather than the religious identity which is a lot less considered in comparison. Due to the emergence of Black feminist critique in America (where the majority of Black experiences are centred on people from African American backgrounds who went on to convert to Christianity) the framing of Black feminist critique is therefore based largely on the Western ‘Christian/Judaeo’ religious understanding. However, when we look at the experiences of Muslim women, we need to understand that religious identity is both differing in terms of its practice culturally and beliefs. This project is studying Muslim identities, where the religious and cultural practices differ to those of the Christian/Judaeo understanding. In studying Muslim women’s experiences, we, therefore, need to capture understandings of Islamic traditions and beliefs. As the criteria of being ‘Muslim’ itself is an important aspect of this study, the need to integrate an Islamic theoretical framework is vital.

Islamic feminism

As a result of the Western Christian/Judeo frameworks Zine (2004) argues that Western discourses often apply colonial bias and/or patriarchal fundamental extremes such as the Taliban regimes to topics around Muslim women. These discourses do not allow Muslim women their own agencies and political maturity especially in relation to their identities and relationship to Islam (Zine 2004, p169). Furthermore, Zine (2004) argues that ‘... The idea that women can use religion as a site of resistance and as an epistemological terrain upon which to construct alternative visions of womanhood has not been validated in the most antiracist feminist discourses.’ (Zine 2004, p171). Zine (2004) argues because religion has mostly been looked upon in terms of fundamentalism and it’s belonging to patriarchal ideals, it dislocates the other varied orientations of faith that exist. It is important to this study in particular because levels of religiosity are a factor that is explored within this study. Therefore, to fully explore this narrative careful consideration needs to be taken in order to allow space for a broader understanding of Islam.

To add, Hunt (1999) in her study of feminist movements of American women studied separate groups of women with either secular or religious beliefs and found that women who had secular orientations often looked at the women who held religious views to form identities from a patriarchal doctrine. They also found hypocrisy in following what they saw as racist, sexist and classiest religious institutions (Hunt 1999 cited in Zine 2004, p171-172). To add, although both groups had their own biases and held essentialist notions about the other, what Hunt understood from this was that both groups had to form a ‘mutual respect’ for one another. She states:

‘Mutual respect must involve a matrix of understandings, including the whole spectrum of race and class analysis, which will make?the women’s movement a more complete power. This will

also incorporate rich cultural, ethnic, age and sexual diversity patterns, as well as spiritual or religious diversity.’ (Hunt 1999, p116).

Similarly, Zine (2004) notes that ‘secular Muslim feminists all too often brand their faith-based sisters as victims of ‘false consciousness’ who therefore presumably lack the political maturity to understand, articulate, and combat the nexus of oppressions they face.’ (Zine 2004, p173). Furthermore, Islamic scholars such as Al Hibri (1999) who situate themselves within a faith-based feminist perspective state:

‘Clearly, I could build a united front with secular feminists and try to foster popular sentiment against self-oppressive choices. But my Islamic training and knowledge of my community tell me that many of these Muslim sisters have thought seriously about the issue of covering their heads and have reached conclusions different from mine. Forcing them to abandon their religious choices is not only patronizing but fundamentally un-Islamic! Islam has established etiquette of difference, by which I may explain my position to other Muslims without ever claiming exclusive access to the truth or becoming coercive’ (Al-Hibri 1999 cited in Zine 2004, p175-176).

This approach allows women who choose/do not choose forms of certain religiously based dress such as the hijab and other forms of dress to be acknowledged through these women’s own agency and understanding of their identities, it seeks to promote and gain a ‘mutual respect’ (Hunt 1999) which, as discussed earlier, embraces various views and helps feminist discourse move away from essentialist ideals, by locating her situated knowledge within this context. I too locate myself within this discourse with an aim to viewing Muslim women as in control of their own agency. Zine (2004) argues that in looking at experiences of Muslim women we need to look at feminism (such as Black feminist critique) that moves away from racist and biased discourse with faith-centered feminist epistemologies. This approach

would be attentive to recognising how racial discrimination and religiousness can effectively dismantle gender inequality (Zine, 2004, p178).

On the contrary, I argue that although Zine's (2004) proposition of faith-centered feminist epistemology places Islam at its core for understanding the positions of Muslim women, it makes a presumption that religion may be at the forefront of the formation of the identity of these women. This may be the case for all or some of the women in my research (please see section on reflexivity p94), but care has to be taken in making such presumptions. Faith-centred epistemology may lead to religious essentialism as not all Muslims are the same and there are many strands of religious thought and practice¹⁶. Therefore, I do not want to focus solely on 'religion' as the key to framing my epistemological position. Instead, I contest that, Islamic feminist epistemology does accentuate a deeper understanding of Muslim women and therefore its role is pivotal to this research. As a result, I want to focus myself on a framework that is inclusive of the 'situated knowledge' of feminist standpoint theory, acknowledgment of Black feminist discussions of the differing experiences of 'other racialised women', whilst also exploring Islamic feminist ideas of a faith conscious epistemology. The acknowledgment of all three praxis demonstrates the need to embrace a more diverse and inclusive epistemology which would locate itself in all three fields and help better understand the experiences of British Muslim women.

Intersectionality

¹⁶ In order to address this, it is vital to understand the Abrahamic monolithic religion of Islam and its key divisions. There is a core belief in the oneness in God, prophets, revealed books, angels, predestination, and the day of resurrection. It is important to acknowledge that there is religious plurality within Islam itself. There are three main sects - Sunnis, Shias and Kharijites and each sect developed distinct jurisprudence schools within these sects. These main sects were split first mainly due to political reasons but later developed and split over theological and juridical reasons. The largest group of Muslims belong to the Sunni sect, second largest to the Shia and the rest fall into the other categories (Khuri 2006). This religious plurality shows the diversity in thoughts amongst the Muslim population themselves. As this research is not focused on these differences specifically, they will not be addressed explicitly in the findings but will be acknowledged through sampling in the methodology. I guess you could get asked why include them in the sampling if you are not going to acknowledge it in the findings?

Hancock (2007) conceptualises Intersectionality as both a theory and a research method. In her essay, Hancock (2007) looks at the differences noted between unitary, multiple, and intersectional methodologies and provides an in-depth look at the way in which Intersectionality is unique in addressing pluralist dimensions of categories that interlock. Additionally, McCall (2005) argues that ‘Intersectionality is the most important theoretical contribution’ (McCall 2005, pp. 1771) in feminist research because it has moved away from the limitations of gender-specific categories (McCall 2005, pp. 1771). Likewise, Hancock (2007) argues that Intersectionality is particular in its development in looking at women of colour, it is also used widely to access other categories such as sexuality and social class, and religion (Hancock 2007, p71). By decentralising gender, it allows other categories to locate themselves more accurately and shows the relationships between these categories as well as how these relationships affect people’s experiences.

In addition, Intersectionality then challenges feminist theory which claims to acknowledge all women’s experiences, which Black feminist critique has argued against. Intersectionality also points to the importance of looking at the socio-cultural contexts in works such as Combahee River Collective (2007) which looked at the way in which the slave trade affected and influenced the image of the modern Black woman. Intersectionality then signifies the importance that socio-cultural context plays, which is vital in this research to the understanding the climate of Islamophobia and the ways in which it affects the women in this research.

Although Intersectionality as a theory contributes to understanding of the experiences of women of colour it does so not without its challenges and critiques. Critiques of Intersectionality have argued that with the ‘intra-category’ there is a tremendous diversity i.e., ‘Muslim women’ this definition by and large does not capture all the sub-categories of her religiosity or her cultural association with being Muslim. However, Hancock (2007) argues

that all categories can be ‘sub fractured’ into many categories which makes it impossible to show these sub-divisions even in multi-variate analysis (Hancock 2007, p66). This area of research design and method is still under-developed in effectively capturing all that it aims to, and therefore needs further exploration (Hancock 2007, p74).

In addition, as discussed in my earlier literature review chapter McCall’s (2005) work on the challenges faced by Intersectionality where she discusses her three stances ‘anti-categorical’, ‘intercategorical’ and ‘intracategorical’ is also problematic. The first stance ‘anti-categorical complexity’ raises issues on the theoretical assumptions and construction of ‘categories’ such as gender, ‘race’, sexuality etc. This is seen as problematic because it argues that the essence of labelling in fixed categories which are seen to be socially constructed does not truly value the use of Intersectionality, and there should be some legitimate inclusion about why such categories should be placed and then fact that these categories should be themselves explored exposing the relationships and the process of categorisation. The second stance ‘intercategorical’ exposes exclusionary processes of categorisation especially when looking at the fringed or marginalised groups in society, although it attends to the first stance in understanding the processes of categories it is more situated to deconstruct intersectional workings and power relations of categories. The third category as ‘intracategorical’ which is a quantitative look at the wider power structures and inequalities that form ‘categorisation’ and uses analytical categories strategically (McCall 2005, p1773). However, my research focus is not exclusively looking at existing wider structures of inequalities but instead focuses on how the women in this research use such categories to self-reflect aspects of their negotiated identities. What McCall’s work highlights here is that through the careful placement of understanding the categories in intersectional work and reflecting on how each of these categories operate it would help shift away from forming ‘essentialist’ ideas. I will be therefore be adopting the second approach of ‘intracategorical complexity’ as it sits in the middle of the

first approach which rejects simplistic categories and the third approach which uses them strategically to expose the relationships between categories and inequalities. This approach is suitable for this research as it aims to reveal the complexity of lived experience of marginalised groups that fall into the ‘neglected points of intersection’ (McCall 2005, p1774). Furthermore, Davis (2008) argues that it is precisely the left-over ambiguity and open-endedness of Intersectionality which allows for its success in becoming a good feminist theory which allows endless realms for exploration of the differences among women in particular (Davis 1986 cited in Davis 2008, p 69-70).

My epistemological stance

I have argued that the shortcomings of gendered epistemology are about further situating oneself within particular political and social spaces as claim to be a knower of knowledge. However, I have argued that feminist standpoint theory does also facilitate in understanding intersubjective productions of knowledge i.e., my knowledge as a Muslim woman. I feel that standpoint feminism will allow my own subjective reality in my research to be used as a means to reveal and reflect ways in which this research has been produced and the experiences of these women understood. A feminist epistemology provides an alternate way of looking at the world we live in (Skeggs 1994), one which acknowledges and recognises these inequalities and hierarchies. Moreover, academic literature around Black feminism shows the significance of inclusions of racial, social, and historical identities which emphasise the need to look beyond standpoint feminism. This is equally important for my research as the women in this project will mainly be from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

In addition, my inclusion of Islamic feminism has been vital to informing my epistemological stance as this literature has informed the embedded link with religion and Muslim identity. Islamic feminism then allows a greater understanding, in which religion can

be seen as a positionality for revealing how Muslim women's identities work. However, my own positioning in this research starting off from an open perspective i.e., not placing Islam at the core is also in light of what Zine (2004, p176) herself argues. She states that her choice of using Islamic dress is not an affiliation with her religious beliefs (she notes that she does not feel the hijab is religiously mandated) much like other scholars such as Amina Wadud(1999), Leila Ahmed(2011) and Asma Barlas(2019). My positioning, therefore, allows for a broader look at the links between Muslim women's identity and dress and allows a wider scope in which to examine wider discourses surrounding this topic. However, acknowledgment of women's faith-centred epistemology whilst conducting this research is important, especially for women who do relate and offer their religious identities as at the forefront of their identity. This may prove beneficial to understanding the ways in which religion and indeed spirituality cultivate the choices these women hold and make in terms of dress and in forming their identities.

Earlier in the literature review, the value of looking at BAME women through the lens of Intersectionality was discussed. I have shown how through Intersectionality the inclusion of the three-praxis discussed standpoint, Black feminist critique and Islamic feminism needs to be addressed in this study of British Muslim women. Therefore, my research has adopted an interpretive intersectional epistemology which builds on feminist standpoint theory with the incorporation of Islamic feminism through the use and acknowledgement of the integral workings of Intersectionality. Furthermore, Intersectionality with the inclusion of feminist standpoint theory allows areas such as historical, racial, and religious barriers to be addressed which is vital to the study of Muslim women.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Having adopted an interpretivist epistemology, the data collection methods I selected were reflective of my positioning therefore qualitative methods of inquiry were chosen. I have used two different methods for collection of the data, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. I decided on using these methods to firstly generate themes from my focus groups; this was done for three reasons (1) so I could assess what areas the women in this study feel are most important to them; (2) To help formulate any areas which may be overlooked due to researcher's own presumptions; and, (3) To reflect the themes covered in the focus groups and use this as a spring-board to articulate my interviews. Once the participants for my focus groups were selected, the focus group sessions were recorded and then analysed.

The analysis from my focus groups was then used to formulate themes and topics of discussion for the interviews. I then started my data collection for semi-structured interviews as a means to gain a more in-depth knowledge of the phenomena this topic looks to address (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, pp705-705). These again, were recorded, transcribed, and analysed- both the data collected from the focus groups and interviews was then written up and are presented in the finding's chapters. It was important that I started with the focus groups because they provided me with the backdrop to selecting themes I looked at in my interviews.

Focus groups

The first method used were focus groups. Focus groups can increasingly be seen as part of a feminist way of research, because it is argued that focus groups shift the power balance during data collection because participants within the group have more control over the interaction that takes place than the researcher (Wilkinson 1998, p114). The focus groups I carried out allowed the women to have space to talk and discuss ideas amongst themselves thereby shifting

the power balance which allowed a space for them to reclaim their voices to express experiences and opinions. In addition, it is argued that focus groups raise a certain level of consciousness and support for the participants (see Fine 1992; Harrison and Barlow 1995; Kitzinger 1994), this was reflective in my focus groups as the women supported and encouraged others to speak about their experiences. This raising of self-empowerment and 'shared understandings' provided a good backdrop for data collection and a chance to communicate different perspectives, and in particular as the women in my group were familiar with each other there was a heightened sense of 'shared understanding'. In addition, Feminist researchers seek to reduce power imbalances (Kauffman 1992), this method was used in the aim to 'give power' and allow the women to explore ideas which they felt were of particular importance. It is argued that focus groups facilitate in enabling little researched areas to be uncovered by collecting shared experiences and testimonies (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, p836). The focus groups touched on topics that would have otherwise been overlooked such as ideas of 'safe spaces' for some of these women. In these focus groups, the aim was to 'map out' the key themes, prompt questions were used that allowed for discussion amongst the group on areas or ideas they felt were important to their identity. Questions such as 'what does modesty mean to you?' or 'what is the most important aspect of your identity?'. This was key to the way in which way this project was managed as it was vital that the topics the women discussed would then be used as springboard for my interview questions. Numerous studies (see Frazer 1988; Griffin 1986; Finch 1984) point out that focus groups, in fact, have led them to include and actually consider topics which they felt were not important to the research they were studying, and it, in fact, allowed them to acknowledge that certain topics were important to understanding their specific phenomena.

A further point that was considered in this research was the addition of using creative methods to initiate difficult topics. For example, a study of South Asian women and

issues around honour and shame was conducted and used scenarios to talk about topics etc. (Krueger 1998 cited in Colucci 2007, p1423) and the use of these scenarios brought about more detailed data because those scenarios were not personal but were reflecting on the women's perceptions of shame and honour. Similarly, in my focus groups, the emergence of Muslim women in popular magazines and commercials was used as a prompt to elicit how the participants feel about the use of Muslim women. Furthermore, asking them to write down ideas around their understandings of modesty and identity to share with the group (Krueger 1998 cited in Colucci 2007, p1424). Bernard (1995) argues that this is a powerful way to generate data and deal with difficult topics like identity (Bernard 1995 cited in Colucci 2007, p1425). Feminist research uses and encourages creative methods as a way to dismantle power relations.

In addition, some studies have suggested that focus groups allow for a more stimulating and engaging experience in some instances where people may find face to face interviews 'intimidating'; focus groups then enable the researcher to 'open up' the topic and make it easier for participants to talk about it (Morgan 1988; Wilkinson 1998 cited in Denzin and Lincoln 2000). As the women in the focus groups were already used to talking as a group in the community centre classes, conducting focus groups were the most suitable option to begin talking about issues that concerned them. Whilst conducting the focus group the women did in fact discuss how 'relaxing' this was for them. Moreover, the main difference and 'hallmark' of a focus group is the interaction that is taking place between participants (Wilkinson 1998, p112-113). In this way focus groups can be seen to be a more 'natural' way of research as people are seen as 'social creatures' (Krueger 1994, p34). The aim of focus group was then to capture the dynamics of group interaction, the group also tends to be a more relaxed environment for people to openly interact and having purposefully chosen the same community centre setting to do the interviews as it was the most familiar to these women.

However, although having a group dynamic is the key aspect of a focus group it does not come without its problems. Members of the group may have been silenced or not able to voice an opinion, with some participants taking over the whole discussion (Wilkinson 1998, p 116-117). On certain occasions (such as where one person was holding the floor for long periods of time) intervention had to be taken when this was the case and it required some skill to do this, often it was a careful negotiation as whether to directly ask an opinion on the topic being discussed at hand, whilst also making sure it did not cut short others who were speaking about their experience. To also make sure that group's dynamics did not shift as soon as there was intervention because this would otherwise become a group interview (where they all start talking to the researcher individually). Certain steps were taken to avoid this, such as asking a prompt question to the person who was not speaking, then making eye contact with other members of the group at the same time as they are speaking. This helped greatly for two reasons, firstly because only briefly looking up, they then were not susceptible to talking to me directly and had to look around to other members. Secondly, because they looked around to other women (as did I), the other women were quick to pay attention and in turn what this did was that it also helped pose that topic to the rest of the group.

To add, focus groups also have their limitations as to what personal details participants reveal about themselves on the topic. This is in part due to 'sensitive material' which they may not wish to share within the group and/or partly because the group dynamics may make their views biased and 'contaminated' so the group conforms to the majority opinion (Wilkinson 1998, p119). However, care was taken to make sure as to not include anything too personal in questions for the focus groups and there was no overly personal information shared by the women. However, it was acknowledged that some of the women may not have spoken fully about some of the experiences they were sharing. Contrastingly, it is argued that in some sensitive topics the group support offered may decrease the discomfort around the topic

(Kitzinger 1994, p111) where facilitation of difficult subjects is managed. In these focus groups the group support and the fact that many of the women were friends or were in the same social circles allowed for a deeper and more insightful conversation to take place. Likewise, Wilkinson (1998) goes on to state that individual discomfort or overbearing talk are part of the social construction of the world and therefore it is one aspect of reality to understand that these dynamics are evident in the social world and not due to the nature of the focus group (Wilkinson 1998, 119-120). She goes on to argue that these are based on everyday social contexts such as arguments or interactions with family and friends. The interactions that took place in these focus groups were certainly indicative that the setting allowed for my focus groups to be a familiar, supportive, and engaging discussion amongst the women who shared similar social circles.

Semi-structured interviews

Conversation is often looked at as the very basic form of human interaction. Through this interaction we learn, process, understand and convey our feelings to one another. We also have many forms of interaction i.e., interviews for when we apply for jobs, chatting with our family and friends or religious confessions etc. (Kvale 1996). Research in interviews, therefore, is an acknowledgement of this fact and is based on conversations of daily life. Historically interviews emerged for social reform purposes and continue to do so as its purpose is to bring about new knowledge and different understandings of the world we live in. Therefore, we need to look at the modes of understanding qualitative research interviews (see Kvale 1996, p29-36). The purpose of qualitative interviews is to understand the lived world of the subjects and their relation to it, in this research that is the lived daily experiences of British Muslim women and their relations to each other and wider British society. For this research eight semi-structured interviews were used. The number of interviews was decided given the time scale and size of

the research that was planned. The interviews conducted provided sufficient in-depth data that offered a sociological analysis of the topic under study.

This project used semi-structured interviews which are defined as ‘an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena’ (Kvale 1996, p5-6). Semi-structured interviews are also different from the positivist style interviews of the natural sciences because they are not rigid in structure but allow a certain level of flexibility to talk over the chosen topic. However, the semi-structured interviews this project used did follow a certain structure and purpose. The exchange was a careful selection of questions and listening to responses which served the purpose in obtaining the knowledge of the chosen topic (Kvale 1996).

Interviews seek to understand the meanings behind these lived experiences and the main task is to investigate what the interviewees are trying to say about their lived experiences. The job of the interviewer is then to interpret and register what is being said as well as how it is being said (see the data analysis and reflexivity section). Qualitative research allows for ‘nuanced descriptions’ that are key to understand a deeper level of meaning behind lived experiences- something which is not quantifiable. Interviews are often descriptive and therefore the nuanced descriptions allow for a varied and diverse range of phenomena to be understood rather than allowing only fixed categories. Diversity and variation are encouraged to a certain degree, but specificity is also vital. It is not an interview of general opinions but of careful and well-designed questions around the research topic (examples are shown later in questions section). However, there is also a deliberate naïveté to interviews, by this I mean, it implies an openness to accept new phenomena. My focus groups largely covered underlying topics but interviews, as they are one to one, bring about unexpected or different themes. This is why I chose to follow my focus groups with semi structured interviews. The focus on semi-structured interviews is that they carefully balance some structure, with not being overly

structured and directive. So, I derived from the data that I had gathered from my focus groups a set of themes that I mapped out which I then went onto explore in the interviews. However, although I had some questions that I wanted to address in the interview I also wanted to leave the interview open to allow for any other topics that were related to this research to be discussed. This allowed the interview to be more ‘open’ for both the researcher and participant.

On occasion interviews can be ambiguous in nature where contradictory statements may be given. This was evident in the interviews I conducted I needed to carefully understand where I might need to clarify certain questions or where I needed to investigate the contradictions the interviewee is aiming to convey. I also needed to be aware of the changes during the interview, where the women changed their meanings and descriptions about a certain theme. I had to address this by asking more specific or clearer questions and give an opportunity for me to fully understand what they are trying to tell me. This was important because this thesis is an exploration into their lives therefore their views need to be put across as accurately as possible. However, in certain instances this leads onto issues around sensitivity- different pieces of knowledge and themes may produce certain levels of comfort in the discussion of a topic (see ethics chapter) but sensitivity is also the ability of the researcher to understand and empathise with the topic. For example, in the discussions around topics such as #MeToo, it was important that throughout my interviews created a comfortable experience for the women. I had discussed issues around confidentiality and sensitivity with the women prior to the interview and through the information sheet. I also conveyed the message again before I started the interviews to tell them that If they felt uncomfortable about answering a certain topic they wouldn’t have to.

I was aware of the interpersonal dynamics between the women and I (my familiarity with them at the community centre) and therefore have chosen to discuss that in my analysis and reflections section retrospectively. This, in turn, allowed for a closer look at the

ways in which questions were altered or gained a wider understanding of the responses that were given by the women in realisation to the dynamics of the interview. For example, I noticed some women felt more anxious and defensive about the whole interview situation or they may had felt curious or reciprocal to of my knowledge about some Islamic topics (see section on reflexivity). The management of timing in these interviews was the main issue because talking about a topic of personal interest encouraged longer or further conversations, so knowing when to cut off recording was crucial such as when the topic veered off to more personal matters not related to the study. What I felt helped in these situations was making sure I covered most of the initial points that I set out to do and left enough time towards the end to ask if they would like anything to add to the interview that they felt was important. During the interview I also left spaces of silence, so knowing when to talk or move on to next question, as well as waiting and allowing the time for the women to respond was of equal importance (Rapley 2001). In these instances, I would allow the women to pause and think about what they wanted to say which led to very interesting topics being discussed. As an example, the silence in a situation were talking about anti-Muslim hate was discussed, one of the women (Dimah) took some time to respond because she had a build-up of emotion from what she had experienced. The silence in this instance allowed her the space to gather her thoughts about a subject that was quite clearly very emotional for her. Silences have been reported to be particularly helpful when looking at experiences of marginalised women, for example silence and secrecy has been used by women as a 'survival strategy' in instances of domestic and sexual violence (Papart cited in Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2013, p20). Policing own voice and using silence can therefore arguably be seen as a space which women occupy as a coping mechanism and as a way to reflect on those experience (Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2013).

Feminist researchers often find semi-structured interviews an appealing method for data collection because firstly it allows the interviewer to really connect and make sense of

the person they are interviewing. In the interviews I conducted I felt that it allowed me the space to have a deep conversation about their experiences especially when discussing the topic of identity. Taking into account different and changing perspectives that they may have to offer for example Andre's study (Andre cited in Reinharz 1992, p19) showed the response to specific questions varied from 12 to 30 different variations due to different factors such as knowledge and how and if the participants felt some level of comfort in answering some questions more in-depth than others. For my research, as the questions were about their personal views and experiences some topics were easier to talk about than others, for example the women were a lot more forward about discussing modesty whereas some women found it hard to talk about issues around sexual harassment. This facility of allowing the interviews to be loosely shaped rather than a rigorous exercise is very important to this research as it is an interpretivist study. Secondly, I felt that semi-structured interviews allowed me as the researcher access to people's ideas and thoughts without too much interruption and influence of my own words which is another purpose of semi-structured interviewing (Reinharz 1992, p19). Thirdly, a further advantage of using semi-structured interviews is that it allowed careful listening to the women and allowed me to base and orientate new questions as matters of discussion. This flexibility facilitated in capturing nuances which may be missed if a basic survey of questions was done for example the data on their complex understandings around the subject of modesty would have been missed. This allowed then for a more realistic 'interviewee orientated' (Reinharz 1992, 21) discussion to take place.

In addition, some feminist theorists (Oakley 1981, Westmarland 2001) have argued that semi-structured interviewing is seen as 'a passive, respectful, open, understanding approach...' because it is asking women what and how they think and feel much like a conversation. Charmaz talks about creating an atmosphere where the participant feels unthreatened and comfortable to talk about sensitive issues (Charmaz cited in Reinharz 1992,

p20). Furthermore, semi-structured interviewing is another way of avoiding total control over the topic in discussion and developing a connection between the researcher and the participants. In my interviews there was a shared understanding that me as a Muslim woman was able to understand and engage in shared knowledge about experiences for women as well as the discussion about some faith centred topics, such as what the idea of modesty is in the Quran. To add, semi-structured interviews are seen as a way to allow more freedom for participants to engage in discussing topics in their own terms therefore allowing the women in this research to voice their own opinions.

However, there are some methodological issues that come with using semi-structured interviews as a means for research. One of the first issues I want to address is the craft of interviewing- what I mean by this ability to listen and negotiate the participant's responses i.e., thinking on the spot as to manage the flow of conversation. This requires a high level of skill and practice as a researcher and also a good grasp of the methodological options available to handle the situation as well as knowledge of the chosen topic of discussion. This is key to completing a successful interview which enables as much knowledge as possible to be obtained. Therefore, I felt that reading around the methodological challenges and examples of how to tackle some of these issues was vital. Literature guides such as Kvale (1996, p88-276) were helpful because they listed what he calls the 'seven stages of an interview investigation' a whole chapter dedicated to helping confront issues as means to enable good interviewing techniques. These guides were not only useful but critical to tackling the methodological concerns of interviews. Looking at the earlier discussion of mode to understanding interviews we can see why interviewing is a craft, there are a lot of factors to consider but are not impossible to implement once knowledge and practice are gained. In addition, Mason (1996) advocates that 'qualitative' interviewers' 'social task is to orchestrate an interaction which moves easily and painlessly between topics and questions' (Mason cited

in Rapley 2001, p315). This further perpetuates the ‘craft’ of interviewing something which may also need to be acknowledged in the focus groups mentioned earlier. Although reading around ‘good interviewing techniques’ was useful, I felt it was still very much dependent upon putting the skills into practice. Before doing my interviews, I practiced asking some of the questions I wanted to ask with fellow PhD colleagues to test how well my interviews would work or if there were any questions which may have been difficult to answer. I then went back to alter or change my responses and interviewing techniques accordingly. I think this helped brush up on some of my skills for interviewing. However, I did acknowledge that this practice run was just a chance for me to develop my skills for interviewing, but the scenario would be different when I interview the women.

Furthermore, I felt that interviewing required some building of ‘rapport’ with the women – Oakley (1981) states it is ‘an acceptance by the interviewee of the interviewer’s research goals and interviewee’s active search to help the interviewer in providing the relevant information’. Oakley then goes on to say in an instance where a woman is interviewing another woman, that relationship requires the investment of the personal identity of the interviewer in the relationship. In order to tackle this issue, I made a decision to introduce myself before the interviews to the women, telling them briefly what the project was about, what I wanted to do with the information and making sure that I answered any questions before we start. For the focus groups, this was easier as I had already been attending weekly classes at the community centre where I met the women for the groups.

However, as I had used snowball sampling method for gaining access to women for the interviews, the women were either friends or relatives of the other women in the community centre. This made it easier for me to build rapport with the other women. To add, the tightrope of interviewing and balancing oneself between building a rapport with the interviewees and to understanding that it is equally important to have a detailed and meaningful

collection of data (Oakley 1981, p33). This was a very important balance that was required as I had to make sure throughout the interview was not drifting too far off the topic I wanted to discuss, this is why I felt having a note of questions in front of me allowed me to keep a record of topics that I wanted to discuss with the women.

Historically it is argued interviewing guided how the interview should be conducted in relation to the interviewee and the interviewer. Howard Becker (1971) first argued that an interview is conversational so should be treated as one. I think treating the interview as a much more 'natural conversation' was very important to my project as the women were sharing some very sensitive and personal information about their identities. The fluidity of the semi-structured interview allowed that, as I had very brief set of topics or prompt questions and in instances where they said something that could be added to my discussion, I was able to change and pursue that much like in a conversation. Likewise, in her own experience of interviewing Oakley (1981) acknowledged that traditional guidelines for interviewing damage feminist research and a better grasp into understanding the dynamics of interviewing should be participant friendly. In addition, literature (Finch 1984; Greed 1990; Oakley 1981) around interviews now argues that an 'equal relationship' in research provides more fruitful data. Building an 'equal relationship' with the women in this project was something I wanted to achieve, although I do not claim that this aspect was controlled entirely, nor do I claim that I would know to the full extent how my relationship as the person doing the research affected the conversations. I did try to (where possible) create scenarios where the hierarchies in interviewing were broken down, for example, a lot of the women I selected had asked that they would prefer me coming to their homes and doing the interviews. Allowing the women this space I felt helped break down barriers in communication as I was in 'their space'. I also made a commitment to meet the women briefly before I interviewed them as a chance to break down any sort of nervousness, they felt regarding the interviewing process. Consequently, as I am

using a snowballing technique to have access to these women, I found that the women felt a sense of ease discussing with one another the process of being interviewed, and that my relationship as the researcher became much more about these women who now saw me as someone wanting to have conversations about my project.

However, it is also contested that semi-structured interviews still have a certain ‘arch of control’ over what topics are to be discussed as well as what questions to follow up and probe and what not to discuss (Rapley 2001, p315-316). As the researcher, at times I did have a control over what topics I chose to pick up on, or ones I chose to leave which meant that they are not as ‘open’ to topics of discussion. However, my first conduction of focus groups where I was seeking emerging themes (to an extent) justify the use of this method to my research approach. Although, wherever possible any new production of knowledge through interviewing was picked up on in the following interviews.

And finally, Cicorel (1964) argues that interviews should not be seen as a mere interaction outside of research but as a ‘specific type’ of interaction and should be treated as one and at certain moments interviewees may also be presenting themselves as a certain type of person (Cicorel cited in Rapley 2001, p308-309). I do feel that this is the case for any type of research as people present and display themselves as they wish to be seen, however what this project does do is present what the women in this research showed as their lived realities’. To add, qualitative research is all about subjectivity, this is especially true for interviews because they are intersubjective, person-dependent and rely on subject impressions (Kvale 1996, p284).

The challenge of posing ‘good questions’ is central to any research and especially so for qualitative studies because:

‘...qualitative studies can reveal how people experience and think about events and social relations, so a qualitative question needs to be developed to take advantage of the unique capabilities of qualitative research. At the same time, because the researcher is representing the lives of individuals, the kinds of questions a researcher is asking become paramount when considering the short- and long-term effects on others.’ (Agee 2009, p439).

So, what questions to ask then was crucial to gaining and identifying data that enabled me to map out the topic in the best way possible. Questions then as Agee (2009) notes do not just begin to form at the moment we embark on our data collection, but from the moment we as researchers begin an interest in the topic. This was certainly true my case, my initial interest in the thesis was prompted by a question in my own mind about what experience is like for British Muslim women in the current context. Then as I went on the Ph.D. programme, and it moved to a more specific need to understand what do I want to know in this study? Researchers (Janesick 2000; Charmaz 2006; Maxwell 2005 cited in Agee 2009) have shown that these broader questions are good because they help find the initial focus of the later development of the study. Furthermore, it is argued that ‘Creating discovery-oriented questions can help a researcher use the process of developing and refining questions as a basis for a more rigorous and reflexive inquiry’ (Agee 2009, p434).

Accordingly, my first overarching question inevitably led the goal for this research, this to reiterate is an aim to explore how Muslim women use their clothing to construct a presentation of self and how this choice affects or alters the way in which they experience a world increasingly hostile to members of the Muslim population? This overarching question Agee (2009) states allows the researcher to place the very basic goals of the study under an overarching question which gives direction for the researcher to address sub-questions they may have (Agee 2009, p434-435). However, for this thesis it was vital for

me to underline my objectives (which I treat as my sub-questions into inquiry) which were formed from my engagement with the literature:

- (i) To understand how Muslim women make choices about clothing;
- (ii) To examine the meanings attached to clothing as expressions of self and identity, especially in relation to religion and gender;
- (iii) To understand the identity negotiation processes that Muslim women embark on in response to anti-Muslim hostility.

3.4 Selection and access to participants

Selection process,

I first started attending the community centre for workshop activities in July 2017 on a weekly basis. This was just at the very start of my Ph.D. as I had already chosen my research topic and handed in a research proposal. The women in this centre also came regularly depending on what workshops they were interested in attending. I have got to know most of the women quite well within this period. Some of the common things I share with the women in this study must also be addressed such as my religion. I have also lived and grew up in the same area as some of the women who come to the community centre. I also share the same ethnicity as some of the women but not all. These are key factors that I feel position and embed me in this research.

When selecting the women for the study I had to look at a number of factors: (1) If they fulfilled the 'British Muslim women' criteria; (2) The way that they dressed (tradition Islamic dress or otherwise); and (3) Whether they were also able to give the time needed for data collection. Securing the women for the focus group was fairly easy I think partially due to their familiarity with me and each other (there was an encouragement amongst each other to take part in my study). My 'gatekeeper' was of great help in this as she knew most of the

women in these workshops on a more personal level. I had also got to know her over the course of the year on a more friendly level where she and I both met up on occasions for a quick chat over coffee. I also feel that as the space, convenience and location of the centre were also very familiar and easily accessible to the women this also helped greatly. My personal rapport with these women allowed me to comfortably talk about issues which they may not have felt easy to discuss with other people. In instances at the workshop, the women chatted along with each other and me, from the most mundane topics like weather to their own very personal issues such as children and marriage.

On reflection, I feel that the selection process for the women may have deterred some women from coming forward for the project for example I had used the word 'British Muslim women'. Initially I felt this terminology as unproblematic but having looked back I feel that this could have singled out women who maybe did not feel they identified as 'British', and they would therefore have not stepped forward to participate in this project. Furthermore, of the women who were asked to be part of the project some did not as they were preoccupied or had busy schedules at the time the data was due to be collected.

However, the limitations to this familiarity with the women call for a deeper understanding of my positionality as what Bolak (1996) calls a 'bi-cultural researcher'¹⁷. Bolak (1996) talks about her insider/outsider position and notes the problems of familiarity that indigenous¹⁸ researchers face. She argues that 'While a foreign researcher runs the risk of being culture blind, an indigenous researcher runs the risk of being blinded by the familiar.' (Bolak 1996; p97). She states as bicultural researchers we have to be careful to not overstep the familiar and make vast assumptions, to the extent that we are not open to learning about

¹⁷ Bi-cultural researcher meaning that I have a dual culture so in my case as a British Pakistani woman.

¹⁸ I am using my own familiarity which is discussed earlier to reflect what Bolak (1996) here refers to as 'indigenous'

investigating the phenomena in the research we conduct. Nevertheless, she gives a good account of how to deal with this limitation of familiarity she quotes Abu Lughod (1993) on her book *'Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories'* as an example:

'Abu-Lughod (1993) makes explicit and explores her own positionality in her recent experiment with feminist ethnography. In her introduction, she notes that feminist scholarship has "encouraged a heightened consciousness of two issues-standpoint and the power dynamics of self and other-that dovetailed with anthropologists' increasingly sophisticated attention to reflexivity in fieldwork and writing" (p. 6). These are some of the concerns that anchor my self-reflexive account of the fieldwork process as well.' (Bolak 1996, p98).

The argument presented here by Bolak (1996) clearly shows and indicates the need to be reflexive in research when there is a strong sense of familiarity. In addition, the methods of semi-structured interviews and open-ended focus groups aimed to further reflect this understanding of allowing data to be gathered without personal overbearing on the data. Furthermore, the second selection of snowball sampling was for my semi-structured interviews of women who I am not familiar with and therefore this shift allowed me to work with these women without having familiarity as a limitation. To add, a further precaution I took is reflexivity in data analysis where analysis of transcription and understanding the method is crucial. Mauthner and Doucet argue that *'...reading is also premised on the epistemological assumption that our intellectual and emotional reactions to other people constitute sources of knowledge.'* (Mauthner and Doucet 2003, p419).

Purposive sampling

I used purposive sampling to initially identify participants. The use of 'purposive sample' allowed me to sample women who are relevant cases to my study (Bradshaw and Straford 2000, p44). I had also chosen the purposive sampling method as it fits in my research objectives

and is also useful in understanding the context within which I was working. Purposeful sampling is one of the distinguishing methods of inquiry in qualitative research. One of the ways in which qualitative research distinguishes itself from quantitative research is precisely because of the depth and meanings in smaller samples rather than large-scale samples for quantitative work. 'Purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study.' (Patton 2002, p273). In this research any woman who labelled herself a 'British Muslim'. The purposive sampling, I argue, is also crucial to my focus groups because as stated earlier in the data collection section the familiarity within the group members may assist in facilitating a more successful focus group (to an extent). I also used the centre as a means to gather some information around the topic of my study but my data collection for focus groups is an overall look whereas my interviews (using snowball sample discussed later) would be discussions more specifically on the topics identified. Although my purposive sampling is limited to women in the centre for the focus groups, having attended the centre has allowed for access to a wider range of Muslim women outside the centre and in other cities.

However, this method of sampling can be noted to be vulnerable to errors in judgment by the researcher. So, as I have had to shortlist women who I felt would be a good selection I attempted to look for variations where possible such as age, education, and religiosity. The sampling method also required that I have a good knowledge as to which women I wanted to select, and also which to exclude from the study, so in this case as I had been attending the community centre, I was familiar with who these women were. In addition, it is also argued that there is a low level of reliability and high levels of bias due to the use of this sampling method as it again does not guarantee the selection of sample will be good enough for study which leads to the inability to generalize research findings (Patton 2002). I hoped to overcome this by making sure my sample was reflective of the research I would take and

choosing women with a mix of different ethnicities and religiosities so my sample was not saturated with a homogenous group.

Snowballing

Following the focus groups, I did semi-structured interviews with eight women gathered by snowball sampling to deepen knowledge of the themes and issues discussed within the focus group. In-depth semi-structured interviewing is important because I used topics that emerged from the focus group to inform the questions, I have asked the women. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask open-ended questions which helped me to not only focus on my interview but allowed the women a chance to fully convey their views. Snowball sampling is useful in pursuing participants who also are inclusive to helping answer the research objectives, the technique is widely used in interviews and provides sufficient ways in which to create a good sample of study: 'Snowball sampling thus relies on the behaviour or 'trait' under study being social and participants sharing with others the characteristic under examination (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997, p. 793 cited in Browne 2005, p48).

Furthermore, Noy (2008) argues that organic social network of snowballing sampling gathers two main concepts:

'(1) Social knowledge. Captured in the snowball sampling design, social knowledge is presently viewed as primarily dynamic, processual, and emergent. In line with qualitative and feminist conceptualizations of 'knowledge,' accent is put on movement rather than on the static notion of logos.

(2) Power relations. Related to the notion of social knowledge is the notion of power relations which transpire between the researcher(s) and researched, and between the informants themselves. This feature too is tied to the fact the snowball sampling makes use of natural social networks' (p329).

The advantage of snowballing is firstly having access to otherwise 'hidden' populations (in my research women who may not be comfortable being interviewed by a male, as a female I have an advantage but also as a Muslim woman I have the advantage of knowledge about their own customs and understandings of being Muslim to a certain level). The snowballing method allowed me to do this as I was already attending the community centre, and the women introduced me to and allowed access to other women for the interviews and focus groups. The researcher being embedded in social network Browne (2005) argues allows the participants to 'check out' the researcher both in terms of their research and in person (Duncan and Edwards 1999 cited in Browne 2005, p50). In her study of non-heterosexual women, she states that her personal sexuality as non-sexual women also allowed her to gain easier access than as a 'heterosexual man'. So, the snowballing method allowed her a way in due to her personal recognition as non-heterosexual women. Furthermore, she argues that these networks allowed her as 'word of mouth assurances' to confirm that these women's experiences were going to be valued and not exploited. To add, she notes that friends of friends within this network not only inquired about her work but also about her as a person so rapport in her case shows the amount of trust that needs to be built in order to conduct this method especially in the case of using sensitive or personal topics (Browne 2005, p50-51). In my discussions with the women in my research this was an extremely important issue because a lot of personal topics about their lives were discussed such as their religious understandings and experiences with anti-Muslim hate.

In contrast, it is argued that as this project uses social networks built through the community centre that I have been built up through my attendance over the years. Snowball sampling can be biased because it selects people from the social network rather than a random sample. However, snowballing is not about looking at a whole population and it is precisely about acknowledging the specificity of the sample (Browne 2005, p51). My study focuses

specifically on the experiences of Muslim women who have participated. It is about exploring their personal beliefs and their experiences in relevance to their faith and clothing.

In this section, I will first outline my selection and access to participants and then move on the specifics of the sampling methods I have used. I had first recruited 20-28 women (by use of purposive method-see details above) from the centre for my focus groups, as I aimed to have 4 sets of focus groups each consisting of 5-7 Muslim women. The first set being the pilot group to test out what works best to facilitate the research. My first point of contact was the local community centre in Manchester which I had been attending for the past year in readiness for the fieldwork. This local community centre is used for a variety of community activities, some of the activities such as cupcake classes and flower arranging attract a large audience of women. The community centre is based in a highly Muslim populated area, but the small fees charged for these activities means that it attracts a broad range of Muslim women from across Manchester who have different levels of religiosity and use of dress. The centre also has a range of opportunities for volunteering and helping out in the local area and is regularly used for group and social events. The diversity of my sample was important (although I acknowledge that not 'everyone will be covered' and again I was not aiming for a generalisation) as I wanted to capture interactions and experiences from a broad group of Muslim women, therefore the community centre served this purpose as a starting point. This community centre is a backdrop for all my focus groups but is only used as a springboard to recruit other participants outside the centre and other areas of Manchester (through use of the snowballing technique- see details below) for semi-structured interviews. This snowball technique was used to recruit a further (different) sample of eight women for my interviews. The aim was to diversify my sample as I did not want to limit it to only women who attend the community centre, but through these women I had been given access to women from different parts of Manchester and other cities around the U.K.

The manager of the centre, who acted as a gatekeeper, who has led workshop classes that I attended at the centre acted as a gatekeeper was approached which allowed me to put up and distribute recruitment posters in the centre. I aimed to recruit my sample by leaving the posters in the community centre with the aim of getting women who are part of the groups or activities that take place in the centre to participate. Letters of invitation were sent to those who are interested, and the participants chosen were women over the age of 18 who self-identify as 'British Muslims' for this research. The sample I selected consisted of a mixture of women who vary in their wearing of Islamic dress. In addition to using recruitment posters, I also made use of the 'snowballing technique' in my recruitment and allowed my personal contact and the trust and rapport I already have with some of these women to be utilized as a way of encouraging them, and other women they know to participate in the research. I decided to stop further recruitment of women for my interviews once I felt there was sufficient data gathered in order to explore this research. Together the interviews and focus groups (though small in this study) provided enough in-depth data for analysis and for the purpose of this research.

3.5 Data Analysis

Capturing the 'real' essence of data is a subject much up for debate in most research areas (Barbour and Schostak cited in Somekh et al 2005). It can be argued that data analysis is probably the trickiest section to cover in all manners of research. Qualitative data analysis interprets the data that is collected to uncover meanings, understandings, and interpretation around the research phenomena in relation to the people in the study. In the following section, I will discuss how I interpreted the data I collected, whilst arguing why the use of thematic analysis best suits my research. I then go on to explain the validity aspect of data analysis which is so central to defining good interpretations of the data. Finally, I reflect on my own positioning and reflexivity throughout the whole process of conceptualising my epistemology, to

reflexivity in selecting the women in this study as well as how I aim to continue to be reflexive in my data analysis.

Thematic analysis

As stated earlier the data collected from both the focus groups and semi-structured interviews was transcribed. The transcription was analysed using thematic analysis to pick out similarities, differences, and the ranges of experiences. Thematic analysis is a way to generate themes and codes from qualitative data and to ask about the implications and relationships of those patterns to participants' everyday lived experiences (Clarke and Braun 2017). Thematic analysis is a useful tool with which to analyse data because it allows themes to emerge from the participants lived experience, behaviour, and practices in order to understand what participants feel, think, and do. It also helps to interrogate patterns of social and personal meaning around topics (Clarke and Braun 2017). Thus, the thematic analysis aims to understand what issues crop up and to what extent are they a formation and part of the British Muslim woman's identity and dress.

In recent works, 'reflexive' thematic analysis is used as an active way to understand and immerse into qualitative research understanding that it is often prolonged and immersive work that aims to build on knowledge and unpack 'stories' (Braun and Clarke 2019, p591). In this research, the women from the focus groups discussed on the broader subject of life in the U.K, the emerging 'themes' then unpacked some of their stories and showed ways in which they impacted their everyday lives. I used these themes on NVivo to 'map out' those experiences and for the purpose and limited time scale of the project used the most prevalent themes to inform my later questions for interviews. Thematic analysis therefore was used as to in an attempt to understand the women's 'stories'. There were some very prominent themes that emerged which I placed in a 'mind map' using NVivo (please see appendices). I tried to include

as many of the recurring themes as possible (that fit the limitations of objectives for this research) using this map as a guide for my analysis and the shaping for my upcoming chapters.

To continue, some of the advantages of using thematic analysis are that the analysis has a lot of flexibility. By this, I mean that it allows the researcher the space to incorporate as many themes as possible and codes without having to worry about a rigid or systematic structure to follow. Thematic Analysis is also a relatively easy and quick method to learn and do. It does not require vast amounts of time as some other more integral analysis such as discourse analysis which can be very time-consuming. It is also accessible to researchers with little or no experience of qualitative research, this is due mainly to its simplistic outlook and as stated earlier very quick to learn. In addition, it is a useful method for working within participatory research paradigm, with participants as collaborators. The focus groups will need this method of analysis in particular as my aim is to understand the women's own ideas of what they feel is most important to their understanding behind this topic is. Furthermore, thematic analysis can usefully summarize key features of a large body of data, and/or offer a 'thick description' (see section on validity) of the data set. Can highlight similarities and differences across the data set, this, in particular, would be a good way to look at my focus groups once again and see if they show any similarities or differences. To continue thematic analysis allows for a social interpretation of the data which in turn can generate unanticipated insights into the research phenomena (Clarke and Braun 2017).

On the contrary, in comparison to other analysis like discourse or context analysis, thematic analysis is fairly simple and does not offer claims about language use for example. However, Braun and Clarke 2006 argue that this is mainly due to the large inconsistencies in understanding ways in which to use the analysis properly (Braun and Clarke 2006, p97). 'Many of the disadvantages depend more on poorly conducted analyses or inappropriate research questions than on the method itself' (Braun & Clarke 2006, p96-97).

Furthermore, the flexibility of the analysis is broad and although this is seen as an advantage Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that this is also a disadvantage because no specific guidelines are set therefore it is harder to determine what aspects of the researcher's data they want on making the process difficult.

To add, Wilkinson (1998) states that analysis of focus groups often neglect and do not incorporate the meanings hidden between the group interaction so much, so she found hundreds of studies presenting the focus group data as a normal interview one to one interaction for analysis and even those that did focus, she argues on a contextual term rather than the interaction that took place between the group members (Wilkinson 1998, p112-113). Additionally, she quotes a number of studies (e.g. Espin, 1995; Press, 1991 cited in Wilkinson 1998, p114) which use both interviews and focus groups '...and to present the data derived from each method as commensurate, with no discussion of the relationship between them- often with no indication of which quoted extracts are derived from which source' (Wilkinson 1998, p113-114). This is also something I will aim to keep in mind in my analysis of the focus groups, as group dynamics and interactions are the key elements to study and observe how these women shape their own understandings based on what is being discussed.

Validity

Dealing with the aspect of the validity of data is prominent for both my data collection methods of semi-structured interviews as well as focus groups. Both methods are critiqued in terms of how 'credible' the data produced is. However, the methods I have chosen are not exclusive in their critique, in fact, most qualitative methods fall into this category and there is a general consensus for qualitative researchers to prove that their studies are 'credible'. Creswell and Miller (2000) provide a good guide to determining validity and ways to reflect upon the data produced. They discuss strategies used by a number of studies to tackle the aspect of validity

in data for example triangulation, member checking, prolonged engagement in the field, audit trial etc. This offers an extensive and broad range of ways of making sure that the data produced is credible. To continue, they offer three lenses¹⁹. The three lenses they introduce are positivist, constructivist, and critical perspective: The positivist assumes systematic forms of inquiry and looks for 'quantitative equivalence' for it (Creswell and Miller 2000; p125). The constructivist places an emphasis on open-ended, interpretive and sensitivity to place and situation (see Lincoln & Guba 1995). The critical perspective focuses on '...our perspective about narratives is our historical situatedness of inquiry, a situatedness based on social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender antecedents of the studied situations' (Creswell & Miller 2000, p126).

I have chosen to look through a constructive lens because I feel it best fits the epistemological stance of Intersectionality which places emphasis on contexts such as social, political, cultural, ethnic, religious etc situations (Creswell & Miller 2000, p126). The paradigm that Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest in taking the lens is, firstly, for the researcher to disconfirm evidence '...disconfirming evidence provides further support for the account's credibility because reality, according to constructivists, is multiple and complex.' (Creswell & Miller 2000, p127). What is meant by this is that for the researcher to go in without having already fully mapped out certain presumptions about participants to study and to be open as possible to new outcomes. As discussed earlier (see focus groups) my first step is to find the preliminary themes which I am anticipating on in my focus groups. These will reflect and show what patterns occur although this does rely on the researcher's own lens it is less systematic than other procedures such as the positivist (Creswell & Miller 2000, p127).

¹⁹ When they refer to the lens, they mean that the inquirer uses a specific viewpoint for establishing validity in study.

Secondly, another procedure is the encouragement to stay ‘in the field for a prolonged time’ this is often taken up by ethnographers who stay in the situated site learning and observing the social context around them. But for this study, (as stated earlier) I have known and placed myself in the local community centre for a matter of just over a year and have got to know and build rapport with the women over the year whilst taking on my PhD and continued to do so in the readiness for my fieldwork ‘This lens is focused on gaining a credible account by building a tight and holistic case.’ (Creswell and Miller 2000, p128). Its engagement with the participants argues for a credible and understanding of the contextual settings of the participants who over the longer period of time reflect views that may be pluralistic.

Finally, to further facilitate my data to be representative as possible to the account of the views of the women in my study Creswell & Miller (2000) suggests that a ‘thick and rich’ description are needed. Denzin (1989) states that “thick descriptions are deep, dense, detailed accounts. Thin descriptions, by contrast, lack detail and simply report facts” (p. 83). So, accounts of describing the setting, the theme and the participants is highly important not only for the researcher to locate themselves properly in context but for readers to be able to establish and understand the research within the given context.

3.6 Reflexivity

The positioning of oneself as a researcher in the field is a highly debated topic but is an important one to critically assess in order to facilitate in understanding the positioning from which we all derive. Indeed, Foucault (1975) argues that the production of knowledge is one which informs ways to approach research, and then in turn how the researcher goes about to produce the production of knowledge as well as situate their ‘self-identity’ within the research. Foucault (1975, p38) argued that knowledge is socially constructed therefore one of the more difficult challenges in qualitative research is grappling with ideas of how to maintain reflexivity. Current literature (Mauthner and Doucet 2003; Woolgar 1988; Denzin 1997) and

methods on how to maintain reflexivity are used to understand challenges of subjective qualitative research. The ‘problem of reflexivity’ is that as social researchers we are often embedded in the social world we study in, it is difficult therefore to represent rather than ‘self-present’ (Mauthner & Doucet 2003, p416). Feminists, post-structural, hermeneutics, postmodernists recognise the significance of reflexivity even more so as they argue that our understandings are contextually and historically grounded. Feminists like Haraway (1988) call on these ‘situated knowledges’ which are culturally, historically and socially grounded to be used in addressing reflexivity.

This research emerged of my own personal and subjective interest as a Muslim woman, I had a profound interest in the discourse surrounding the topic. Living my life as Muslim and being surrounded by many British Muslim women not only intrigued my mind about topics that were related to us but when I came across books and articles written about ‘us’ I was always examining and understanding how and if they related to the stories that I heard around me. It is therefore fitting to understand my positionality which is grounded from this. It was never my intention to be dispassionate or objective to this topic because my own positionality and reasons into choosing this topic could not be more subjective. So here is where I faced a dilemma-how exactly should I approach this research without shying away from a topic that I was passionate about but also knew could use some of my positionality as an advantage? This is where my readings from Feminist standpoint theory came in- an epistemological position I could utilise to ground the very backing of my own subjective reality. However, when I was looking at theoretical frameworks the standpoint theory did not quite fit in with the overall research and my supervisors also pointed out that I need to dig deeper into looking at ways I could address this issue. This is where the work of Black feminism derived, as I read and understood ways in which this could also work for helping me ground my epistemological position- it still wasn’t quite there yet. Intersectionality fit as it was a very

focused and good theoretical framework I could use- but at this point, I still did not consider it to ground my epistemological position.

Eventually, it was a book titled '*Veiled Sentiments*' by an anthropologist -Lila- Abu-Lughod which provided a more fitting insight of ethnographic research that resonated with aspects of my work. This is where my look into Islamic feminism came about, although not alien to some literature, this aspect of Islamic feminism is fairly new and underdeveloped as of yet but its emergence and literature covering these aspects was the missing piece to the puzzle I had in my head to 'tie everything together'. I knew at this point my earlier looks into situated knowledges of feminist standpoint were still key to my understanding, the Black feminist critique I felt pointed out very important biases my study also needed to address and of course Intersectionality had been a major aspect of it all. My knowledge then, of all four theories needed to be tied together and Intersectionality was perfect in doing just that. This is the background to the framework developed in this thesis.

3.7 Ethical Issues

As social science has increasingly matured over the years so has its concern with the ethical considerations and practices of the researchers. Ethical considerations are important because they acknowledge the sensitivity of participants and researchers alike. So increasingly, care and precautions are taken to overcome some of the barriers to this research. Oakley (1985) presented a problem with the way data was collected by social researchers because they saw the participants as data-providers. Oakley argued that feminists must claim this space open to the mapping of social experience and it is vital that the researcher forms a good relationship with the participants (Oakley cited in Reinharz 1992, p27-29). In the focus groups, I have conducted, I took the decision before the start of each focus group to stress that I was analysing their exchanges and conversations about this topic. This point I felt was of particular importance to make as I did not want them to feel in any way that their exchanges were

someway a test of their knowledge (see Reinharz 1992, p30-32). This research has gained the approval of consent from the University of Salford's ethics panel.

Ethical considerations in data methods

There are a number of ethical factors that may arise if there is a gap in the researcher's cultivating practice, some of the issues that Symon and Cassel (2012, p103-106) argue that there should be an awareness of how the questions are worded so as not to cause any distress to the women. The use of similar techniques in all data collection to maintain consistency. I had to adopt techniques such as how to respond to the women's discussion of experiences so as not to appear rude or disinterested.

I had to also make sure that there was a sensitivity towards the handling of the data (through use of confidentiality and anonymity) but also recognising the personal involvement of me as the researcher and the participants who have a mutual relationship and to what affects this may have had. I felt that having a discussion with the women was vital in recognising this. As a researcher was important to be honest with the participants, disclosing what the study is for and how it will be used. (I have done this on my participant information sheet so the women are aware of what will happen to the data I collect). There was also an awareness and learning from any mistakes for example if a question was not answered well, to reflect on why this was and also to make sure it was not something highly sensitive that the women did not wish to discuss.

The fact I had got to know these women over the course of a year I feel has allowed a sense of ease when I conducted the focus group. As a Muslim woman, the women may or may not reveal some aspects related to their religious identity for example, they may feel I may judge their religious practice etc. However, throughout this research I have assured them I will not reveal nor publish any confidential information and as part maintaining

confidentiality. I used pseudonyms to anonymise the women in this research. Another important point is that women within this group are already familiar with one another, they regularly attend workshops offered in the community centre and often see one another outside these meetings. The familiarity then lends a comfortable space which they work within. Just to reiterate, this is not about 'getting it as much information out' of the women but the environment in which discussion is encouraged will be in an aim to allow 'telling to take place'. For example, the study conducted on Somalian women on the mental healing of immigrant women was conducted at events such as weddings and parties, it was evident from this piece of research that this type of data would not be accessible to these women if they were taken in a much more formal 'Western' setting. By allowing these women a comfortable environment to speak about such issues especially when they are traumatic is actually better done within a community (P Guerin, B Guerin and Elmi 2006, p5-6).

However, having to maintain the role as a researcher may be difficult in instances where there are blurred boundaries, information that is both personal and they have previously discussed with me was not mentioned (especially in the case of focus groups). The women also understood that my prior knowledge of these things will not be discussed and that they should only mention what they feel comfortable in discussion with the group (I have also given a written section on this in their participant information sheet). Moreover, focus groups have particular issues with confidentiality and anonymity this also had been discussed with the women and on the participant information sheet where they had been asked to keep everything discussed within the group confidential. I further elaborated this point before the start of each focus group and reassured them that they will be anonymised in my research.

To add, as the focus in both my focus groups and interviews was on the women's experiences in day to day life there may be issues, they bring up that may be sensitive to them. There is an acknowledgement that the women may feel discomfort through stimulation of

upsetting memories. Further help and support were discussed with the supervisors or a list of organisations given in which the participant can be fully supported such as Victim Support, Samaritans etc. If at any stage the women felt that they need to withdraw from the research were assured that they are free to do so, and all data would be destroyed and not used as part of the research.

In keeping with the University of Salford's ethical policy prior to participating in the research all participants were given an information sheet regarding the research and what it involves. They also had the opportunity to ask me any questions they have before making their decision to be involved in the research. Prior to participating, they were also asked to sign a consent form clarifying that they are aware what they agree to and what is involved in taking part and all data would be anonymised.

There was no unauthorised access, use or disclosure of any information that the woman who participate in my research provided. The only exemption to this was in the case of disclosing risk to self or others or any criminal activities which I would have had to breach confidentiality and discuss the issue with the supervisor. However, I had explained that an attempt to seek permission from the women would always be sought wherever possible. The women were reassured that care will be taken to keep the agreed confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research. Any names or links with the participants were anonymised in the transcript process, and all data collected was kept on a password protected computer for my own use only and in compliance with the Data Protection Act (1998). The women were also ensured that the data will be handled and collected in accordance with the consent given by them.

3.8 The women

This thesis is set out to critically examine the everyday lives of British Muslim women in the context of their everyday experiences and choices that they make. The selection process (as discussed earlier) aimed to examine the lives of the small number of women who have participated and contributed to this research. Although the later chapters go into much more detail about the background of the women, the tables (below) give a quick guidance and can be used as a reference in the later chapters when the women discuss their views.

Table 1: First focus group.

This is the mixed veiled and non-veiled women group. The women from this group all took part from the classes at the community centre.

Mixed veiled/non veiled focus group					
Name	Age	Self-identified religiosity	Veiled/non-veiled	Ethnicity	Occupation
Layla	26	‘Just Muslim’	Non-veiled	British/Indian	Engineer
Marium	25	‘Shia’ and ‘fairly religious’	Veiled (headscarf)	British/ Arab	Barrister
Zara	21	‘Sunni Muslim’	Non-Veiled	British/ Pakistani	Student
Sarah	48	‘Sunni’ and ‘religious’	Non-Veiled	British/ Pakistani	Homemaker
Rida	58	‘Shia’ and ‘religious’	Veiled (headscarf)	British/Pakistani	Homemaker

Table 2: Second focus group.

This is the veiled Muslim women group. They also attended the community centre for various classes.

Veiled women focus group					
Name	Age	Self-identified religiosity	Veiled/non-veiled	Ethnicity	Occupation
Saba	38	'Sunni' and 'fairly religious'	Veiled (headscarf)	British/Pakistani	Shop assistant
Zoya	35	'Sunni' and 'somewhat religious'	Veiled (headscarf)	British/Indian	Homemaker
Amna	56	'Sunni' and religious	Veiled (headscarf)	British/ Gujrati	Receptionist
Samreen	50	'Wahabi'	Veiled (headscarf and Jilbab)	British /Indian	Homemaker
Faiza	40	'Sunni' and 'fairly religious'	Veiled (headscarf)	British /Pakistani	Homemaker
Saba	38	'Sunni' and 'fairly religious'	Veiled (headscarf)	British/ Pakistani	Shop assistant

Table 3- Third focus group

These women were in the non-veiled group who also attended the community centre.

Non- veiled focus group					
Name	Age	Self-identified religiosity	Veiled/non-veiled	Ethnicity	Occupation
Kay	22	'Muslim' and 'religious'	Non-veiled	British/Somalian	Student
Ayla	22	'Muslim' and 'fairly religious'	Non-veiled	British/Somalian	Student
Raisa	25	'Practicing Muslim'	Non-veiled	British/ Arab	Lawyer

Table 4: Semi-structured interviews.

These women are recruited through the snowballing sampling method for semi-structured interviews, and are from different parts of the U.K.

Semi-structured Interviews					
Name	Age	Self-identified religiosity	Veiled/non-veiled	Ethnicity	Occupation
Muskan	24	'Sunni Muslim' and 'religious'	Non-veiled	British/ Pakistani	Student
Uzma	40	'Muslim'	Non-veiled	British/Pakistani	Dentist
Dimah	34	'Sunni' and 'fairly religious'	Veiled (Niqab and Abaya)	British/Bangladeshi	PhD Student
Sana	30	'Salafi' and 'religious'	Veiled (Niqab and Abaya)	British/Pakistani	Entrepreneur
Naia	32	'Maliki' and 'somewhat religious'	Veiled (Turban style headscarf)	Mixed Race Pakistani/English	Teacher
Alayeh	24	'Sunni Muslim' and 'religious'	Veiled (headscarf)	British/Kashmiri	Student
Fatimah	22	'Sunni' and 'fairly religious'	Veiled (headscarf)	British/Somalian	Teacher
Nura	28	'Culturally Muslim'	Non-veiled	British/Iranian	Solicitor

4. Chapter Four: Modesty

4.1 Introduction

This chapter covers the subject of modesty, which first emerged in the literature works on Muslim women (Lewis 2015, Dwyer 2000, El Guindi 1999, Tralo 2007, Droogsma 2007). It also emerged as an important point which was first discussed by the women in my focus groups, then later in my interviews with some of the other women. The women who shared their experiences with me have expressed varied views in understanding their day-to-day decisions in the use of this concept. Although I do not claim that this word is used exclusively by Muslim women (or *just* women in general), I will explore how this term was used by the women in a context that links directly with Islamic understandings of this word in western society. In light of the aims and objectives this chapter will aim to understand how Muslim women make choices about clothing using the term ‘modesty’. The chapter will also seek to examine the meanings attached to clothing through this term as expressions of self and identity, especially in relation to religion and gender.

In order to discuss the participants’ understanding of modesty, the first half of this chapter explores dress and its link to the term ‘modesty’. In this section the different experiences of dress by the women with Western styles of clothing, Islamic clothing, cultural clothing is explored. In addition, negotiating and managing dress through personal choice and family influences will be debated. The second half of this chapter explores the relationship between dress and ‘modesty’ in terms of morality, character, etiquettes, and manners. This chapter will show these women navigate modesty in social norms such as etiquettes and behaviour. Furthermore, there will be a discussion on how modesty for these women is tied to, but not exclusively, about what kinds of associations they have with this term. Location of the term modesty and its relation to what is deemed Islamically, culturally or socially acceptable. Through carefully examining and questioning the experiences of the women in this research,

this chapter will examine how Muslim women not only think about or adapt to different ideas of dress but also the ways in which the misconceived notions of the West around Muslim dress are addressed.

It is important to first define the term 'modesty' before I go on to discuss its use by the women later in the chapter. The simplistic definition of 'modesty' as outlined in the Oxford dictionary is:

1. The quality or state of being unassuming in the estimation of one's abilities.
2. The quality of being relatively moderate, limited, or small in amount, rate, or level.
3. Behaviour, manner, or appearance intended to avoid impropriety or indecency.

This basic definition of modesty addresses multiple issues of identity and social structures. But for the purpose of this research, I want to focus more closely on the third definition which reflects the conversations I have had with the women. Focusing on the deconstruction of the third definition still leaves much to be debated, especially as it seems to relate to a set of values that are inextricably culturally, religiously, and socially bound. As a starting point, we can see modesty as part of a larger result of a patriarchal structural system which conditions female bodies (Jaggar 1989), uses female bodies as sites of honour (Abbas 2010), or as parts of patriarchal religious systems which place virginity at a core to maintain sexual chastity or as projections of mind control in secular societies (Mernessi 1982). However, modesty can also be about upholding individual choices, disrupting the male gaze, and resistance to the objectification of women or challenges to internal narcissism (Cameron cited in Lewis 2013, p153). It is a loaded term which can be seen through a number of lenses, but for this chapter I try and uncover it through the medium of what it means to the women in my research. As my research is focused on women who self-identify as Muslim, it is useful then to first understand the cultural and religious significance of the term in Islam.

4.2 The cultural and religious significance of modesty

It has been argued that the term ‘modesty’ is linked synonymously with Muslim women’s dress (Peek 2005, El Guindi 1999, Droogsma 2007) – that is, the idea that Muslim women in particular adhere and practice ‘modest’ ways of dressing in relation to religious scriptural guidelines:

“And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O ye Believers! turn ye all together towards Allah, that ye may attain Bliss.” (Verse 24:31; Translated by Yusuf Ali).

However, the above scripture is just one version amongst many in the Qur’an and *Hadiths* which talk about dress. In some translations of the Qur’an, the word modesty is used (like the one above) but in others the word modesty is omitted entirely and replaced with words like chastity or hiding of ‘private parts’ (see translations by Sahih international or Arberry on Qur’an Arabic Corpus). As there is no sole translation in English of the Qur’an, it leaves believers a small margin of self-reflection to understand what the scriptures are commanding. Furthermore, there are numerous more *tafsir* (exegesis) of the verse in the Qur’an especially in relation to the idea of head covering which they translate from the word ‘*khimar*’. The Arabic word ‘*khimar*’ is most commonly translated as ‘head covering’ which is also the prominent agreed position taken up by the four major schools of Islamic thought (Hanafi, Shafi’i, Maliki,

and Hanbali). However, the word itself remains quite ambiguous, not least because the word 'khimar' was not assigned to just a head covering in early Islam but also was a local term used by the non-Muslim Arabs (Mernissi 1985). As I have shown, there is a definite link to the idea of modesty and scriptural texts of the Qur'an and *Hadiths*. It has also revealed that the understandings of modesty in relation to the scriptures are subject to the understandings of and interpretations of those texts.

On the other hand, whilst modesty is linked with ways of dressing, it can be argued that it is also associated with behaviour and character:

'Modesty is both a character trait and a manner of acting with others that is inconspicuous and unobtrusive. Not attracting attention to oneself, not sticking out in public, is an attribute of modest behavior, as is avoidance of ostentatious display of wealth. In and of itself, modesty is a good quality that connotes some consideration for others' feelings in dealing with them.' (Lazreg 2009, p3).

Modesty therefore is much more than ways of dressing; it refers to a set of ideals and social norms in which certain behaviours are seen to be 'modest', some of which I will later go on to explore in the chapter. In addition, a study (Lazreg, 2009) shows how modesty is also culturally underpinned:

'Anthropologists correctly point out that modesty in Middle Eastern societies refers to a whole array of ideas and practices, including modalities of covering the body partially or totally; character traits such as bashfulness, humility, diffidence, and shyness; and the system of beliefs and customs that embed gendered conceptions of sex, chastity, virginity, adultery, and the like. As a character trait, modesty implies that a person seeks to downplay her achievements or skills so as not to make others jealous or envious. Such a person would refrain from bragging about her accomplishments. She may also not seek praise or credit for her accomplishments,

thereby indicating that she values what she has accomplished more than she does its social evaluation. At the heart of modesty so construed is also a certain degree of self-underestimation' (Lazreg 2009, p5).

Similarly, in my literature chapter I discussed the socio-political absence of understanding the agency of Muslim women and how academic research (Tarlo 2007, Siraj 2011, Abu-Lughod 2002) argues that women define their own ideas of modesty. Abu Lughod's article (2002) states that different types of coverage is used by Muslim given their differing cultural, contextual scenarios for example in some cultures the use of the hijab is a lot more prevalent (such as Arabs) than others (such as South Asians). It argues that the West sees Muslim women through a singular lens in which they are homogenous whilst ignoring the cultural differences.

To continue, the fact that the term 'modesty' has recently been more extensively used and adopted by major global fashion brands such as H&M which often market 'modest clothing' as ways to target Muslim consumers of fashion. Likewise, in the world of social media the British Muslim fashion blogger Dina Tokio who has over 700,000 subscribers on her YouTube channel even recently launching the title of her book 'modestly'. It is to no surprise then, why some of the younger women I spoke to use, reflect and negotiate the use of this term in and outside of the Muslim community.

4.3 Dress

As all the women in my research are British, they have spent significant time as part of Western society. Coincidentally, some of the conversations we shared were about how Western styles of clothing influenced their ideas and understandings around modesty. Some participants expressed that although they understood Islamic modesty, they were often keen to adapt different styles of dress depending on the occasion, for example such as family weddings or on

holidays. They felt that this meant that they still were being modest whilst changing styles of how they would normally choose to dress.

One of the first women I got to know over the course of my research was Amna. Amna is 56 years old and used to work as a primary school teacher (until quite recently) and I met her at the community centre where she attends a number of workshops in her spare time. Amna is the eldest of her four siblings (three sisters and two brothers) and her parents came as Indian immigrants in the 1960s in response to the UK's demand for workers from the British commonwealth. Amna's father worked in a factory which faced labour shortages due to the aftermath of the second world war. Amna, being the eldest of the siblings, said she always felt she was constantly challenged whilst growing up because of the pressures of being the first to do anything. Amna told me that her ethnicity as British Gujrati, her challenges as a Muslim woman and as a child of immigrant parents who were still learning and adapting to their new way of life, made things 'quite difficult'. However, like many migrants from South Asia and elsewhere who came to look for work in the sixties (and subsequently settled in industrialised cities and towns), she describes how stories of her parents struggles and challenges made her face her own.

Amna proudly told me when I met her that she was one of the first women in her community to wear *hijab* (roughly 20 years ago) even to the discouragement of her mother who she says felt would make her a more identifiable racial target. Studies such as Afshar (1994) show how women from immigrant backgrounds adjusted their dress to fit in with community expectations of modesty which Amna argues for her mother was wearing the traditional *shalwar kameez* at home. As part of the traditional dress her mother wore a *dupatta* which was loosely draped over the shoulders or was hung loosely around the head when she went out or had visiting guests. Although Amna did wear traditional clothing of her Indian heritage at home similar to her mothers, her later decision to wear a headscarf was in contrast to her mother's

traditional ideas around ‘modest’ dress (i.e., her *shalwar kameez* and *dupatta* linked to her Indian heritage). Amna made a clear distinction that although she does see *shalwar kameez* as being ‘modest’, it does not fit the religious obligations for making sure the hair is fully covered because the *dupatta* is only loosely draped whereas the headscarf allows the hair to be neatly tucked in. In the 70’s and 80’s, she told me, people were more concerned about the colour of skin and saw her headscarf as part of the ‘funny clothes’ that brown people wear with no real understanding of the affiliation of the headscarf being a religious item of clothing (as it is arguably seen as today). Amna like many other first-generation children of immigrants faced and still face many dilemmas in which their own and their subsequent children’s identities are in question (Lewis 2013), but her proud statement of ‘being the first in the community to wear a *hijab*’ shows her enthusiasm for paving a way for her own assertion in British society.

Amna told me that through the encouragement and hard work of her parents she was the first person in her family to go to university. In her household (like some others from first generation of Muslim women I had the chance to speak to in this research) they were eager that their children make use of the opportunities given to them. She also told me that this is the first time she started thinking about wearing a *Hijab*. She can’t quite recall what it was that made her want to wear it even though neither her mother nor her grandmother back in India wore it. She just remembers the overall joy once her place at University was accepted. She felt extremely thankful to God for the opportunity, and as a result felt it was her duty to be able to express her religious identity and her way of showing gratitude.

Furthermore, Amna also mentioned in her previous job as a primary school teacher she felt quite lucky that she was in a position that allowed her to continue to dress modestly (smart trousers/shirt and headscarf) but also allowed her a good work/life balance between being a parent and fulfilling her duties at work and at home. However, later on in her life she felt stressed about being there because of a number of changes in the education system.

Amna felt that her previous career was no longer suitable as it was demanding more time and because of her later divorce she (and her three children) she could not financially depend on the income the job offered. She told me that she now works part time as a receptionist (which also has no strict policy of uniform) and her online business allows her freedom to work from home and ‘wear what she likes’ and to have more ‘time to herself’ especially now that her children have all grown up and gone into secondary school.

For Amna, the ideas around ‘modesty’ and its link with ‘dignity’, ‘behaviour’ and ‘dress’ are still as important, as she explained in the focus group (second focus group of veiled women):

‘I think you become role model as well, don't you? You've got to reign yourself in. If your character was a bit different, and when you take on your modest dressing, you can be a role model to somebody even in your workplace. If you're a teacher, there could be students looking at you. Even if you working in a local pharmacy or anything. I think there's a lot of thought, dignity really, that applies with modest clothing.’ Amna (second focus group- veiled women)

Amna talks about how depending on your profession- it is okay to dress in particular ways. So, she gives examples of a teacher and a pharmacist and how they need to dress accordingly in order to fit in the environment in which they work. In the field of identity and self, there is an importance in understanding the roles clothes play as Dunsteath (1998) argues: ‘They are not just about enveloping the body- they connect with memory, history, ritual, race, sexuality and sensuality’ (Dunsteath 1998 cited in Guy 2001, p 108). Similarly, Butler (1990) argued that dress is a site of gender construction, in which she states that dress is socially constructed to seem ‘appropriate’ wear for certain social contexts at the time. In particular, Amna’s reference to the particular professional jobs shows the values she holds to understanding body-management in particular workplaces (Guy 2001, p110-112). Her view was also shared by the

other women in the focus group who saw appropriate work attire as part of their understanding of modesty.

Interestingly, Amna links appropriate ways of dressing to the idea of being a role model. In this second focus group of veiled women, the women were also all mothers and I felt that this had changed the dynamics a bit more from my first focus group (non-veiled women some were single and some married). Amna's comment on being 'role models' is interesting for that reason because the group discussed at length ideas around modesty in relation to role models. It may have reflected what they deemed as important for their children to understand how modesty relates to their religious but also social contexts. Parents often have the task of making the children learn a sense and choice of dress from an early age right through to teens. Parents are also often quite influential in the constructing of ideals of dress of what is or is not appropriate and individuals often internalise this from parents and peers (Peek 2005, p225). In the same way, a study (Dagkas 2011) showed that religious obligations and traditions are often learned and passed down from Muslim parents (Dagkas 2011, p 224-226). Amna's concern here shows that she takes her role very seriously even within the workplace and later on talks about how she has tried to be an example to her children. From this, we can see how the women pass down the nature of dressing and their ideas of modesty even within professional dress.

Conversely, Raisa shared similar views to Amna on the adjustment of dress albeit Raisa's views of modesty are different (which I will discuss shortly). Raisa is 25, she is also the eldest of the three sisters. Her family moved to Britain from Saudi Arabia when she was 18. She was brought up by her mother in a single-parent household surrounded by 'strong females', although she does have regular contact with her father who lives back in Saudi Arabia. I was introduced to Raisa after one of the focus groups that were held. She is a close friend of Marium (who will later be introduced). Raisa lives by herself in an apartment in Manchester, her sisters and mother often visit but they live in London. She moved here a year

ago, when she found a job in a law firm and became friends with Marium. Raisa leads an affluent lifestyle which she says is courtesy of her father who pays for her car, apartment and provides her and her sisters monthly expenditure and that's why at such a young age she can afford such luxuries. When I was first introduced to Raisa, the first thing that immediately struck out to me was her sense of style and how well-groomed she was. Raisa admits that she spends a lot of time in taking care of herself because she feels image is important. However, Raisa also talked about modesty in terms of dressing.

When I questioned Raisa on what her understanding of modesty is, she told me about the rules of dressing she applies to herself normally, such as not showing her cleavage or legs from above her knee, but in instances where she goes to swimming, she adjusts her way of dressing to conform to what she feels is required to whilst she swims:

'I think there's rules that I follow, so like I don't wear stuff that shows my chest or my legs. I cover those parts up. But like it depends if I'm going swimming, I have to wear a swimming costume, so I just get one that has longer short types but covers my cleavage up. I don't want my boobs on display... (laughs)... that's not modest' Raisa (third focus group-non veiled women)

Although Raisa states that she normally wears a swimming costume, she stresses that she chooses her swimming costume carefully so that she feels that she is in some way still being modest. She does this by choosing a swimming costume that covered her legs by being a little longer and choosing one which also was not too low cut or exposed her cleavage. Most Muslim women who conform to the ideas of dressing in Hijab often would rule out swimming in a mixed gender setting (Walseth 2004) and the women I got to know who veiled also went to women's only swimming. Raisa negotiates her own understandings of what it is to be modest, her swimming costume here is an example of what she thinks is acceptable. Hamzeh and Oliver

(2012) showed in their study of how Muslim women negotiate dress in physical activities and how women became their own agents in negotiating their dress choices. What this study showed was the differences amongst their Muslim women participants in choices such as swimming. For Hamzeh and Oliver (2012, p332) the hijab is about the visual, spatial, and ethical. They argue that as well as understanding the physical outlook of the hijab, there is also an understanding that certain behaviours also add to what is classed as 'hijab' for example some of the women described not using abusive language (Mernessi 1991). The spatial Hijab, in this case they refer to the area in which Muslim women are limited to mobility and ethical Hijab where Muslim women are taught about protection from things like being alone with men. Studies such as Dagkas et al (2011) signify a reoccurring dilemma of restricting physical activities such as swimming in schools for Muslim girls. The idea of modesty in this context is therefore highly debated. However, Raisa breaks all these boundaries because she negotiates a space for herself by arguing that her use of swimming costume allows her to enjoy physical activities like swimming.

One of the issues the women spoke about in my research was wearing clothes with various degrees of acceptance and on how much skin they feel they should show. When modesty is talked about it is often seen in stark opposition to sexualisation which society associates with immorality and deviancy, whereas modesty is seen as a feminine virtue (Barnhill cited in Crasnow and Superson 2012, p120). It is argued there is sexual objectification of women in society (Gervais et al 2012). In Western popular culture of films, television, music it is even more apparent that women are seen as objects of sexual arousal and heterosexual men as subjects to be sexually aroused (Barnhill cited in Crasnow and Superson 2012, p120-121). The breasts for example can be argued to be the most sexualised parts of the female body. Covering the cleavage for example does not specifically relate to only Muslim women.

Nura (interview): 'Personally I wouldn't think that showing your cleavage is okay like all the time, I would maybe be okay like in the evenings. Then it's fine and it has to be special occasions, but I'm relaxed like that. Men should mind their own business; I'm not wearing it for attention. It's what I like on me'

Nura (interview): '...I don't show my legs either not above my knees. So I wear skirts that are like just below my knee, but it depends like I said If I'm on holiday I like getting a tan so I'm comfortable wearing swimming clothes, but that's just me, that's my idea of modesty not showing too much inappropriately...'

Nura is 28 years old and lives in London but travels up often to see Raïsa who she became good friends with at University. Nura is currently working as a solicitor and lives with her family. She is of mixed ethnicity: her mother is French, and her father is Iranian. She seems really proud of her mixed heritage and told me about her trips to Morocco to see some extended family. Although, since she grew up in the U.K she feels like she can only really connect with the customs and culture here as she told me she grew up in a mainly white neighbourhood and went to school where it happened to be mainly white. When I questioned why she describes herself as British Iranian she simply said because as a child growing up she had a few incidents where some children would make fun of her mainly Iranian features (her tightly curled hair, dark eye colour and darker complexion) and now that she was older she has learnt to love these features and love her heritage from her father's side. She told me her mother (because she is white) sometimes got questioned if she was taking care of other people's children because they do not look her like (white, green eyes and fair coloured hair). She told me mostly her family friends are also white, and they only know a few Iranian families through friends of her father. I asked her if she would describe herself as a Muslim as she said she didn't feel she was religiously Muslim but felt culturally Muslim.

Furthermore, all of the other women in the research self-identified as Muslim but Nura was the only one in my research to speak about being only culturally Muslim. When I asked her to explain what this meant, she said that her parents follow certain customs that are Islamic in heritage, but they are not practicing 'as in don't pray five times a day etc'. She argued that they were not very strict on eating 'halal foods' and often just bought from the local supermarkets for convenience although they did not eat pork. Living in a white neighbourhood and having the struggles to fit into the society with often very limited access other Muslim communities. She describes her childhood as filled with cultural rather than religious moments and that is why she would call herself culturally Muslim rather than religious. They celebrated Christmas as a holiday but not really Eid but celebrated *Nowruz* (Iranian New Year). Although she believes there is a God, she doesn't know much about the Qur'an or other religious scripture but feels that she doesn't need to follow any traditional religions to have her belief. She told me her father over the years has just taught her culturally Muslim things such as foods that they eat and also traditions in Iran that his family share (which are incidentally Islamic customs). She told me that he is somewhat religious but doesn't practice the faith fully.

Nura argues that her sense of dress comes from her own understanding of appropriateness rather than a religious one. Although she argues that as a teenager, she often had quarrels about dress with her parents (much like her other white friends over appropriate lengths of skirts and tops etc) but as an adult now she decides to wear what she likes. Nura talks about how she chooses to dress depending on the occasion. So, for example when she talks about going to the beach, she feels comfortably dressing in swimming clothes or in the evenings she can wear clothes that maybe even show some cleavage. To her, modesty is much more about dressing appropriately for the occasion, she sees appropriateness of dress as a way for her to define what is or isn't modest. Nura was the only one I interviewed who linked herself to being 'cultural Muslim' rather than a 'practicing Muslim' like the rest of the women, but she

still has ideas around modesty evidencing it may be culturally learnt. Her parents she said didn't really practice the religion either, but Nura identified as a Muslim because of her belief in God and her links with Islamic culture. Nura told me about how her father and his family taught her concepts like '*ijtihad*' (moral self-reasoning and understanding of religious texts), although her father did not fully practice religion like other Muslims, she now knows she said he taught her to use her own mind when understanding ways to dress. Her father's own family never wore Islamic attire such as the *Hijab* but because they all now lived in Western countries, they wear clothes that are the norm there. Unlike some of the other women I interviewed Nura did not see her dress as part of her religious obligation but more of a personal decision which she said was part of her Islamic understanding of '*ijtihad*'. In the literature chapter I showed how Islamic feminism was pushing this concept of '*ijtihad*' (Moll 2009).

On the other hand, Muskan's ideas of modesty is very specific. Even though she does not wear traditional Islamic clothing she is very specific about what she can and cannot wear. She argues that although she wears Western clothing (jeans and a top) she is careful not to choose clothing that is sleeveless or tops that are too tight or too short. Her views are different from Nura but at the same time they reflect her own understandings of modesty:

Muskan (Interview): 'Well my legs, I would show my arms that's not a problem but yeah like not wear sleeveless. I would wear half sleeve. And then yeah I wouldn't wear short tops and I also consider modesty as loose clothing so not wearing very tight clothing like where it shows your body.'

Nura is of a mixed heritage and her Muslim heritage emerges from Iran whereas Muskan is British Pakistani and her family come from Lahore. The differences between the two may be down to different cultural understandings of dress, but at the same time another factor could be that Muskan describes herself as a very religious Muslim and Nura said she was culturally

Muslim. What this shows is the plurality of religious and cultural beliefs in Muslim women's identity because although they both chose not to wear the veil, their own reasoning and understandings are completely different.

In a similar way, Iman feels that modest clothing can be anything as long as it is loose clothing.

Iman (interview): ' . It's about how you carry yourself as well so you can't go on the street with tight clothing. Loose clothing. Emmm even if you wear tight jeans with a nice top that covers you'

She describes here the standard Western attire of 'jeans and a top' and how that can be modest as long as it is loose and covers. For her, having tighter jeans was not an issue and it was more about covering the upper half of the body. When I met Iman she was in her home wearing loungewear, she told me that she herself wears a headscarf and jilbab (long outer robe) when she is out. Her comment was also about what I was wearing as she pointed to my clothes; this may be the reason she made a reference to jeans and a top. She had earlier spent some time explaining to me about 'her size' which she said she was conscious of, especially in reference to her breasts and that is why she felt wearing her jilbab was an easy way for her to cover. Plus size clothing is often an issue for many women who want to dress modestly (Miller cited in Lewis 2013, p143) and this was a problem that Iman pointed out to me. Her upper half of the body was what she was most worried about concealing because she felt that showing an outline of a chest was an 'immodest' way of dressing.

Moving beyond just dress, Naia's idea of modesty is influenced very much by Western standards of beauty.

Naia (interview): '...if you make it too difficult and boring and you can only wear a hijab and grey and you can only wear it one style and be super modest. You have to think about the young

girls who want something a bit you know interesting, you know like the makeup and all that and it's difficult in this society as well...'

Naia argues that being modest should not mean that you have to be dull in the way you dress and how it is positive that younger Muslim girls have various ways to express themselves. This is reflected in the works of Reina Lewis (2013) who looks at Islamic fashion online for younger generations of Muslims. The internet, social media and fashion blogs are all in a way contributing to the changing emergence of fashion and also Islamic fashion. Naia who used to be a high school geography teacher in an Islamic school may have been more aware of this as she taught a group of mainly young Muslim women. Again, perhaps partly due to her proximity to younger generations of Muslim women, Naia also was quite vocal about the use of makeup and how she still feels that using or applying makeup or choosing to explore different ways of being modest is important. Islamic consumer culture began to grow with the increasing population of Muslim in Europe in the 1990's where more affluent Muslims who settled in European countries tried to keep up with the fashion trends of the West (Lewis 2013, p19-20).

This growing trend of highly fashionable outfits continues to consume much focus from younger generations of Muslim women who want to adhere to their own religious identities at the same time becoming part of the consumer culture of fashionable trends and ideals of beauty through use of makeup (Lewis 2013, p19).

Dimah (interview): 'There are conditions of hijab, like your face needs to be covered, your hair needs to be covered and your chest needs to be covered, but from my point of view the conditions of hijab aren't being met, and not just that but this current climate with social media and Muslim beauty bloggers and all that. It's become more of a fashion thing more of a trend thing.'

Dimah (interview): 'Nowadays you are seeing Muslim women in leggings and chest out low cut tops, teeny tiny hijab on with everything else on display and I'm like it kind of hurts my heart and the other side flip side of that is when I was growing up girls in hijab were doing all kinds of stuff and then you kind of give a bad representation to the ones who aren't dodgy...'

However, Dimah argues here that she sees the effect that Western influence is having on her interpretations of modesty and argues that society is heavily influencing 'fashionable trends' on hijab. She sees this is a negative effect the true meaning of modesty and that the effect is also down to what bloggers promote as their ideas of 'modest' clothing. She also talks about some Western clothing that she feels is not 'modest' for women who wear the hijab, such as low-cut tops, displaying of hair or tight leggings. Droogsma (2007) argued that for some of the Muslim women in her study the Islamic forms of dressing acted as a way for resisting aspects of patriarchal society. For Dimah, this is very apparent because she refuses to acknowledge 'fashion trends' which she believes to be part of immodesty. The Islamic dress for her falls away from a freedom of pressure of fashion similar to what women in Droogsma's study highlighted (Droogsma 2007, p310). In Dimah's understanding having a prescribed dress code such as the hijab eases the pressure to consume the trends of fashion and shifts her away from dressing to conform to beauty standards that are expected of women in patriarchal societies.

Islamic understandings of modesty

Modesty is a key term that all the women in my research would see as being Islamic in some sense. Some of the women clearly stated that for the 'true sense of modesty' the covering has to be Islamic, in a sense that it has to conform to what they class as ideals that are religiously prescribed such as covering of the hair as understood by many scholars of the Qur'an. In the focus groups I showed a couple of different examples of Islamic religious dress (see appendices) they were showing use of the veil in various ways. This created some open

discussions amongst the women, in particular this was important for me. In the methods I stated that I would introduce a selection of photos that I would present to the women (see appendix) and have discussions around what the women thought of them. In our first focus group of women who veiled and didn't veil (mixed group), we had an interesting dialogue around what is or isn't modest:

Rida (first focus group mixed veil/non veil women): 'so just your face its open...and your hands and feet...obviously so no half sleeves its not hijab...'

Marium (first focus group mixed veil/non veil women): '...yeah I think that's more conservative... than people currently wear like up to your wrists and ankles and your neck and ears need to be covered....'

Rida 'Yeah that's it...'

Moderator: What about the niqab? Your views on that?'

Rida 'No, definitely not.'

Rida 'It's not proper hijab'

Rida 'No any kind of, like this (points at image with woman wearing a turban style hijab) and can see her neck and everything. That's not a proper hijab.'

Moderator: so you think covering the neck is a must for hijab?

Rida 'yes, definitely.'

Moderator: what about the other images? Say the sport nike one?

Rida: 'That's made for sport and her neck and everything is covered. So so that's okay.' Rida 58, wears headscarf

In this group both Marium and Rida were the only ones who both wore a headscarf, the rest of the group did not (3 other women). They had this debate between them over what they saw as modest or what wasn't. Rida who says that the proper idea of hijab meant covering everything apart from face, feet and the face was 'proper' and she felt that some of the pictures I had shown of the hijab (turban style-see appendix) could not be classed as a 'hijab'. However, Marium was quick to point out that her own hijab was more 'conservative' and later on in the conversation she argues that she thinks it's okay if women wear it in other ways i.e. not cover their arms or neck or have ears exposed. What makes this more complex is that although Rida was very specific on the ways in which Islamic idea of the hijab should be worn and argued for the neck and certain parts not to be exposed, she was also very much against the niqab (face veil). She felt that the niqab in her words was 'not Islamic' and gave examples of women who are prohibited from wearing it in the pilgrimage in the holy city of Mecca. Again, this relates to her personal *ijtihad* or understanding of ideals of what is, or is not morally acceptable (Moll, 2009).

Similarly, we see that Sana shares the same views:

Sana (interview): 'Yeah I think covering hair is Islamic and I didn't have that knowledge before. I would agree that you do have to cover to call it a hijab.'

Likewise, my interview with Dimah shows that some of the Muslim women I met felt that there was a strong sense of what a hijab should or should not be. Here she talks about how social media has transformed the hijab away from its religious background into a more of a 'fashion' statement.

There are conditions of hijab, like your face needs to be covered, your hair needs to be covered and your chest needs to be covered, but from my point of view the conditions of hijab aren't being met, and not just that but this current climate with social media and Muslim beauty

bloggers and all that. It's become more of a fashion thing more of a trend thing. 'Dimah (interview)

Dimah's interview was very focused on the idea that Islamic values were being driven away due to the consumer culture (as discussed earlier). She in a way used her dress to fight back against societal norms of following fashion. Her adherence to wearing a niqab and so narrowing parts of the body open for exchange was also part of her resistance to being an object of male gaze (Brenner 1996 cited in Franks 2000). She uses her dress as a form of agency in asserting her religious identity through her Islamic attire which she sees as rejecting dominant discourses about women's dress (Afshar 2008).

However, some of the women disagreed that the idea of modesty and the hijab should be limited in one way, they felt that it was far more important that women make their own distinctions about what or what shouldn't be modest:

Fatimah (second focus group-veiled women): 'I just don't think people get it, so what if we choose not to cover hair, it's a contested term anyway. I don't believe it's fard (obligatory). I think what the Quran is trying to tell us is that just dress appropriately, and that can mean a lot of things. It isn't what Muslim men make out to be...some (men) don't stop looking no matter what we wear. What are we supposed to do hide in cupboards? It's about how you come across what vibes you give off. If you are drawing attention you can even do that in a burka'

For Fatimah and some of the other women, they felt that covering of hair was not a necessary part of Islam. Although Fatimah herself wears a headscarf, she did not think that it was mandatory for all women. She argued that women should be allowed to wear whatever they choose, and the Qur'an was not particularly specific. The women in the group also felt that they had no religious prescriptions of what they can or cannot wear but it was a matter of personal taste and choice. One of the arguments that Fatimah refers to here is the religious

debate over the term ‘Khimar’ which is mentioned in the Qur’an. Although many Islamic scholars have given evidence to the covering of hair in reference to this term, some religious scholars have argued against it. However, in my interviews and focus groups I did not pursue the religious debates around this topic because although my research looks at religious identity, it does not fix itself on interpretations of religious scripture. Fatimah’s argument here is more concerned about behaviours of individuals rather than dress. This was a view shared by the women in this second group of veiled women. They understood that although there was an element of appropriateness of dress it was also about the behaviours of individuals that contributed more towards their ideas around modesty. The emphasis in this group was focused a lot more around conducts of behaviour rather than just what women choose to wear.

4.4 Journeys into ‘modesty’

When discussing the topic of modesty some of the women talked about their ‘journeys’ into learning about modesty whilst growing up, they felt it was about attaining a greater religious identity that made them understand more about who they were:

Amna (second focus group- veiled women): ‘I think we weren't brought up to, I'm talking about me personally about my parents and sister that had to wear a scarf from a young age. I wore my scarf quite late. When I look at a young person even if they're not moderately dressed modestly, I don't judge them because I feel if somebody forced me to wear a scarf I won't have worn it wholeheartedly but it's because I've learnt, I've gained Islamic knowledge, my character's changed.’

Amna talks about her journey into wearing a hijab but also acknowledges steps within that journey when she talks about how when she looks at younger people, she recognises that they may also be on a journey that may or may not be similar to hers. She feels that if someone had ‘forced’ her to wear the headscarf she wouldn’t have understood it the way she does now. She

argues that because she learnt about it by her own means she felt she ‘accepted’ it as part of her understanding into Islamic knowledge. Peek (2005) describes the developmental stages of Muslim Identity where the learning of faith becomes more intense through religious practices showing that as children these are learned processes. So, Amna, in her understanding of ideas around the hijab was not necessarily something she knew but her understanding changed over time as she grew up and negotiated this within her context of views and experiences.

When we were having this conversation in this group of all veiled women about the how they decided to wear the headscarf, they all acknowledged and agreed that they each had a personal story to tell about what and how their views of modesty changed. One of the key aspects to this was a greater awareness of their religious identities about how Muslim women should be dressed in accordance with their understandings of religious scripture.

Zoya (second focus group-veiled women): ‘and there's girls that walk through this...they had mini-skirts on. Literally, there was nothing Islamic about the way they dressed, and they did wazoo and they put the thing and they prayed namaz. I mean if you saw them. I mean literally, they had a mini skirt on. You would never, ever think in your wild dreams they would be praying namaz, but they did, so how can we judge. My daughter said, "You just can't judge a book by its cover." You'd never think they'd go pray namaz.’

What Zoya highlights is that there are different ways in which she constructs ways in which women are seen to be modest. She admits that her judgement of the girls she saw as not adhering to her preconceived notions of modesty such as ‘wearing mini-skirts’ which to her signified as clothes that are in some way immodest. However, she then goes on to say that she immediately felt bad for placing choice of clothing onto their religious acts of devotion. She felt that as she watched them pray *namaaz* (one of five daily prayers) it was difficult for her to comprehend. However, when she mentions this to her daughter in a later conversation her

daughter has a completely different reaction to her in stating that ‘you shouldn’t judge a book by its cover’. This may be due to a generational gap as to ways in which British Muslim’s and many immigrant communities have had to adapt to the changing societies around them. Afshar’s study (1994) of three generations of Muslim women immigrants in West Yorkshire looks at the generational differences. She noted that the younger generation of Muslim women often focused on religious rather than cultural understandings of modesty. So, whereas Faiza was much more concerned about the dress of the individual she talks about, her daughter was more evidently aware that dress does not always signify religiosity therefore her comment about ‘don’t judge a book by its cover’. The older generation were more concerned with female bodies as sites of ‘honour’ and ‘shame’ which often meant dressing appropriately (Afshar 1994, p134). Her daughter’s comment and Faiza’s now seemingly changed view shows that the generational understanding of dress in Muslim communities is changing.

Personal journeys to modesty

When we discuss culture and especially culture in terms of immigrant communities, we often talk about the family. Family for some of these women were often the ones to teach them about ways of dressing:

Amna (second focus group- veiled women): ‘I think it comes with time. Certainly, I think as I have matured, you gain experience through your family, your children, extended families. You make sure the character you are, as you’re growing up. So, if it’s somebody younger than me then I’d just probably feel they’re still learning. There’s always a learning curve for all of us yet.’ Amna 56, wears headscarf

Some of the views that Amna echoes here resonated with a lot of the women in my research. They felt that part of the reason why they used the term ‘modesty’ was in fact because it was

talked about with their mothers. They often had to dress in ways especially when living at home that they felt would be 'acceptable' in their homes and in family gatherings.

However, some women felt that this was restrictive and limited their own personal choices. Saba was talking here about how when they went to the beach as younger children her mother who wore a hijab and jilbab often refused to go into the water because she did not want to remove her clothes:

Saba (second focus group-veiled women): 'Yes, to be able to go on the beach, to be able to go in the water, or to be able to have your family day out. It's restricting certain people.'

She therefore felt very strongly against wearing what she describes as 'restrictive clothing'. Her experience of talking about how her mother felt she had to exclude herself from certain activities was one she clearly held very strongly to. Although she understood that other women use burkinis or specially designed swimwear for Muslim women she felt it was an 'extra burden' Muslim woman did not have to accept. For her Modesty meant that it had to be a personal choice, one in which she had every right to openly choose how to dress.

Saba (second focus group-veiled women): 'Modesty is a big thing. It's very broad. My personal opinion. I don't know, anybody else have different things. And I don't base it just on the hijab. Because I think there's a lot -- Modesty comes from within and also I know people like you say, who have hijab and maybe don't have a lot of the personal characteristics that go within. And some people who don't have the hijab but have a lot of personal modesty characteristics and, like manners and looking after people. A good heart and all of that. For me, it's very broad. I won't judge a person on the fact of how they look.'

Although, the women discussed that they felt there were influences on how they viewed dress as part of Islamic, cultural, or family values. They still argued that modesty is still very much about personal choices to choose how to dress as a Muslim woman:

Faiza (second focus group-veiled women): 'I don't think I could tell somebody what is-- For me it's a personal thing. I don't look at someone and say, "You don't wear a scarf so you're not a Muslim." Most probably a better Muslim than I am, to be honest. For me I wouldn't be able to-- That's why I think it's a personal thing. I wouldn't be able to judge somebody on their dress. I wouldn't be able to. I know some people who don't wear a scarf, but they actually make all their namazes. [sic] Maybe somebody who wears a scarf and dress like that doesn't make any namazes. [sic]'

For Faiza, it was very much about recognising that the way in which someone dresses does not automatically mean that they are either a 'good' or 'bad' Muslim.

Similarly, Saba saw that although there is influence from family in the end it is much more about choosing what modesty means for yourself:

Saba (second focus group veiled women): 'It's a personal thing. It comes to people at different times of their lives. If some people have a very religious family and they've always dressed in a certain way then I think for them they're brought up in that way of dressing modestly, and then there're some people who will come into modesty. They'll choose it for themselves. I never used to be that modest. In my family we've got different levels of modesty.'

For some of the women they described a personal journey in understanding what the hijab was and how they altered the way in which they dressed:

Amna (second focus group-veiled women): 'I do wish I'd changed earlier. I wish Allah had given me hidaya earlier.'

Samreen (second focus group-veiled women); 'You know Abaya. But I don't think that that was fashion or the character or whatever. Slowly slowly and then full time when about just over 10 years. I don't know, I lost my brother. He was only 35. That was 18 years ago. I was not fully hijabed or anything. Then learned more about deen and everything and how we live our life in

the final destination. Even though I know this is happening, that acid attack and everything, I don't think I would take it off. I would never, I could never do it. I've got people thought, oh you should not walk around the block. I say, "No if it's going to happen, it's going to happen. If someone is going to attack me, I'll defend myself" I think you only have to fear Allah, that's it, no one else. That's how I hold on, I'm strong now.'

Amna (second focus group-veiled women): 'I think it comes with time. Certainly, I think as I have matured, you gain experience through your family, your children, extended families. You make sure the character you are, as you're growing up. So, if it's somebody younger than me then I'd just probably feel they're still learning. There's always a learning curve for all of us yet.'

The women's understanding of dress shows that it was a change gradually that they learnt about. They saw it as part of learning about their religious identity and the ways in which they also learned about their gendered identities (Dwyer 2000, p481). Haw's (2009) explanation of the 'mythic feedback loop' can shed light on the developing identities of Muslim women where she argues that the 'internal self' constantly links, thinks and feels the external sense of understanding the world through social action (Haw 2009, p365).

Sana (interview) '...clothes won't stop you from praying, it's your devotion to God and understanding that you live your life based on teachings, being modest is about being close to God through your actions'.

Similarly, for Sana, she saw modesty as part of her religious identity and as an act of worship to God but she says its beyond what women choose to wear, she continued to argue that it was much more about the internal struggle to be a good person in everyday life.

What my interviews and focus groups show are that the clear difference about the ways in which the women saw modesty was connected to generational differences. Differences

between 'generation x' and 'millennials' were apparent specifically in the ways in which they viewed modesty. For example, the greatest difference was that those who were older members often saw that dress was a very important part of Muslim women's identity whereas the younger members often talked a lot about modesty as part of behaviours of women. Here Kay gives her views:

Kay (third focus group- non veiled women); 'Modesty isn't about covering up as much as you can, it's about being a humble person, someone who you would meet and be like wow she's so nice and things like that. If someone just covers up they just wearing clothes that's how I see it. But your attitude as a women is what makes you modest. Islam says that, we have to be a good example for everyone'

For Sana her definition around modesty was much more about being good in character and 'modest' in terms of consumption by not too 'lavishly'. She does add dressing nice but when I questioned her what she means by 'nice clothes' she put it down to simply the action of selecting good outfits. When she mentions these 'websites' I actually learnt she was talking about ones specifically designed for Muslim women's dress. The one she happened to mention to me was *Modinsa*. I had heard of this site as I came across it many times when I was looking for cheap scarves to buy. I further questioned her about other online stores that sell clothes that are aimed specifically for Muslim women like *Inaya* and *Aab* just to see what she thought of the clothes they target for Muslim women. Her response was a straight 'no, I can't shop there it ain't meant for people like me'. She went on to explain that firstly she felt the products they sell on there are too expensive for her to buy and then about how some of the clothes on there aren't even modest anyway. Sana talked about the see through abayas they had and that it was meant for 'skinny girls' and not 'big girls' like her. From this, I could see she made an obvious distinction about how she chooses her clothing, based on factors such as price, materials of dress and what suits her body shape.

She also indicated that in her choice of clothing she always had to take her size into consideration. She pointed out that you can wear jeans but constantly referred to her size she noted that as a big girl she felt more comfortable in long skirts and dress so it ‘doesn’t cling to all these lady bits’:

Sana (interview): ‘The behaviour is what I think is most important, being kind to others and being considerate. You have be modest in your actions.... Can’t live too lavishly and be selfish. You can just dress nicely as well I think...’ Sana 30, wears niqab

Sana (interview): ‘...well yeah there are a lot of clothes out for women you see, we have all these websites you can use now. But you can still go to stores and get something nice. But it isn’t about the clothes. It’s what’s in your heart’ Sana 30, wears niqab

Although most of the women I had interviewed used the term modesty, Nura who I met through Sana, used the term ‘haaya’ interchangeably with modesty. I think Nura very specifically wanted to use this term haaya because of its specific links and use by various Islamic countries. She asked me ‘you know haaya?’ (‘haaya’ is also part of the Urdu language because although its etymology is mostly derived from Sanskrit, the language is also influenced by Persian farsi and Arabic)

Nura(interview): ‘Modesty is your haaya, it’s how you behave and interact with people and it’s also how you dress...’

The term ‘haaya’ is much more to do with shame than modesty because it is a reference especially to the female honour. Although Nura was the only one to use this term, her understandings about shameful behaviour were much more important to her. Afshar (1994) addresses female Muslim bodies as sites of shame and honour but Nura’s perception of this is distinctive as she is the only one to talk about this from the women in my research (the concept of sites of ‘honour and shame’ will be discussed in the following chapter).

On the other hand, when the group started talking about modesty, Amna started posing a question asking what does it mean by modesty, was it by character or was it the way we choose to dress?

Amna (second focus group-veiled women): 'Modesty as in, your character? Or modesty as in, dressing – ‘

It was interesting because her first relation to the word modesty was about character and the fact that she made that link that the group picked up on was interesting also. This was maybe why the group at length shared a deeper look into what they meant. One of the reflections I made here, was that because the information leaflet I had given them had the title of my research identity, religion and clothing this may have led them to talk much more about clothing as a direct result. I think it's very easy for the women to have made that distinction based on the title and they may have felt that if they talk much more about 'clothes' they wear it would be what I wanted to hear about. In particular this may have been the case with this group because I remember Faiza was the earliest to arrive and asked me if I had a participant information sheet to read over because she said she had only time to 'skim through' it earlier that week. I gave her a copy I had with me and as the women started to arrive, they passed it around and I remember jokingly asking them if anyone had read the information sheet beforehand. Consequently, having my research title fresh in their heads may have made them make assumptions about what they felt I wanted to know.

However, Dimah, had a very clear ideas about acceptable clothing for Muslim women. She argued that it wasn't a contested term for her, and it was very clear to her that Islam required women to cover their hair. For her, it was also about conduct and manners, in our interview my question was if she thought that modesty was similar to the Islamic concept of Hijab:

Dimah (interview): '...I think it's same but different, it's like the literal hijab and we are told to cover ourselves and there are conditions we need to meet. Covering your hair and covering your chest. That aside there is another hijab, the way you conduct yourself, the way that you talk, you know you're not talking vulgar language you know your manners, your etiquettes- that's also hijab the way you are dressing...In Islam there is no Black and white oh no you have to wear the jilbab. You know the conditions you need to meet like not have figure hugging clothes, show chest this and that. That fits it.'

What Dimah demonstrates here is how strong her link with Muslim identity is. She is very specific about adhering her lifestyle around Islamic values. Similarly, studies such as Hijri (1965) showed the integration of religious values as an everyday lifestyle is very important for Muslim identity. After my interview with Dimah she saw me out of her building and along the way she mentioned she would be going to pray in a room nearby then she would leave for the train station. For me this showed just how dutifully she took her religious obligations as a Muslim woman, and how her life revolved around her acts of devotion to God. Dimah further illustrates this firm understanding of what the hijab, jilbab and other Islamic garments meant for her because she saw it as a part of her religious duty. However, although she herself wears the niqab and jilbab she does leave room open for other ways of dressing modestly with the rule that it should not be figure hugging or show the chest. Her flexibility with ways to dress became apparent from when I had met her for the interview at her University in London. I was expecting a woman who wore a niqab because that is what she had told me over our email conversation. However, when I saw her inside the campus, she greeted me with a huge smile. On the way to her University I asked in our interview about her niqab. She told me that she doesn't wear the niqab inside the University campus because it makes it easier for her to talk to the rest of class and the lecturers. Later in the interview when I had followed up on this- she told me everyone at her campus is understanding but she herself was more comfortable in

taking it off. She then pulled out her niqab from her bag which was next to her and told me she gets a train into University so before she leaves her campus, she puts her niqab back on. This was intriguing to me because on one hand her niqab was about her act of religious duty, but on the other she was very willing to take it off in certain situations and in this case, it was in a 'space of understanding'. Academic literature such as Ammerman 2003, Sherkat and Ellison 1999 and Peek 2005 show that certain organisational settings allow for a more comfortable space to assert religious identity. However, these studies looked at Muslim religious groups as places of 'belonging', but I argue that the environment of University as a place of diverse range of students may have allowed her to feel comfortable because she described it as 'a place for learning'.

4.5 Cultural understandings of modesty

For some of the women, ideas around their interpretations of modesty came from cultural influences or a mixture of what they described as 'cultural Islamic interpretations'. What they meant by this was that although culture was about their ethnic upbringing, it also meant that Islamic traditions were very much embedded in their everyday lives. It is easy to forget at times that there are huge variations of cultural differences in the Islamic world. Culture plays a key role in the construction of identity and also how we see the world (Campbell 2010). Muskan who was of Pakistani heritage argued that for her the '*duppata*' formed part of her hijab and a way of covering that was both religiously and culturally acceptable:

Muskan (interview): 'In Pakistani culture you wear a dupatta and that's like still covering your hair. So even if it's showing a bit it's okay because your hair is somewhat covered. It's still hijab.'

Muskan's understanding of modesty is clearly linked with cultural values, her ethnic culture of using a *duppata* (Long scarf that is often draped over the chest/hair in South Asian societies) was her way to conform to her religious understandings of modesty. Often in immigrant communities from South Asian regions, different types of dress is used to attend weddings, parties, religious ceremonies, or other South Asian households such as *Shalwar Kameez*, *Sari* etc. Although Muskan did not wear Asian dress all the time she wore it on occasions such as the ones highlighted. Muskan chose to use ethnic wear as her choice to maintain modesty. Whereas Dimah, who was also ethnically South Asian, distanced herself from her culture placing Islam and her religious identity at the forefront. Muskan's acceptance of and Dimah's rejection of culture create complex views about the different intersections of identity. Although both women commented on being very religious, they had different outlooks about where they place cultural heritage. In studies such as Dwyer (1999) and Peek (2005) we see a continuing rejection of ethnic, cultural, and national identities as they feel they are un-Islamic which the case is for Dimah but not so much for Muskan.

In addition, Zara appears to take a middle ground between Dimah and Muskan arguing that she sees some cultural factors as good but others as bad. For example, Zara makes a connection that sometimes culture dictates what you wear and how Muslim women here are 'free' to wear what they want but culturally in Saudi Arabia she talks about how women are more dictated to by 'stricter' rules.

Zara (first focus group mixed veil/non veiled women): 'I feel like Britain is a free country so, like you are not forced to wear something in a certain way. Like in Saudi Arabia its stricter...'

She goes on to talk about how the custom for Arab culture is much less about religion but more about the rules about what women can be seen in whilst in public places.

Zara (first focus group mixed veil/non veiled women): 'I think sometimes some people see culture and religion as not two things. One thing so say for example Asian clothes, so say a girl wears English clothes that might be okay to some others'

For Zara, modesty is very much culturally defined. She argues that for Muslims in Asia (Saris/shalwar kameez) feel that their clothes are modest and for Muslims in Britain 'English clothes' (jeans, tops, trousers, skirts etc) were seen as acceptable. She felt that for her, cultural dressing defined modesty. I think what's important here is to understand the context in which Zara is talking. Zara was part of my first mixed focus group and she herself is a third generation British Pakistani and had recently graduated from University. She had a diverse range of friends who she often came along with to the community centre, some of whom were international Arab or Sri Lankan girls who had come to study abroad. Her views about Muslim cultural diversity may have been a part of her experiences with the differing ethnic groups she came across.

Much like Zara, Marium understood that the cultural differences define how some Muslim women choose to dress:

Marium (first focus group mixed veil/non veiled women): 'Yeah, I mean yeah probably its less about religion its more about culture.'

Marium (first focus group mixed veil/non veiled women): 'I mean for example if you say Asian culture, In Asian culture sort of Muslim women tend not to have like bare arms and legs. And that's less to do with religion and more to do with. That's just how culturally women dress.'

Dressing in ways that are more 'culturally acceptable' here she argues is not having bare arms and legs for example in some Asian culture (to be more specific I think she means some aspects of Pakistani culture). To her, modesty also was part of learned cultural heritage which acknowledged acceptable ways of dressing (Peek 2005). What the conversation around the

cultural influence of modesty shows is that some women derive their understandings through their cultural understandings of modesty.

4.6 Conclusion

As this chapter shows, the women have identified the complexity and variations in their own understandings of the term ‘modesty’. This chapter demonstrates the different meanings this term holds for the women in this research. Although not all the women in my research wore Islamic clothing, they had some sort of understanding in relation to term ‘modesty’ whether that may have been because of shared cultural/ religious understanding or the fact that the term continues to have historical/ socio-political significance when we talk about the female Muslim body in particular. It is also interesting however to see the ways in which the women negotiated their understandings some arguing certain types of dress that are seen as obligatory in religious scripture whilst others have posed a more open use of what it means for Muslim women’s dress today.

5. Chapter Five: Challenging sexual harassment

5.1 Introduction

As way of reminder, this study is focused on the concepts of ‘choice’ and ‘negotiation’ to understand how Muslim women experience everyday interaction and how this then impacts on their notions of self and identity construction. In light of the overarching focus, this chapter will pay attention to the aims. Firstly, to understand how Muslim women make choices about clothing. Secondly, to examine the meanings attached to clothing as expressions of self and identity, especially in relation to religion and gender.

In light of these aims, the literature review chapter explored cultural, religious, socio-political, and gendered identities. Although this chapter underlines some of the ways in which these identities are explored it does so in the context of discussions on the topic of sexual harassment. The topic of sexual harassment emerged as a significant issue for the women in this study when they discussed their everyday experiences, something they felt linked to and associated through broader talks around modesty.

Sexual harassment is defined by McMaster et al as “unwanted sexual attention” (McMaster et al 2002, p. 92). It is constituted by both the offender’s behaviours and the victim’s psychological interpretations or perceptions. Sexual harassment could be anything from name calling to physical sexual abuse (Skoog and Bayram 2016. p491) – that is to say, there is a spectrum of sexual violence. According to feminist theory, the concept of rape, sexual molestation and various forms of sexual harassment are based on mechanisms of social controls in patriarchal societies (Brownmiller, 1975; Riger and Gordon, 1981). In addition, it can be argued that patriarchal societies have an incessant need to assert control and power over women and marginalised groups to maintain gender hierarchies. It is also argued that there are greater incidences of rape and sexual violence that occur as a consequence of the exertion of power

and violence (Clark and Lewis 1977). Sexual harassment is an example of power used to control and maintain the gender hierarchies as its harmful effects are personal, organisational, and societal (Dougherty, 2001).

However, for BAME women, sexual harassment can be seen to be more problematic because it is often coupled with racial discrimination (Richardson and Taylor 2009). In addition, it is argued that much of what we know and understand about sexual harassment is through the lens and bias of Western middle-class white women and ignores the lived experiences and social structures that surround minority women (Richardson and Taylor 2009, p 249). However, there has been a distinctive change in recent years to the inclusion of ethnic minorities with the introduction and use of Intersectionality in feminist studies. Sexual harassment and racial discriminations are both experiences of oppression and power inequalities faced by BAME women and this is why Intersectionality in particular is useful as a investigating tool to understand what role they play in the structures that surround lived experiences for these women (Richardson and Taylor 2009, p252). Furthermore, as my research is concerned with the lived experiences of Muslim women, Intersectionality allows an exploration of the role religion plays in understanding experiences of sexual harassment.

Consequently, this chapter explores the struggles and challenges of incidences of sexual harassment for the women in my research. It will firstly address how dress is negotiated and understood through the concept of sexual harassment. It will then explore some of the discussions around the #MosqueMeToo movement and how it has impacted the younger British Muslim women in particular. And finally, it will look at the concepts of '*haya*' and '*izzat*' through personal, cultural, and religious understandings of sexual harassment for these women.

5.2 How dress is negotiated and understood through sexual harassment

One of the emerging topics was about how dress was debated to be associated to instances of sexual harassment. It is argued that in patriarchal societies women's dress is dictated by pressures from men to control women's sexuality and to gain control/ conformity and/or dress for the male gaze. It is also argued that women start to receive these signals from early adolescence which later become internalised (Papp et al 2016, p241). Women (as well as men) go on to judge others to these standards around 'good' and 'bad' dressing, for example if someone is deemed to be 'dressed provocatively' then 'slut-shaming' is used to control female sexuality (Papp et al 2016). Patriarchal society therefore lays blame on the victim of sexual harassment especially if they are not conforming/dressing according to gendered norms such as 'modesty' and 'fidelity' for women (Papp et al 2016, 241-242). The women in this research are very much aware of these 'norms' and in the earlier chapter have discussed their outlook on 'modesty' both religiously and in the context of British society.

Amna's view is relevant here as she starts talking about how she thought certain ways of dress would ward off unwanted advances from men:

Amna (second focus group-veiled women): 'I've always worn a scarf ever since I was in my late teenage years, so I think saying that dressing like this meant I got no unwanted attention is wrong. I think some men just Imagine your body shape doesn't matter if you are in a niqab. They just have a dirty mind.' -Amna

Amna (who was mentioned in the previous chapter – see page 103-104) talks about how she as a teenager felt that her dressing in a *Hijab* would take away attention from her. She stated that having now lived through the experience of wearing one, her opinion has changed and she knows that some men don't even look at clothing and that they 'just imagine your body shape'. Similarly, Saba and Zoya agreed:

Saba (second focus group- veiled women): ‘... It’s nothing to do with what we do or wear. These kinds of people are just sick.’ -Saba

Zoya (second focus group- veiled women) ‘yeah I think that is true because even when you go to these Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, men would still give funny looks, or try and step in your way.’

Consequently, what Amna, Saba and Zoya have discussed is an example of women as consumption for the male gaze (Mulvey 1975) in patriarchal societies. Outfits like the niqab continue to be fetishized (Hernandes 2016, Said 1978), and women continue to be sexually objectified. Although recently, after 9/11 veils are argued to be looked as objects of fear and a threat to Western society, they continue to be objects of fascination and gaze, whilst still being seen as barriers to social integration (Spencer 2006).

In addition, it is argued women’s experiences of sexual harassment are different from men’s in that their bodies are overly sexualised. In her book, ‘questioning the veil’, Lazreg (2009) argues that ‘...her body is perceived as existing for men.’ (Lazreg 2009: p45). She claims that Muslim women are made to feel that they must take on the responsibility to cover to in order to avoid unwanted attention. Furthermore, she argues that ‘The fiction that the veil is an antidote to sexual harassment is crucial to understanding the psychology of veiling.’ (Lazreg 2009 p 45) and argues that Muslim society dictates this false understanding to women who internalise the notion to veil and that if they do not, they are to be expectant of falling victim to instances of sexual harassment.

Considering this, a narrative offered by Alayeh is pertinent here. Alayeh is 24 years old, she has moved to Leeds where she is currently working part time as a waitress as well as studying for her masters in Geography. She has hopes to become a teacher but is unsure at the moment what route to take after her masters. Her family and relatives live in Bradford

and they are from a Kashmiri background, and she is one of the youngest of her siblings. I met Alayeh near her halls of residence in Leeds. We had decided prior to our meeting that we would walk to a quite coffee shop that she knew of nearby. I was greeted by a warm smiling face, wearing a light blue scarf that was tucked partly under her navy-blue hoodie. On our way to the coffee shop (after some small talk), I asked her about how she likes to style her *Hijab* she told me she just normally wears in a 'simple style' to match with her outfits (by this she meant neutral colours / or just colours that match her outfit for the day). Alayeh told me that she decided to wear this from her early teens and finds it 'comfortable' and as she says, 'there isn't much thought process' she just picks a scarf from a colourful selection she has and 'throws it on'. I asked Alayeh if she had experienced or heard about sexual harassment in her community:

Alayeh (interview): '...no I think I've had some comments like ...mashallah... from really old men if I walk past. I don't mean, it's not in a good way because they stared at me up and down and I think it was when I was alone. I was walking back. It made me feel uneasy, but I always think God is watching over me. You just have to be careful you know, it's hard being a woman because you have this constant fear at the back of your head that someone may attack you if you are going around a lonely street at night. I don't think men think like that at all. Like my brother he's younger than me but he just walks about anytime anywhere. It's not the same for me.'

Although Alayeh stated she had not directly experienced sexual harassment, she had instances where she received harassing remarks from older men. This shows the normalisation of sexual harassment, although she classes these as 'comments' they are in fact instances of sexual harassment. Saying words like *mashallah* (God has willed it) although its translation doesn't make much sense on its own but in context it is often used as a way to show appreciation or to appreciate something. In Alayeh's case, I assume it was used to almost objectify her sexually because she recalls them 'staring up and down at her'. Alayeh also says that she feels as a

woman she is an easier target for sexual harassment compared to her younger brother. She feels this gives him the freedom to go out at whatever time of night he like without much worry. Some women feel they are more vulnerable to attack at some hours of the day (Condon et al 2007). It is also argued that women perceive themselves as slower on foot, weaker and more vulnerable than men, and the most commonly feared attacks are sexual based (Condon et al 2007). Although Alayeh has not experienced any sexual harassment she is in fear of it, so much so, that she avoids going out at certain times at night, and she specifies this fear is because she feels more vulnerable as a woman. Alayeh's statement suggests her struggles as a *hijab* wearing British Pakistani women. She talks about her constant fear of being attacked, in my discussions with her she told me about an experience of having her scarf pulled off by a girl at her school (this will be discussed in depth in the next chapter). This may have heightened her fear as a racialised, religiously recognised minority woman (Cooke 2007, p140).

On the other hand, Iman's experience is completely different to Alayeh. Iman is 36, she is married with two children who greeted me at the door of flat in East London. She told me she's grown up in the area all her life and would never live elsewhere. I had spoken briefly over emails and short phone calls to Iman, and I knew immediately how welcoming and warm she is as a person. She invited me into her home, and she introduced me to her two little girls (and her pet cat). Her husband she told me was at work and she herself did not work. As I had spoken to Iman over the phone, weeks earlier, she had told me that she is a 'revert' (a term that converts to Islam often use because they believe everyone is born a Muslim). She told me about her journey to become Muslim and that her family were not religious, but her great grandparents were Muslims. She describes her ethnicity as part white British and part Turkish. Her husband is Black British but also a 'revert' like her and she feels that they would both describe themselves as fairly religious. Iman wears a headscarf and abaya normally when

she is out, but as I had come to her home, she was just in lounge wear. Iman shares her experiences of growing up:

Iman (interview): 'I think because I'm such a big girl, and I hit puberty really early when I was younger, I used to always feel that people made unwanted advances towards me. I think the boys used to tease me a lot when I was younger because out of all the girls my chest especially was a lot bigger and more noticeable.'

Iman clearly felt and linked her puberty and being a 'big girl' (what she meant was people considered her being overweight) had caused the boys to tease and make unwanted advances towards her. Research (Skoog and Bayram 2016) conducted on why early adolescent teenage girls are more exposed to sexual harassment shows that sexual harassment is quite high and prevalent amongst adolescent teenagers. They also found that girls who seemed more 'sexually mature' i.e. displayed the signs they have reached puberty (growing breasts etc) were particularly more subject to harassment than their peers (Skoog and Bayram 2016, p 500-501). Iman's experience is therefore not isolated but shows that girls in their teenage years, in particular, are subject to sexual harassment.

To add, Iman then went on to tell me the reasons why she thinks she was especially a target from the boys, and she associated her way of dressing as a reason why she was being targeted:

Iman (interview): 'I think I should have made more of an effort to cover really because at first I used to think it's good I'm getting the attention. But then it started getting too much like they would touch me while walking past or rub against me on purpose....'

Iman feels that had she covered up more she would maybe not have faced the same harassment from the boys. A study (Kamal and Fayyaz 2016) conducted on some of the reasons why Muslim women chose to wear a *hijab* showed in some groups one of the main reasons was for

protection from harassment (Kamal and Fayyaz 2016, p96). It was further observed that these women shifted the way they dressed to wearing the *hijab* and they concluded that ‘...It is likely that they have tried to negotiate an harassing environment and their need to be a religious person has led them to finally adopt the headscarf.’ (Kamal and Fayyaz 2016, p96). Iman had also told me that she wanted to wear a jilbab because it was an easy way for her to cover up areas like her chest (see previous chapter). For Iman, her choice and negotiation of dress are part and parcel of her consciousness about her body, having been exposed to harassment many years earlier. She now therefore negotiates dress in order to what she feels would prevent unwanted advances from others.

Moreover, Iman went on to talk about how she feels an Islamic environment would have helped prevent some of the issues she faced when she was younger and that for her daughters, she will help guide them on how to face some of the issues:

Iman (interview): ‘I think I get really nervous thinking about my girls, But I wasn’t lucky because I wasn’t brought up in an Islamic environment. There weren’t that many restrictions on what I could wear. I wish my mum advised me more. If she had I think I wouldn’t have had this issue. I would advise my girls and I would also make It easy for them.’

I wanted to know why Iman felt so strongly in associating an ‘Islamic environment’ almost as a sort of protection against instances of sexual harassment, she had explained in part that she felt that dressing in certain ways would help keep off unwanted attention. However, she explained to me that she had experienced positive attitudes from Muslim men:

Iman (interview): ‘Alhamdulillah, I’ve not experienced anything but good gestures from other Muslim men. They really treat ladies with respect, I’ve been to many events and they speak so

nicely like calling me sister. I think it's the heart of Islam. Men should be respectful of women and vice versa. ' -Iman

What Iman states is clearly in line with the positive experience she told me about in her journey to conversion. She told me she felt more part of a community as she and her husband found a social circle they fit into at the Mosque, her attitude therefore for feeling respected stems from her experiences and journey. Other research (Haleem cited In Jawad et al 2002) into experiences of new Muslim women converts to Islam also shows that although the experiences are varied, new Muslims often appreciated the feeling of caring and a sense community amongst Muslims (Haleema cited in Jawad et al 2002, p121).

5.3 The #MosqueMeToo movement

Recently, in Western societies in particular, women have used social media platforms to speak out against such acts of violence and abuse of power- one such recent phenomena had been the #MeToo movement. The movement was started by activist Tarana Burke in 2006 to talk about the prevalence of sexual assault and abuse in society, however it was not until 2017 this movement started gaining momentum. In October 2017, the actress Alyssa Milano used the social media platform 'Twitter' to talk about her abuse allegations against the famous film producer Harvey Weinstein. She used and encouraged '#MeToo' to talk about incidents of sexual harassment and the topic exploded in popularity globally- not just on social media but also in tv, radio and the press.

However, although the movement proved to be popular, it started to raise an ongoing debate on the inclusion of BAME women. It has been argued that the #MeToo movement had largely been used by middle class white women and therefore that the movement needed to move in a direction that also listens#to narratives beyond those of upper-caste, middle-class, non-disabled, cisgender women in urban areas' (Atrey cited in Philipose

and Kesavan 2019). Furthermore Ashwini (2018) has argued that it becomes seemingly difficult for women of colour to report instances of abuse out of fear of adding to the already existing racial tensions against ethnic minorities. Although the narrative of the #MeToo was discussed by some women in my research it was mostly due to the timely occurrence. I had seen how almost every day front pages of major newspapers, investigating programmes around Harvey Weinstein, and social media platforms became full of accounts of sexual assault and abuse of celebrities and public alike. It was to no surprise that the women in my research were sometimes discussing these incidents during, before and after my focus groups. What often followed was also their own accounts of people they knew who had faced issues within the Muslim community. It was not until the final focus group that the topic of #MosqueMeToo came up and was discussed.

The #MosqueMeToo movement was initially created to be concerned with sexual harassment in the holy city of Makkah as a response to an experience of harassment from a pilgrim. The movement was first instigated by feminist Mona Eltahawy who saw that Muslim women's voices were often not reflected especially in relation to religious institutions. She created the #MosqueMeToo movement as a way for Muslim women to talk about their sexual harassment experiences in places of worship. The movement grew, starting discussions around issues related specifically to Muslim communities. In spite of contemporary hegemonic feminist theory there continues to be a problem in the inclusion of religion to understand cases of sexual harassment. As expressed earlier in my literature review chapter Muslim women are subject to a gender, racial and religious based oppressions (Cooke 2000). The #MosqueMeToo movement aims to challenge this by giving a digital platform in order to address representation, identities, and challenges of Muslim women (Schenato 2017). Although the movement has not explicitly claimed to be about Islamic feminism, many of the women in this movement have used verses of the Qur'an to challenge issues of sexual harassment. Since Islamic feminism is

about using religious texts to challenge debated discourse and furthering women's rights within the faith, it can be argued that #MosqueMeToo is part of that.

As a result, in popularity on social media of the #MosqueMeToo, my final focus group (which happened to be a group of younger women below 30, who did not veil), had discussed the movement and debated reasons why some men feel dressing in certain ways was an 'invite for sexual harassment':

Kay (third focus group-non veiled women): '...you seen the #MosqueMeToo trending on twitter; these types of men don't even leave Makkah alone. Loads of women saying how they got touched up while on pilgrimage. How sick is that? You are at the holiest place and all you want to do is harass women.'

Kay shares her disgust with the other girls that a sacred place of worship could be target for sexual harassment. The expectation of Muslims that even in one the holiest places where millions of Muslims come for solace, peace and worship, Muslim women are subject to harassment calls out the level of misogyny, abuse, and sexism that Muslim women have to deal with (Boles cited in Graybill et al 2019). The #MosqueMeToo movement is specific in addressing the issues that Muslim women face because of its affiliation with religious places of worship and religious leaders. When this discussion was taking place there was a clear expectation that the women had of the wider Muslim community, i.e., because they felt that *Makkah* was a place for pilgrimage and Muslims go there to worship, they at the very least should be respectful. Raisa, similarly, shared her frustration to this:

Raisa (third focus group-non veiled women): 'yeah, and women there are all in full abaya mostly. Covered up and stuff so I don't get this guarding because you are wearing something. It's really nasty how they (men who are harassing) think they can do what they want even there.' Raisa

Raisa's frustration is directed at the fact that even though the women who visit Makkah are all fully covered (part of requirements for worship) they still face issues of harassment, and some men can still 'get their way'. Even though this group did not wear veils, they showed great empathy with women who did, part of the reason why the women seemed frustrated when talking about this discussion was that they felt dress did not simply change your chances of harassment. When the #MosqueMeToo movement trended, it showed that levels of misogyny had to be first dismantled in order to address the issues around sexual harassment (Boles cited in Graybill et al 2019, p80-81). Unfortunately for Muslim women this also meant dealing with Islamophobia or what Mona Eltahawey (2017) describes as being stuck between a rock and a hard place:

'Muslim women are caught between a rock and a hard place: between Islamophobes and racists who want to demonize all Muslim men and a community that wants to defend all Muslim men.' (Eltahawey, 2017 online). Although the movement has been powerful in bringing out voices of Muslim women, some are discouraged because they have been left facing defending the faith, they strongly believe in. In my conversations with the women in this research I have found that they are quick to respond with defence for their religion and instead they lay blame with cultural or individual or community thinking (discussed later).

However, in this discussion Kay and Ayla reflected on the situation in the U.K and how it compares to other Islamic countries:

Ayla (third focus group- non veiled women): 'In the U.K I don't think it's that bad though as in people know they would get caught. Think because it's like international people they can't really identify because millions of people are there. But should beat them up there and then for touching you.'

Kay (Third focus group non veiled women): 'I think in the U.K people know the law, so they would know especially now, not to mess about like that. But it still happens, it's shit, you can't really do much about it, unless you have like strong evidence.' Kay

Both Kay and Ayla felt that in the U.K people are more aware of being caught and not getting away with sexual harassment. On the other hand, Kay said it still happens and people get away with it because of a lack of evidence. Kay shows her sense of awareness at how difficult some cases of sexual harassment because the lack of evidence that people have access to. The #MeToo movement was also about the struggles of women to be heard and believed when they told their stories of abuse. The media, at first, was riddled with questioning the character of women who reported their abuse. For instance, in the famous case of Harvey Weinstein's long line of sexual abuse of women in the Hollywood industry, the victim Rose McGowan said how since 2016 she had struggled to name Harvey Weinstein because of lawsuits. Furthermore, when the allegations came out, the media started digging up questions around her personal life as well as others who came forward as a test of characteristics. In addition, Ayla also felt that because pilgrims in Makkah came from all over the world, they would be feeling a certain sense of invisibility because it would be hard to recognise the perpetrator in the huge crowds that gather there.

What the discussion on the #MosqueMeToo topic showed was how the digital space is allowing for voices of Muslim women to be heard. Although the women in my research were not actively part of the movement, it had allowed them a space where they could understand and debate issues concerning other Muslim women. In addition, Point (2019) argues that like the #MeToo and other movements on Twitter it is allowing a new type of feminist activism to take place, the #MosqueMeToo is seen as a demand for justice, intervention, and visibility of Muslim women.

5.4 Understanding the concepts of *izzat/hayaa* with the women

The last chapter introduced the subject of '*hayaa*' and although it refers to modesty (especially in the way one dresses) it is also embedded with multiple understandings in Islamic culture. '*Hayaa*' is also about behaviour and attributes associated to but not exclusive of being 'Modest, Humble, Simple, Shy, Moderate, Decent, Polite, Pious, Lowered in look, Respectful and clearly loyal towards Allah.' (Nahar, Lazim and Yusof 2019, p64). It holds great significance and has a great presence in the lives of the women in my research who discuss their everyday lived experiences through the practice and knowledge of this term.

Moreover, the terms '*hayaa*' and '*izzat*' were used interchangeably at times during my conversations with the women. The reason for this may be because in definition they share similar meanings (although '*izzat*' is more specifically used by South Asians). The terms themselves are a reference to a cultural understanding about conduct in behaviour, most cases of which are defined simply as 'shyness' especially in regard to sexuality. Here 'shyness' does not mean the attributes of being nervous or timid (which are often what shyness is defined as) but instead it's about self-control and holding back behaviours which express or talk about sexuality or sex (Sabbath, 2015). On one hand '*hayaa*' or '*izzat*' is about feeling pride and honour in good deeds and upholding ethical and good manners but on the other is also about keeping away from deeds that are seen as 'shameful' an extreme example for this is seen in cases of so called 'honour' killings where these terms have been used as a justification for murder (Gill 2014).

Additionally, the terms are about a mental state of being that aims to keep away from 'bad' deeds which are often culturally determined (Nahar, Lazim and Yusof 2019, p64). It is seen as a motivational power to cultivate a good character and good ethics and as a way of

self-policing behaviours that are deemed good or bad (Ashry 2016). As an example, someone who displays what are seen as ‘ill manners’ in behaviour (something as simple as a child being rude) is seen as losing their own ‘*hayaa/izzat*’ (in the scenario of the rude child it would be both the said child and parents who would be seen to ‘lose face’ for the ill behaviour).

However, although the concept of izzat and hayaa were prevalent with women who belonged to minority groups in my study, Iman (who is a white convert²⁰) did not mention or use this concept. This may be because as stated before, this is a cultural issue and is specific within certain communities although this concept is linked with Islam it is more specific to cultural understandings rather than religious. This may explain why Iman does not use this term, but the other women from ethnically different backgrounds do.

To understand the use of the terms ‘*hayaa* and *izzat*’, I will first discuss the conversations that occurred in my second focus group with Saba, Zoya, Faiza, Amna and Samreen. These were the women who attended the centre who took part in the research in my second focus group of veiled women because they all wore the Islamic attire (*Hijabs*, *Abayas* and/or *Niqab*). These women were also friends with one another and lived in the local area near the community centre. Some of them had children who attended the school nearby and therefore were quite familiar with each other as their children are friends. This was one of the reasons why the conversation unfolded so easily on what would otherwise be a sensitive topic to discuss with a group of strangers.

Saba is 38, a married mother of two daughters from a Pakistani background. Both her daughters attend primary school. I met her initially at the centre when I was attending cupcake classes. Saba runs creative art classes for the children on some weekends, she also arranges day trips and other events for younger children. She used to work for the council but

²⁰ Iman is ethnically classed as White British and she has chosen to convert to Islam.

switched to working part time at a grocery store. When I met Saba, she was extremely open and friendly, and it was through her that I got familiar with other women in the community. Saba and I shared many conversations over these months about things she is passionate about, but what stood out for me was her enthusiasm and love for her daughters, or as she said-her 'life revolved around them'.

Saba wears a headscarf in the same style as Alayeh that's neatly folded and pinned perfectly, it drapes around her clothes in the same manner with whatever outfit I have seen her wear. She told me that she wore her scarf in her late teens like Amna (who was discussed in the previous chapter), although in her family she told me everyone wears it. She told me the reason she started wearing a headscarf was solely religious and whenever she catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror it's a reminder to her about her identity as a Muslim woman. Saba, like some of the other women who are part of this discussion attend the mosque regularly for speeches given by visiting scholars to improve their own knowledge of their religion.

Some of the conversations in the focus group stemmed from a discussion the women were having about their experiences of the mosque. The discussion starts off with Saba: *Saba (second focus group-veiled women): 'When I was younger, I used to go to madrassah right. So, I'm like 9 or 10 then and the maulana saab started asking us to stay behind class if we didn't know our sabak. Then we would just sit there and dread it because after class he would (know there are) less of us and he used to have this huge table and it was all covered so he would ask us to sit on his lap and read. You could feel him get excited; you know what I mean...It was absolutely disgusting. I didn't know at the time it was wrong, but it felt really wrong, I didn't even tell my parents till I was a lot older. I told my mum. But by then he'd left, I don't know where he went. I just hope he got caught and can't teach anymore.'*

Saba describes her experience at the *madrassah* (an extra-curricular Islamic study school- usually part of the mosque where children go to learn and recite the Qur'an) and she talks about her Qur'an teacher (*maulana saab*) in which the children had to stay behind after class if they didn't do their homework (*sabak-translated as homework-* this is usually some recitations of the Qur'an which are to be practiced for pronunciation). Saba talks about her experience and her not having the ability to distinguish whether what was happening to her as wrong, but she *felt* it was wrong. Victims of child sexual abuse often are guided by what adults tell them is wrong, but often fail to express and tell others especially if they have not been guided (Sanderson 2006, p22). In Saba's scenario, she clearly didn't fully understand what was happening to her but as soon as she was older, and she recalled the time this incident took place she was able to acknowledge that what had happened was wrong. It can be argued that in certain communities (such as the Pakistani community Saba belongs to) sex and sexuality are not largely discussed openly- especially amongst parents with their children (Gillian and Akhtar 2006, p1370).

Gillian and Akhtar (2006) highlighted in their research that British Asian communities found it difficult to report and recognise child abuse as one of their participants stated:

'As they get older and go into their teens we won't be able to talk to them as openly as we'd like to because of our cultural practice *haya* (modesty) and *sharam* (shyness/embarrassment). *Haya/sharam* will act as a barrier and will not allow us to talk to our children freely.' (Gillian and Akhtar 2006, p1370).

Gillian and Akhtar's research (2006) found that the concept of *haya/sharam* is so deeply embedded in British Asian Muslim communities that talking about issues such as child abuse becomes almost a taboo subject. However, Saba did say she finally found the courage to talk

to her mum about what went on many years later. From the time I have known Saba, I have also got to know her closeness to her mum who also lives nearby and who she often goes to visit with her children. Although she did not personally discuss this incident at length with me, she told me this was one of the reasons of how she got close to her mum who had been supportive and kind enough to listen to her without judgement. What this meant for Saba was that she was finally able to voice her abuse and move beyond the concept of *haya/sharam* but at a much later stage in life.

Additionally, in response to Saba, Faiza quickly followed up in the discussion by saying:

Faiza (second focus group- veiled women) *'...see, that's the thing I think we forget as a community we have so many of these stories to tell, but no one explicitly wants to have their names involved and it's bad for us as it is but what about our kids? What if they suffer. We don't openly talk about sex and what is or isn't appropriate forms of touching.'*

Faiza, is a close friend to Saba they are often attending classes together and their children are also of similar age. Faiza is currently not working but she helps out in her family business, she has three children and one of them has recently started high school. She is married and often spends time between her own home and her in laws on the weekends, she is from what she describes as a 'close-knit community' in Blackburn originally. She moved along with her children when her husband got offered a job in Manchester and has been living here since. Her own family, in laws and siblings are still in Blackburn but she said she prefers living in Manchester.

Looking at Faiza's statement, she talks about how in the community, incidents like child abuse are not addressed because people feel they don't want to be named or involved. It can be argued that the reason for this stems from the argument that British Asians see through

a lens of *izzat* (personal/family honour). To be associated or linked to anything related to sexual abuse (even if you are a victim) is seen through a negative light (Chew-Graham et al 2002). A study conducted by Chew-Graham et al., (2002) on South Asian women and their mental health showed that all of the women's groups referred to this idea of *izzat* in Asian families. Some reported that in these families the concept of maintaining *izzat* was more important than self-happiness or happiness of children (Chew-Graham et al 2002, p341). The authors theorise how *izzat* could be misused as a way to coerce and silence women into not talking about their problems within the wider community as well as their own families (Chew-Graham et al 2002, p341). Faiza's statement therefore reflects her understanding that the community surrounds itself with negative views about child abuse and how it hinders people from reporting or talking about it. However, she acknowledges that staying silent about incidents like this is a lot more harmful to children and the community.

As a result, (after Faiza's statement talking about the difficulty facing parents and the larger community about the topic of sex with their children) the discussion started to evolve as the women started questioning reasons why these types of conversations are hard to have in the community:

Samreen (second focus group-veiled women): 'I think people are definitely more scared about consequences in our community. Maybe that's what holds them back, they worry people will start gossiping about them.'

What Samreen indicates here is her awareness that of 'gossiping' which are enhanced layers of community surveillance, which spreads to this fear of losing 'family honour' and as a result may lead to being ostracised from the community altogether. Samreen talks about consequences from the community in speaking out. There seems to be a collective understanding of *izzat* between the women who recognise ways in which it can be used to filter

out any negative voices. She states that people are ‘scared’ that reporting such issues may result in gossiping within the community. The idea that anything negative be associated with a family is very central to the concept of izzat (Soni, 2013). In Soni’s (2013) study looking at izzat and the shaping of young British Asians she argues that because British South Asians belong to a ‘collective culture’, i.e. where an action is seen through a lens of the community, they share a sense of responsibility in trying to uphold family honour (Soni 2013, p59-60). Whereas, she argues, that British society has more emphasis on individualism (Soni 2013, p60). As a result, a sense of ‘collective’ consequence prevents people from speaking up in fear of being ostracised from the community (Soni 2013).

It is important to realise that the women understand the concept of izzat, but they also recognise that it is perpetuating the problem of silence within the community:

Saba (second focus group- veiled women): ‘Yeah, I think we want to hide them from the real world but it’s not good, not good at all keeping them sheltered. I mean if I knew, I would have spoken up. I would have had the confidence earlier.’

Saba (second focus group- veiled women): ‘You’d be surprised how many people actually go through this kind of harassment, especially within family. It’s really disgusting, and I think our community needs to start standing up. We trust family members too easily’

In a similar way to Samreen, Saba is showing testimony to the fact that some cultural norms such as *izzat* and *hayaa* have held her back from speaking up earlier. Saba reiterates that had she known what sexual abuse was earlier she would have spoken up. She briefly nods to her suspicions about incidents are happening in families. Although Saba provides no other context to this statement, it may be the recognition that abuse within families exists (Lima 2012, Bentovim 1988, Robert 2015 p99-100). Although the concepts of shame (*hayaa*) and honour(*izzat*) are not isolated to British South Asian communities, my research as

well as others (such as Gillian and Akhtar 2006) suggests that they are more commonly practiced by British South Asians, this may be the reason why cases of sexual abuse in particular is underreported (Gillian and Akhtar 2006). Additionally, reports such as Harrison and Gill (2018) show that cases that are reported are denied access to reporting structures, some are also retracted due to a lack of cultural sensitivity in handling these cases.

However, the women in the discussion show responsiveness to the need to act against what happens in the community. I believe this is in part to be because they have lived and worked within British society so therefore understand the laws and regulations. They, themselves, are also a product, an amalgamation of both British and South Asian culture so although they know and respect cultural values there is a notable shift in attitudes in the British Muslim communities when it comes to issues like discussing sexual abuse. As an illustration, when we look at Zoya's discussion on ways to move forward. Zoya talks about teaching their children to be aware, arguing that hiding important facts is 'unislamic':

Zoya (second focus group-veiled women): 'I definitely think it's very unislamic the way we hide things from our children about important facts of life they should know or tell them to always worry about what other people are going to think- I've taught my children- It's just not a fair expectation, because they worry more about others feelings than their own.'

The women in this discussion also agreed with Zoya's point of view, and throughout my research I found that almost all the women in my research shared this view. I cannot be certain that this is the view that all British Muslim women share (nor do I claim that it representative) but it is certainly representative of the women I have had a chance to speak to as part of my research. There could be a number of factors (that I can assume) that may be relevant to understanding why the women of this research displayed a more active approach in tackling problematic elements of 'hayaa' and 'izzat' but this would need to be further explored

in ongoing research which focuses on this issue specifically. For now, what my research suggests is that the women are actively discussing and questioning the problematic nature of these concepts for themselves and others, and by doing so, are challenging certain cultural and religious expectations surrounding this issue.

The nature of 'hayaa/ izzat' in Muslim communities

I have already discussed the nature of what the concepts of 'hayaa and Izzat' mean on an individual basis. I want to now discuss them specifically in relation to how its wider use in the community impacts Muslim women in my research. Therefore, I want to first focus on the discussion in my focus group between Ayla and Kay over a girl they both knew (Sana) who had been subject to a number of assaults:

Ayla (third focus group-non veiled women): 'There was this one time remember at school (looks at Kay) when that teacher was touching Sana's bum when we went abseiling. I mean he was just like pretending to help her, but he just kept rubbing his hands on her when she was coming down. There was no need, and he was getting off on it. You could tell. Proper embarrassing for her because all the boys started calling her big batty after that. It wasn't funny but I don't think she even told anyone. Think her parents were strict. She probably couldn't tell them.'

Ayla discusses how Sana was a target of sexual assault from a teacher, but also boys at the school were maybe aware of this and also used this to bully her. Ayla recalls that she didn't tell anyone but one of the reasons may have been because she may not have wanted her parents to find out. Kay suggests that maybe this girl Sana could do something about what happened at her school now, although she personally is no longer in touch with her. I assume maybe at school Kay and Ayla may have been friends or just classmates.

Ayla (third focus group-non veiled women): 'nahh, I Don't think it's that easy. Like what evidence does she really have apart from a few of us remembering it. Plus, what if she probably just forgot about it. I mean it might be at the back of her mind, but I think she probably would have moved on. What if she's married now and her husband's family find out? It's just more trouble in that way.'

Ayla states that it won't be easy to just report it without evidence, that maybe Sana has have moved on and forgotten about this incident. Ayla also points out that perhaps she's married, and she wouldn't want this to be brought up in her new relationship. After the focus group ended, I asked Ayla and Kay more about Sana and if they did want to get some help if they felt it would benefit her, they both said they had lost contact with her and the last they heard of her was that she had moved abroad but they did not know where. They said after facing a hard time at school she became quite reclusive and just did not hang around with anyone they knew, Ayla did a quick Facebook search for her too, but she did not find her on the social media page. What can be understood from the exchange between Ayla and Kay is that although they had understood what happened to Sana was wrong, and felt that there should have been some justice for her, they were also aware of the societal pressures within the Muslim community that had kept her silent. When Ayla talks about if she's married and her parents not finding out, this is an example of how upholding of honour and shame are placed unequally on women in particular (Dasgupta 2007).

Kay went on to comment that:

Kay (third focus group-non veiled women): 'Yeah people just find it difficult to talk about this stuff, anyway, imagine talking to a stranger and what if they turn up to your house. Then what? It's not going to be nice for your parents to know that. They would think they failed or

something and they are strict so you never know how they would handle it. But if it was me, I would tell my mum, she's always told me to speak up. She doesn't stay quite quiet?'

Kay showed that she also understood the social context of her community acknowledging that some parents may find it intrusive that people come and inquire about what happened years earlier. They both refer to Sana's parents as strict and felt that they may not handle the issue in the right way. However, Kay says her mum has always asked her to be vocal and stand up for herself if she's ever faced with any issues.

To continue, the group moved on to discussing a topic they had read on the news through a popular social media platform: Facebook:

Kay (third focus group- non veiled women) 'Well see it happens in our Muslim communities too, people are just in denial. It's really distressing. People just want to pretend that our communities are all good. Yeah there's lots of help and stuff but for these things people are kept in the dark because of pressure it would 'look bad'.'

Raisa (third focus group- non veiled women): 'I don't even know what 'look bad' means like why pretend everything is perfect. People need to be educated about these things. I think our generation is a lot more clued on.'

The dialogue between Kay, Raisa and Ayla was a discussion over a dad who had sexually abused and fathered children with his daughter. They discussed how incidents happened in silence in the community due to the pressure it would 'look bad'. Raisa makes a comment suggesting that she highly disagrees with the outlook of shame from the Muslim community because she sees nothing wrong with reporting acts of abuse and she feels this is because of a generational difference.

Comparatively, from my focus groups I had noticed conversations about these incidents brought up communities' lack of discussion and silence over these issues as being part

of the problem. Similarly, in my interviews there was an overwhelming number of women who talked about issues of harassment and its links with the community. I want to first discuss Muskan, who identifies that segregation of sexes may be the problem in some Muslim communities:

Muskan (interview): 'I think Pakistani culture is especially weird with this stuff. So, on one hand you get men who would treat you with proper respect and everything but on the other you get some men who view women as some sort of object.'

'...there's a real problem with segregation in the community. It's all well and good keeping people separate but it's not practical at all. I think boys need to learn from an early age how to interact with girls and girls need to know how to interact with boys. It causes more trouble sending them to single sex schools. Later in life I think some people may struggle to communicate with the other gender. That's why issues like harassment start happening, they don't know how else to communicate. They haven't learnt.'

Muskan states that due to the segregation of sexes in the Pakistani community, some men fail to learn how to interact properly with the other genders. Although there is no explicit mention of sex segregation in the fundamental Islamic texts such as the Qur'an, it is sometimes seen as an extension of the *hijab*. As explained earlier in my literature review, the *hijab* is not only a physical garment but refers to an imaginary barrier that separates the women from the gaze of other men (non-relatives). Thus, a large part of Muslim society works by adopting this and limiting interactions between men and women- some by separating spaces. Although a study has not been conducted specifically looking at the effects of gender segregation of the British Pakistani community in relation to cases of sexual harassment, we can look to other research that may have similar results. A study (Leaper 1994) conducted into exploring the consequences of gender segregation on social relationships showed a number of findings. It

recognised that from an early age girls and boys displayed a different pattern of social norms and activities based on their peers, and boys who have not had much chance to interact with similar aged girls often struggled to express and talk about their feelings (Leaper 1994, p75). When Muskan is referring to lack of understanding due to segregation, she may be correct as the research showed that it may lead to struggling to communicate or understand the other gender.

Moreover, Muskan also mentioned that she feels like there is a silence in the community when talking about instances of abuse. Likewise, Nura stated that although she had not heard about the #MosqueMeToo movement, she wasn't surprised that people were reporting cases of abuse:

Nura (interview): 'well on the news I saw so many people talk about the #MeToo campaign and I'm happy. It gives a chance for women to talk about what happens to them and share and punish men those people who try and silence it. I haven't heard about the #MosqueMeToo but I'm not surprised. It's very common but not talked about the Muslim communities. I think it makes people more aware now and they must be more careful.'

In comparison, Sana talked more specifically about the wider Pakistani community. Sana is a relative of one of the other girls in the focus group and I had a chance to meet her when she was staying over at her relatives' house in Manchester. Sana is 30, she lives in Birmingham with her husband who she recently got married to. They have an online business selling Islamic goods. She took the decision to wear a niqab over a year ago when she said she felt she was 'ready'. She describes herself as a British Pakistani, her husband is British African. She told me that she had issues in getting married to him because her family was not accepting of a non-Pakistani husband, so she took the decision to marry him in a small religious ceremony attended by her friends. Although now she told me they have accepted him, but it took them a while.

In our conversations, Sana talked a lot about the wider Pakistani community mostly to do with them not accepting her husband but also aspects of racism within the Asian community (discussed in the next chapter). When I asked her about the #MeToo, she wasn't aware of the movement itself but told me about other accounts of sexual abuse she heard of through family members. She discussed a recent incident that happened in Pakistan where a little girl called Zainab was abducted from home, brutally raped and dumped by the side of a trash site:

Sana (interview): 'There's really evil people out there. I am thinking about the poor girl Zainab who got abducted and it was by someone who the family knew. It's a real shock and its opened people's eyes to the things that happen right under our noses. People speak up more now.... not standing for cultural traditions like child marriage either. Men and women, I guess. I do think there needs to be talks in communities about this.'

Although Sana did not talk about any personal experiences of sexual harassment, she was aware that it occurs in the Muslim community. She also showed that in communities such as the Pakistani community she belongs to, stories like the one of little Zainab also are talked not just in Pakistan but also amongst British Pakistanis.

To contrast, Uzma's views were similar to Sana's although she herself admits to not being very familiar with Pakistan as she has never been. She is a third generation Pakistani and no living family left (that she knows of) in Pakistan, she told me she can't remember if any of the distant relatives her mum talked were even around. Uzma is 40, she is single and lives on the outskirts of Manchester with her mum. She is an orthodontist and is passionate about her career. I met her through a friend of one of the women at the centre. She doesn't wear traditional Islamic attire and told me she has never worn one. For her, veiling is not a necessary part of her religion and she said sometimes people have given her a hard time over her decision

not to veil. When I asked Uzma about the #MosqueMeToo movement she told me that although she heard of it, she didn't know how useful it was in opening up these issues especially when she felt it was the 'older generation' who were reluctant to talk about these issues and they were missing from social media platforms.

Uzma (interview): 'I don't know how to feel about the whole issue, I think some ways I definitely see the benefits but in other ways I think it does not really appear to help the older generations who don't use social media much. They are much more reluctant to talk about it because to them they feel their honour is at stake. But I guess it does open and start conversations about what's happening in our communities.'

In her statement Uzma recognised the benefits of the #MosqueMeToo movement and the conversations it can open up. However, she argued that this would not be something for older members of the community who are not users of social media platforms. She also states that because she feels the older generation are more tied to the idea of maintaining 'honour' they would fail to address the problems it raises. In my research, I tried gaining access to older members (65 plus) of the community, however I found it difficult to recruit them. Instances where I directly approached or asked some of the women in the focus groups to, the older women showed a lack of interest in getting involved. I'm not entirely sure of what the reasons were for this, and it is hard to assume from the limited interactions I have had. For future research this may be something I would look at, as evidence from my research shows there are also generational differences of opinions amongst Muslim women.

Contrastingly, some of the women in my research talked about Islam and its views in regard to sexual assaults. Dimah shared her views on this. Dimah is 34 years old. She's currently in the middle of doing her PhD. She describes her ethnicity as British Bangladeshi, and commutes from her hometown in Essex. I had arranged to meet Dimah in the building of

where her office was at her University. She wore a long Black abaya and a headscarf but no *niqab*. She explained herself that at University she chooses not to wear the *niqab*, and instead only wears it outside of the University setting, in public. When I asked her about the #MosqueMeToo movement she felt the issue lay with Muslims not following the guidance given to them:

Dimah (interview): 'I think Allah has given us so much guidance on what to do and how to behave that I don't think these things would be this common if people followed their religion properly. They should know there's a reason why Men are commanded before women to lower their gaze. It's to make sure they control urges to do bad. If they just focused on themselves, it would keep them away from making women feel uneasy.'

Dimah also feels that women also need to take responsibility in how they seem to appear:

Dimah (interview): '...women can also help themselves if they are more careful with free mixing. Like Muslim women should know freely mixing in certain spaces like shisha bars etc makes them more of a target. Firstly, because the wrong sorts go there and secondly because they are associating themselves with bad habits where they think women would love the attention.'

However, she acknowledges that 'bad things' do happen at mosque and places within Muslim communities and she feels that the Mosque community have a duty to sort this out:

Dimah (interview): '...it's all a test and of course you can't control everyone, but I think sometimes it may help. Saying that I do know such things happening in mosques astagfirullah, it's up to the mosque committee and the community to keep these types of men in check...'

Dimah's understanding that Islam teaches to 'lower the gaze' for both men and women is correct and what she argues is that careful observance is not being practiced by these men who harass women. However, she also claims that women should be careful of the environment

they go to because she feels that men start viewing this as a que to ‘wanting attention’. Papp et al (2016) point out that women are made to blame one another and echo harmful patriarchal society views that lay fault in the victims for not conforming to ‘good feminine behaviours’ (Papp et al 2016, p241).

To add, when I mentioned to Dimah about how she feels about instances of sexual harassment happening in spaces of worship, she felt that it was a problem for the mosque community to sort out. Out of all the women in my research, Dimah’s view is the most different in relation to reactions to the #MosqueMeToo movement. Although she understood the problem of sexual harassment, she saw this on a more individual basis i.e., men who can’t control themselves and women who are wanting attention. I also found her reaction the most confusing as she was the one who spoke the most about women’s rights and advocating change for Muslim women. What I can interpret from trying to understand her views on this is that she may see following religious guidance for Muslim men and women as the utmost importance i.e., the belief that if Muslim men lowered their gaze we would not have these instances, and if Muslim women adhered to the practice of *hijab* that these instances would also decrease these types of behaviours from men. Again, this is an assumption from my conversations with Dimah, her opinions on this matter may be different to the other Muslim women in this research but it is also a reflection of how some Muslim women may see the #MosqueMeToo movement.

In comparison, Naia’s views on the #MosqueMeToo movement reflect some views of Dimah’s on religion but at the same time Naia argues that religion and culture are sometimes intermixed, thus creating aspects of silence and abuse. Naia is 32, is a teacher who lives in the South of England with her husband and three small children. I met her through Layla at an Islamic conference that was based in London, where she took interest in my work and wanted to be part of my research. She does distance learning part time at University which she commutes to few times a month. She’s of mixed ethnicity her dad is British Pakistani, and

her mum is White British. She grew up in the North of England, but her family moved to the South when she was young, although she told me she often visits her distant relatives up North. She herself, moved to America for a sort time and that is where she met her husband. I met Naia again a few months later at a conference. Afterwards, I interviewed her regarding my research. Naia wore a *hijab* in a ‘modern turban style’ (see index) in a light pastel yellow shade with a long skirt, leggings and knitted top and cardigan. She told me she often dresses very similar in her job as a teacher because she feels it makes her look ‘smart/casual’ which fits her teaching role.

When I started asking Naia about the #MosqueMeToo movement she told that, for her, it feels like a cultural problem rather than a religious one:

Naia (interview): ‘Well my husband is Puerto Rican, and this kind of thing definitely happens there. He said way more than here, from what he tells me. I think they have an image for beauty standards...I like to think Ideally Islam moves women away from sexual objectification, but I can’t say this could be the case right now. I think a lot happens under banner of religion where its cultural.’

Looking at the first half of Naia’s statement, she talks about knowledge of Puerto Rican culture from her husband that make her think about different standards of beauty in society. Different cultures form their own distinct standards of beauty ‘...Like other tastes, the appreciation of physical beauty requires cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984): cultural knowledge that varies across social groups and that is distributed unevenly across society.’ (Kuipers 2015, pg 39). What Bourdieu meant by this was that influence and ideas around cultural expectations form and shape what society sees as beauty. Arguably, patriarchal society sets standards in all aspects of society through beauty ads, magazines, social media, fairy tales, and the mass media. Objectification theory sheds light on the sexual objectification of women in Western societies

through everyday instances like whistling, leering, taking photographs of women (Calogero 2012, p574).

To add, women in this study have talked about various instances of abuse that can relate to academic understandings of sexual objectification. Sexual objectification theory shows how women internalise the sexual objectification of themselves i.e., start viewing themselves as objects to be seen on basis of their appearance (Calegero 2012).

However, when we look at the second half of Naia's statement she sees adhering to Islamic values to shift away from sexual objectification but making sure that cultural influences or societal pressures are not affecting her in the same way. I asked her what she meant by this:

Naia (interview): '...well you know Islamically the woman is regarded as someone who has control of her own autonomy, she's not there to please men. Men and women have both been given guidance on how to become a good person, and by helping humanity you fulfil the purpose God sent you for...through a person's actions not focusing on dressing to please others, the hijab forces you to do that, to think about your connection with God every time...you can't be sexually objectified if you are following rules set by God...who tells you to view yourself through your actions.'

Naia sees *hijab* as a way to avoid conforming to the ideals set by society, she argues that Islam dictates to view oneself through actions you do rather than through appearance. Furthermore, Naia argues that:

'Some people think that even the hijab is a restriction of women's freedom and sexuality. But I think people don't understand Islam, I mean our religion talks about women's rights to sexual satisfaction from their partners! I think it's limiting to narrow it perverse in some ways.'

However, Naia has a clear issue with the cultural influence that she feels has led to cases of sexual abuse:

Naia (interview): 'Some men do take their own personal agendas and do wrong things under the name of religion like with the whole terrorism for example. I mean I do know some of my friends who've been wrongly taken advantage of by these men. They get silenced in some communities and it's a real shame. Islam advises us to speak for our rights.'

To clarify, both Naia and Dimah hold similar religiously informed ideas when they explain their views on sexual harassment. In my literature chapter I discussed how Islamic feminism is paving a way for many British Muslim women who view their religion as a forefront to their identity. When all the women discuss issues around the topic of sexual harassment, they make clear that they feel issues they face are cultural rather than religious. Like Naia and Dimah, they argue that Islam gives them the rights they require, and it is through Islam they can challenge patriarchal norms in Muslim communities (Zine 2004).

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, my research has shown that the women I had a chance to speak to shared variously different experiences of and opinions about sexual assault. This chapter showed ways in which women made choices about dress, behaviours and challenges to issues around tackling sexual assault. The women in this study showed an awareness and reaction to the #MeToo and #MosqueMeToo movement and the ways in which this impacted or shaped their conversations to reflect on their own personal lives. This chapter also explored the concepts of 'hayaa' and 'izzat' through discussions about incidences of sexual harassment. Muslim women are often depicted to be powerless victims of abuse who lack agency and are controlled by men. However, what these discussions have shown is that although the women do face some

cultural and societal challenges, they women are very much aware of the issues they have to tackle. For some of these women it means challenging through use of Islamic texts as a way to legitimise and use their rights, while for others it's a question of speaking out against injustices whether it be from their own Muslim communities or the wider society. Furthermore, despite these challenges, the women have also used these discussions to reveal ways of tackling the issues they face and are signalling actions that need to take place in the Muslim and wider communities to create awareness and open up conversations around sexual assault.

6. Chapter Six - Negotiating anti-Muslim hate and Racism

6.1 Introduction

As way of reminder, this study focuses on the concepts of ‘choice’ and ‘negotiation’ to understand how Muslim women experience everyday interaction and how this then impacts on their notion of self and identity construction. In light of the overarching focus, this chapter will pay attention to the aim in understanding the identity negotiation processes that Muslim women embark on in response to anti-Muslim hostility.

The historical framework of orientalism in postcolonial literature (Said 1979) provided the groundwork for examining the ways in which people of the orient were looked at. Its perceived beliefs were subjectively scrutinised by the West. Foucault’s (1991) argument of discourse as production of knowledge and power was and arguably is pivotal in understanding orientalism (Cheek, 2008). Likewise, Stuart Hall’s (1992) understanding that all social practices we have produces a meaning, and that meaning shapes and influences what we do (p291). Using both discourse and social practice as evidence the orientalist defined and rationalised the ‘other’. Therefore, the early orientalist work was about unravelling the production of knowledge of the ‘other’ through a Western centric world view (Kerboua 2016, p8-9).

Although the work of Said (1979) has been challenged (Halliday 1993, Kramer 2014, Ahmad 1994, Lewis 1982) it still presents a useful framework for understanding Muslim identity. For this research, gendered orientalism provides an insightful way of exploring the experiences of British Muslim women. Women from the ‘orient’ were looked at as submissive, exotic and at the mercy of the barbaric culture they are part of (Gindro 2003, p112-113). This analysis of earlier works of orientalism is helpful in showing how Muslim women’s identities have and continue to be shaped through inaccurate systematic historical discourse.

However, the post 9/11 climate has moved beyond these earlier labels of the orient especially in relation to Muslim women. It is argued that the framing of Muslim identity in the post 9/11 climate is based on essentialist construction of Muslim identity which is threaded from earlier orientalist work. The fact that the Muslim world has had various degrees of significant cultural, societal, and political changes through time has been ignored. What has formed is a neo-orientalist, monolithic and unchanging view of Muslim society and Muslim identity which is now arguably present in Western discourse (Kerboua 2016, p11). What this has meant for Muslim women is that the essentialist discourse and neo-orientalist narratives have further distorted their images to add an additional framework which sees them as the ‘enemies within’ (Mirza 2013, p6). As an example, the ‘war on terror’ has propelled Western societies with inundated images of Muslim women as objects of ‘fear’ and ‘hate’ (Ahmed 2003). They are no longer seen as ‘passive’ victims but as an accomplice to ‘terror’ and a threat to Western ways of life (Ahmed 2003, Mirza 2013).

It is precisely this framing of Muslim women in Western societies that has disenfranchised many Muslim women from feminist discourse which arguably constructs them as indoctrinated, disillusioned and an affront to the progressive wave of feminism in the West (Hoodfar 1994). This further alienates an understanding of Muslim women, their cultures, their beliefs, their communities, and their identities. A re-examining of feminist frameworks for Muslim women places Islamic feminism at its core. It seeks to challenge earlier feminist ways of thinking by illustrating how culture and religion exist and sit within Muslim women’s lives. Islamic feminism is argued to be about the resistance to the reductive grid of neo-orientalist, essentialist, and outdated societal views of Muslim women (Zine 2006).

Furthermore, what can be learnt from Said’s work on orientalism is the understanding that Western scholarship is a result of institutionalised, restrictive cultural beliefs. This is precisely why my research which uses an intersectional standpoint feminist

approach is useful and has a pragmatic approach to understanding the experiences of Muslim women in this research (see methodology chapter).

In my literature review I discussed how Muslim women in the post 9/11 climate have been a subject of hate and discrimination, and the term ‘Islamophobia’ is used to specify these types of hate crimes (Runnymede Trust 1997). I also stated that although the term ‘Islamophobia’ continues to be used in scholarly literature surrounding the subject, it is still arguably a contested term (Müller-Uri and Opratko 2016). I want to reiterate (see introduction) why this term is contested and my use of the term ‘anti-Muslim hate’ over the term ‘Islamophobia’. The term ‘phobia’ is suggestive of individual bias or individual fear or hate but fails to address the historical and systemic production of anti-Muslim hate, which is connected to race, racism and white supremacy (Rana et al 2020).

To add, anti-Muslim hate crime constitutes a religious form of hate crime. Copsey et al (2012) defines it:

‘... as any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by a hostility or prejudice based upon a person's religion or perceived religion, that is, their Muslim faith.’ (p6)

Although the defining anti-Muslim hate crime is important, it is just as important to acknowledge some of the ways in which it effects its victims. In 2017/18 the highest number of hate crimes were reported in England and Wales with a 123 per cent increase from 2012/13 with a significant rise in religion-based hate crimes (Williams et al 2019, p93). Studies (Hanes and Machin, 2014; Williams and Burnap, 2016 cited in Williams et al 2019, p94) show the strong correlation of hate crimes directing linked to events such as terror attacks, political votes and court cases. The prevalence of online hate speech in particular is used to spread anti-Muslim

and anti-Islam messages of hate. After the Brexit vote this became more prevalent in social spaces like twitter (Demos 2017).

The antagonistic discourse on social media platforms around anti-Muslim hate has given rise to the most horrific of crimes. The person responsible for the Christchurch terror attack in New Zealand in March 2019 was an avid social media user and follower of many anti-Muslim groups online. He filmed his live Facebook 17-minute video of shooting innocent victims attending the Friday prayer at a mosque labelling it as a 'real life effort post' (Williams et al 2019, p97). In addition, Williams et al study (2019) added that hate speech on social media increased the chances of offline hate crimes. Furthermore, social media has been shown to expose large amounts of audiences with an awareness of the hate speech that exists its platform because of how heavily and quickly it spreads (Williams et al 2019). This was also apparent in my research as many of the women from my research were all either personal victims of such hate crimes or they knew someone who was.

Furthermore, anti-Muslim hate becomes more prevalent when forms of assumed recognisable Muslim identity markers such as the headscarf and other forms Islamic dress are visible (Zempi and Chakraborti 2014). In my literature review, I also discussed how the political, media and public scrutiny of the veiled Muslim women in Europe has further added to seeing the veil as a symbol for religious fundamentalism. In addition, what was discussed was what that stemming from earlier orientalist views the veil has also been marked as a symbol for 'oppressed' and 'backwards' ways of thinking and thus a representation of gender inequality (Zempi and Chakraborti 2014, p 2-3). To add, what is mostly concerning is that veiled Muslim women in particular are argued to have become 'easy targets' for anti-Muslim attacks and as a result have to face the brunt of hate and hostility they receive (Isakjee and Young 2013).

Although my research does not solely focus on Muslim women who veil, it does include some who do and others who practice other forms of dressing. As a reminder, my reference to women who veil in this research is about women who adopt either a headscarf or a niqab, and my reference for those who do not is about women who dress in differing ways with no specific link to dress being recognisable as ‘Islamic attire’. When I planned my research, I was aware of the literature around the topic of anti-Muslim hate in relation to veiled Muslim women, however, my focus was to look for any similarities and/or differences to the experience of non-veiled Muslim women. What this chapter explores is the link between anti-Muslim hate and the different ways in which it effects veiled and non-veiled women in my research. It also aims to cover ways that the women face and challenge anti-Muslim hate.

As literature (Khiabany and Williamson 2008; Jiواني 2006; Razack 2008; Smith and Thobani, 2010, Mirza 2010) has had an overbearing look at Muslim women who veil, this chapter will look at incidences of anti-Muslim hate and racism discussing the veiled and non-veiled Muslim women experience through examining the experiences of women in this research. I will then go on to discuss elements of racism within the Muslim community. It will then go on to discuss how these women try and negotiate ways to counter or avoid racism in hopes of ‘fitting in’ by adjusting ways of dress. And finally, it will discuss how these women have created ‘safe spaces’ that try and facilitate areas of ‘comfort’ where the women feel a sense of belonging.

6.2 Examples of anti-Muslim hate

Alayeh 24, who was introduced in the last chapter, is a student living in Leeds from a Kashmiri background. In our discussion Alayeh had told me that she had previously worked as a waitress in a particularly white area of Leeds and that she felt she was constantly looked at with ‘suspicion’ or talked to like she was ‘stupid’:

Alayeh (interview): ‘...they just look at me with suspicion, like you don’t belong here...staring at my face and then at my scarf...making racist remarks thinking I can’t hear them... or on purpose speaking slowly and loudly to make me look stupid ...Just really nasty behaviour. Thankfully I haven’t had any issues with people physically harassing me.’

Alayeh’s experience sheds some light on the types of anti-Muslim hate Muslim women receive for example she mentions racist remarks here. Arguably, the current socio-political climate which has created a mass hysteria around Muslim bodies being seen as ‘the enemy within’ (Mirza 2013, p6). It is therefore not surprising that Alayeh reports she was looked at with ‘suspicion’. Ahmed (2003) argues that certain subliminal messages have been sanctioned by the media to create labels that stick in the mind, for example the association of Muslims with terrorists. Furthermore, as Alayeh’s headscarf is seen as a marker of her faith her Muslim identity has become visible to scrutiny. In 2015 the Counter Terror Act was introduced with programmes like Prevent to monitor signs of radicalisation openly encouraging who? to look at Muslims with suspicion and mistrust (Renton 2018). Measures like this can presumably be adding to people? looking at women like Alayeh with a sense of suspicion.

Alayeh mentioned that she just got on with her work because at the time she was desperate for a job to fund her living costs as a student, even though that meant she was subjected to racism and hate. Alayeh explained that although she did not mind the job and the people working with her were ‘lovely’ she was compelled to put up with the remarks because she felt she had no other choice. She explained that sometimes these were issues that she struggled to talk about to her work colleagues because ‘...they just said ignore it...they don’t know what it’s like to be Muslim...’ and in those times she often felt maybe taking her headscarf off just for work would help. Alayeh clearly had some difficulty in making her colleagues understand her experience as a BAME woman of Islamic faith. Her struggle to make her colleagues understand even made her contemplate changing her ways of dressing by removing

her headscarf. Alayeh is not alone in thinking this. A study (Zempi and Chakraborti 2014) conducted on other veiled Muslim women found that in instances where they suffered anti-Muslim hate, these women chose to decrease their 'Muslimness' by taking off their headscarves so they are less likely to be subjected to hate.

Alayeh feels that her experiences will always be imbedded in her head:

Alayeh (interview): '...you think people just talk about racism like okay its happened, let's just call it out and that's it -it will go away. But it doesn't you know. It stays with you. Now I'm always worried about what white people really think of me. It's bad. They could genuinely be nice people but in your head, you think what if they think I'm stupid, I'm a danger, I'm dumb...you know thoughts like that'

Alayeh has become so conscious of how others now perceive her that she is constantly judging what other 'white people' maybe thinking of her. Post-colonialist works such as Frantz Fanon (1967) shows how Blacks or minorities become locked in an inferior-superior dialect in which they behave and become accustomed to viewing themselves through the lens of the 'other' (Yancy 2008). In addition, literature that looks at internalised racism argues that as in Western society negative stereotypes of BAME people are projected. For example, when we see a Muslim women being mentioned in the media, we see titles like 'Jihadi bride', we start to associate and internalise the false rhetoric of 'all Muslims as dangerous' that is being fed through society (Ahmed 2003). Alayeh mentioned in the conversation that she thought that others may think she is 'a danger' her thoughts arguably cannot be a coincidence to the rhetoric associated with Muslim bodies as 'bodies of fear' (Ahmed 2003). Internalised racism can also mean seeing a system of racial hierarchy. The fact that Alayeh seems to be preoccupied with what only 'white people' think of her, that she places *their* thoughts of her as more important than what she knows herself to be as a Muslim woman.

In a similar way, Sana's experience is comparable to Alayeh's she has also faced some challenges:

Alayeh (interview): 'I think for a niqabi its very difficult sometimes here... it was a lot harder when I first started wearing it. Certain people would change directions or cross the street when they looked at you. But I think they get used to you eventually. Currently though I feel people do judge me a lot, they won't speak to me. They just feel I'm uneducated or illiterate, they speak very slowly like I don't understand or can't hear what they are saying. Where I live there are a lot of niqabis so I don't have that here- which is nice.'

Sana, 30 wears a niqab and lives in Birmingham (introduced in the last chapter) she was also like Alayeh in a sense that she was perceived to be someone who was illiterate. Muslim women continue to be seen as lacking agency and unable to speak for themselves and are seen as victims '...of their anachronistic faith, lacking agency and voice.' (Zine 2006, p4). Muslim women like Alayeh and Sana continue to face challenging orientalist attitudes in a society post 9/11 where arguably these views are pushed more and more to the forefront by the media and wider society (Zine 2006).

Similarly, Sana's experience shows us that she is (like Alayeh) looked at as someone who is a perceived threat or danger, with people crossing the street if they see her walking down, which she believes to be because of what she wears (Patridge 2012). Again, incidences like this do not happen in a vacuum. Muslim bodies continue to be positioned as posing a threat to Western democracy by creating hysteria about Muslims wanting to 'bring Sharia Law' with no context or understanding of what it is or even sufficient evidence to claim so (Patridge 2012). What this tells us is that these types of hysterias are creating very real and damaging consequential effects on lives of Muslim women like Alayeh and Sana.

As a result of the 'war on terror', there has been a dramatic shift in the ways in which the West has started to see Muslims as a threat to Western democracy and freedom (Zine

2006). Leading up to the Brexit vote anti-migrant agendas were pushed and created an environment in which anti-muslim hate was allowed to be nurtured (Abbas 2019). We have also continued to see anti-muslim rhetoric in the form of seeing refugees as ‘terror’ being pushed to the extent that it has been argued to be one of the motivations behind the senseless killing of MP Jo Cox who was a supporter of refugee campaigns and was working on a report to tackle Islamophobia with the anti-Muslim hate crime recording group Tell MAMA.

To add, the perpetrator of the horrific killing supposedly shouted, ‘Britain First!’ when he stabbed her (Abbas 2019, p2534.) Far-right parties like Britain First have been known to stir up hatred and resentment against Muslim communities under this façade stating, ‘Muslims taking over the country’. As a result of all this hatred, it has fuelled some people to become increasingly intolerant of Muslim communities. In the week following 6th March 2018 letters were sent all over the UK announcing that ‘Punish a Muslim day’ would be held on the 3rd April. The letter called on hate and hostility towards the Muslims arguing that they are harming society and must therefore be ‘punished’. It listed a sickening ‘points system’ in which the most harmful and aggressive behaviours would be rewarded with higher points for example ‘... 10 points would be earned for verbal abuse; 25 points for pulling a Muslim woman’s headscarf; 250 points for murder; and 1,000 points for physically attacking a Mosque.’ (Feldman and Allchorn, 2019). This of course, is not just linked solely to far right parties, but indicates a system that allows and sustains thoughts that seek to continue fester divisions amongst modern society.

Consequently, whilst doing my fieldwork the ‘punish a Muslim day’ letter had also circulated around social media and many of the Muslim women (including myself) were alarmed by. It was also circulated through WhatsApp and Muslim communities were having open talks in Mosques and through many social media platforms to calm people down. Some of the women who had contact with me, shared messages of assurances and others urged

Muslims to stay home and not risk going out on 3rd April. For this reason, Ayla had forwarded me messages she received which was full of assurances and how as a Muslim community we have to ignore the tension the letter is trying to create. However, when I later spoke to her about this, she was annoyed that her dad was ‘not letting anyone out’ that day:

Ayla (interview): ‘My dad is out working in his shop like seven days a week without fail, I haven’t seen him hang around much at home during the day, this is the one time I’ve seen him close his shop and he’s not letting anyone go out because he thinks it’s risky...that’s just what they want...’

Although thankfully no major incidents were reported that day, there was fear and anxiety felt by many of the women in my research as well as the larger Muslim community as a whole. Ayla’s dad and her family were greatly affected by this extreme hate towards the Muslim community. Ayla’s attitude was different to her dad’s in reacting to this- she felt that staying home was causing the reaction the person who created the letter wanted i.e., to frighten Muslims to stay home. Whereas her dad felt staying at home was the necessary action to take because he may have seen it as posing a real threat and danger. This may indicate the generational differences in the ways in which Muslims are handling and responding to hate (Nandi et al 2020).

Although some of the women in my research experienced verbal hostility, no one reported being physically assaulted apart from Dimah. Dimah, 34 who wears her a niqab was talking to me about an incident which happened on the tube on the way back home from University:

Dimah (interview): ‘I commute regularly on the tube to University. I don’t have a problem when I’m at University alhumdullilah, but I do have issues around when I’m using public transport to and from Uni. I am aware that it’s to do with my niqab. But this is who I am. I

shouldn't be stared, shouted and thrown stuff at. It does make me really uncomfortable, but I have no choice. So over time I've learnt how to handle it. I don't know what else I could possibly do to make myself more safer in those situations.'

Dimah felt frustrated that she had to face incidents like this, the incident she talks about on public transport was where stuff was thrown at her by a group of young white teenagers in school uniform. They threw orange peels at her, laughing and joking calling her a 'bin' as they left the carriage. She told me it caught her off guard because she normally spends her time immersed in reading a book on her long journey home but she felt she could sense 'trouble' as soon as she saw these teenagers get on who were being very loud and disruptive. Not too long before this incident the (now) Prime Minister Boris Johnson had made a 'joke' about women in burkas as 'letterboxes' or 'bank robbers', which immediately saw an increase in hate crimes against Muslim women wearing a niqab (Dearden 2018). What language does is have a real impact on the lived experiences of women like Dimah, the young boys who called her a bin were presumably aware of Boris Johnsons 'joke' and therefore used it to make fun of Dimah by comparing her to a 'bin'. The selection of the word 'bin' itself indicates a more sinister view that is made to sound as someone who is 'useless' which is both dehumanising and hurtful. This kind of language used by Boris Johnson and reported by the media gains popularity and circulates- contributing to the normalisation of Islamophobia among the British public (Gawlewicz and Narkowicz 2018).

In order to address the hate Dimah receives she talked about how she has dealt with the experience since:

Dimah (interview): '...they just stood laughing loudly at me as they left, I was in tears when I got home, but I've learnt to toughen up. It's made me a stronger Muslimah alhumdulliah.'

The concept of 'toughening up' was prevalent throughout my research by the women who had experienced some sort of anti-Muslim hostility. Coping through ignoring the abuse can be seen as better choice for some of the victims of anti-muslim hate as they are willingly taking agency over not becoming involved in actions such as cursing or hitting which can be argued to be seen as un-Islamic, or as a safety mechanism for fear of escalation of abuse (Zempi 2019, p103-104). A lot of the women in my research accepted this as part of the challenge in living in the current socio-political climate where Muslims are targeted. Dimah's comment to make her a stronger 'Muslimah' is similar to that shared by many in the growing Islamic feminism movement (Afshar & Maynard 1994). In my literature review, I explained how Islamic feminism gave rise to forming identities of Muslim women which places their religion at its core. Dimah uses her faith in this way to face the hate she receives and as a testimony to her dedication as a Muslim woman. Similarly, in studies like Peek (2005) the events of 9/11 led to many Muslims praying for spiritual guidance and hence becoming more submerged in their religious identities at times of crisis.

6.3 Differences in hate crimes

My research seems to suggest that there are differences in the way in which anti-Muslim hate crime is carried out. Women in my research who wore 'traditional Islamic forms of clothing' such as the hijab, niqab or jilbab were targeted more frequently and specifically as literature suggests (Zempi and Chakraborti 2014, Allen 2014). My data also seems to suggest that some of women who veiled (Alayeh, Dimah and Sana) experienced anti-Muslim hate language towards them. However, on the other women who did not veil had experiences that can be classed as racist targeting.

Uzma, 40, a single orthodontist (introduced in the last chapter) was telling me about an incident at her clinic when a woman refused to be treated by her:

Uzma (interview): '...her face changed as she walked in and saw me, she just said no I'm not seeing her. She won't know what she's doing, she's one of them....so I just sat in shock, I haven't experienced anything like this. It was upsetting.'

The woman caused such a fuss that she was then taken care of by the other orthodontist. She had never met this woman before, and she had just registered at the clinic. The woman's comment declaring her 'one of them' clearly upset Uzma, as she told me that she had spent her entire life in a majority white area with 'no trouble'. She said she had felt comfortable in her 'own skin' but even though she had only experienced this once, it changed her perception of herself and she noted that she became more conscious of what others thought of her. Although Uzma was not quite sure what 'one of them' meant, her understanding that she took away from this was more to do with the colour of her skin. Whilst Uzma felt shocked because this is seemingly not an everyday encounter for her at her work, it makes the reality of everyday lived racism become apparent thereby exposing her vulnerability as a BAME woman. Critical race theory (Crenshaw 1988; Matsuda 1987; Williams 1991) suggests that racism is embedded within the fabric of modern-day society, although Uzma had never experienced this before her experience led to her become more aware of how it affects others around her.

In a similar way, her experience was shared by some of the other women who seemed to be more aware of racism at a much younger age. Muskan who, as a young girl, was called a '*smelly paki*' by one of the children at school:

Muskan (interview): 'I can laugh about it now, but back then I actually did think maybe I do smell, I started dousing my clothes in my dad's aftershave haha'

Even though Muskan can laugh at her experience now that she is older, she at the time as a young girl was concerned about what had been said. Muskan's use of her dad's aftershave was probably in the effort to cover 'smells' that she felt may have led to her being racially abused

by the other girl. Racism can be argued to be a learnt behaviour as 'race' is a socially constructed concept, young children can therefore pick up and learn hostility and stereotyping of others based on those learnt stereotypes (Atkinson 2009). A study conducted about learnt racism in young children (Connolly 2000) pointed out that south Asian girls were continually called '*pakis*' and excluded from the peer groups which is suggestive of learnt behaviour from the wider environment.

Likewise, Zara, 21, who does not wear traditional forms of Islamic clothing, told me that whilst out on a night out with a friend was called an '*ugly paki bitch*' by a group of girls she was walking past. She put it down to them being drunk, and she passed it off as something she would '*not take to heart*'. Zara said that as a Muslim woman she did not let 'little comments' like that bother her, she argued that she was firm in her belief that some people are '*ignorant*' and she hopes one day '*God guides them to be more accepting*'. For Zara her faith seems to be a way of coping with the racism, similarly prayers and spirituality can also be seen as coping mechanisms as ways of responding to hate (Spates et al 2019, p519-520).

In a different manner, we can try to understand the various ways that Muslim women have learnt to cope with racism and hate through understanding how the migrant communities they belong to view it. Layla is 26 she works in an engineering firm and she does not wear traditionally Islamic clothing. She was one of the participants who identified an interest in being part of my focus group. She describes herself as a '*no- nonsense- career-minded woman with lots of ambitions*'. Although she was introduced to me by the other women at the community centre, I had not seen her there at the classes before. I later got to know that although she grew up in the local area, she had moved out and was living independently due to the job she had in another city. Layla recalls how her own grandfather had moved to the city in search of work when times were tough in India. He called her grandmother over after working

hard for many years and having to live in cramped conditions with other men who were also migrants. When they could finally afford to move out, they preferred living in areas that they were already familiar with and that also had a network of friends with whom they formed close friendships with. She argued that culturally Indian and Pakistani families liked to live nearby family and friends and in her grandparents' instance, she believes that this was a coping mechanism for them to deal with the racist hostility being faced outside. She talked about how it was a way for the community to feel secure:

Layla (interview): '...it was tough back then, my grandparents got racially abused and my grandmother was frightened to go out after one incident when she was coming back from the shops wearing her new sari she just bought back from India and one guy spat at her, it took her a while to adjust... My grandfather told her to have thicker skin...'

The migrant community that came in the 1970's faced much racist abuse, Layla's incident with her grandmother being spat at because of her sari shows the clothes have and still continue to play a part in triggering responses of hate. Clothes items such as the sari mark 'foreign' bodies, and although a sari is not a 'Islamic' form of clothing. It is falsely associated to the concept of all brown bodies as Muslim (Patel 2017 p3).

To add, Layla told me although she lives away whenever she has time away from work, she visits her family and friends back in the local neighbourhood where she grew up. The focus group, in which Layla took part, discussed how they felt they would 'fit in' certain places but struggled in others. Layla grew up in the local area surrounding the community centre and therefore she said she was used to seeing people from all different backgrounds, but now that she had moved away to an area with 'mostly white people'. Layla's comments were a discussion of how she felt when she had moved away in an environment that was completely different to where she grew up:

Layla (interview): 'I think there are certain spaces where I feel I 'fit in' like places where I see other brown people- like I feel a sense of belonging. But if I've lived somewhere long enough then I feel a lot more relaxed. I don't necessarily think it's the environment it is more about me being apprehensive.'

It is interesting that Layla associates 'belonging' to being around other 'brown people'. Although 'race' is argued to be socially constructed, ideas around 'race and identity' often shift focus on societies perception of self around others. Her own understanding of what grandparents felt may have been passed down to her.

Likewise, Sarah shared her sense of comfort because she felt that she was surrounded by people she knew, the sense of familiarity.

Sarah (first focus group- mixed veil/non veiled women): 'I've lived here my entire life I feel like I am very familiar with the surroundings and because I know a lot of people here it makes a lot more comfortable.'

A study (Sanghera and Thapar-Bjorkert 2017) conducted on young Pakistani women in Bradford found that migrant generations had often strong kinship and networks in place and that these created a symbolic and emotional capital (p91-92). When Layla and Sarah talk about their sense of belonging or familiarity this may be due to the networks of kinship that are already in place in their community.

6.4 Experience of racism based on skin colour

Whilst this chapter is about exploring ways in which Muslim women negotiate racism and anti-Muslim hate, it is also about the differing ways in which this is experienced. Racism is also a challenge for BAME communities who need to continue the struggle to fight against a colonial mindset which creates a racial hierarchy based on shades of skin colour (Crenshaw 1988;

Matsuda 1987; Williams 1991). The Muslim Ummah consists roughly of quarter of the world's population. Although as a society there is constantly projected stereotypical image of veiled Arab or 'brown' women, we need to move beyond this and look to understand that Black people also form part of this group. In the same manner, when we want to look at anti-Muslim hate and racism faced by Muslim community; we also need to acknowledge not just the racism from the outside but racism within from Muslim communities. While the women I found through my method of snowball sampling happened to be largely from South Asian backgrounds, I also was interested to view experiences of racism from Muslim women of other backgrounds.

Kay and Ayla are best friends, I have not seen one without the other at the community centre. They have grown up together as they live in the same area and they attended both primary, high school and college together. Both Kay and Ayla identify as British Somalians and their families also seem to be good friends. Kay and Ayla both went to a mixed multicultural school in Manchester and told me neither of them had an issue with racism whilst there. However, Kay is darker in complexion to Ayla and remembers at an early age she was just seen as 'the Black girl':

Kay (third focus group-non veiled women): 'It's not the same for me- I look different. When I was younger, and I didn't wear a scarf or anything they just thought oh she's Black- they always thought I'm like Christian or something. Just not Black Muslim- even my Asian mates assumed that I'm not Muslim until I told them....'

'...most Muslim women don't do mixed swimming. Nothing wrong with it of course but I'm just saying because I never got that without a scarf. I was just seen as a Black girl.'

Kay stated that because of being 'Black' she was automatically not assumed to be a Muslim by both non-Muslims and Asian Muslims. Muslim bodies are often portrayed as homogenous group, often either pictured to be 'brown' or 'light-skinned Arabs' (Ahmed 2003). The fact that

Kay does not wear a scarf adds to her not being 'visibly' recognised as a Muslim woman. Similarly, although Ayla is lighter skinned than Kay she is still not seen as Muslim because of her 'afro' hair:

Ayla (third focus group- non veiled women) '...people just think I'm mixed race, I don't wear a scarf like the other Somalian girls...so they can see my hair...'

Both Kay and Ayla told me they encountered racism when they were younger from other Muslim girls' families in school. They discussed an incident with a South Asian friend who they used to hang out with a lot in secondary school:

Ayla (third focus group- non veiled women): '...so, when we were outside hers, her mum was saying something in their language I could hear her...I didn't know what she said... but I could tell by her face was embarrassed of what her mum was saying. She told us later what her mum said ...probably not properly ...her mum thought we were bad influences on her...she was allowed other friends to her house, just not us because we are Black'.

For Ayla and Kay, 'being Black' meant they were seen as 'bad influences' from the story they told me I am not sure if the mother of her friend realised, they were Muslim. Even still, they were singled out because they felt their friend's mum had seen them as 'bad influences' in some way.

In a similar way, in the previous chapter I talked about Sana being a south Asian woman herself and getting married to a Muslim man of African background. She told me that her family did not initially accept her husband because he was 'not Pakistani', and people in her community looked at interracial marriage as going against customs and 'norms.' Although Islam does not state marrying people of certain 'race', the problem lies within pockets of Muslim communities not allowing interracial marriage. However, as Sana noted had her

husband been white, they would have ‘more readily’ accepted him. This shows that there seems to be a racialised hierarchy in place that see ‘white’ as superior (Karim 2006).

To add, Raisa describes here a useful example of why she feels she has not faced any racism because she is often passed off as white:

Raisa (third focus group-non veiled women): ‘For me I don’t know if there is anywhere, I have been in the U.K where I would say I feel uncomfortable...I haven’t experienced any racism personally-so maybe it’s that. I am quite light skinned, my hair is light, and I have light eyes. People don’t assume I’m Muslim. Maybe it’s that.’

Raisa’s statement gives a clear demonstration of what ‘Muslim bodies’ should or should not look like. Her hair, skin and eyes because they are ‘light coloured’ give no indication to the perceived concept of what a ‘Muslim woman’ should look like. Furthermore, like Ayla and Kay she does not wear any traditional forms of Islamic clothes which further moved away from the false view that all Muslims must be ‘brown bodies.’ (Ahmed 2003).

Additionally, Iman who is a white convert argues that she herself has not faced any racism:

Iman (interview): ‘...the U.K is generally really friendly. I’ve been to other countries and it was much worse. You do get the odd looks now and then if you go somewhere like not in the cities. But I think that’s because they may have not met many Muslims before. Sometimes I do prefer it though... like when they meet you, they are really interested in who you are, and you can have a good chat. Especially older people do that. They just want to know I guess- I don’t mind that.’

It seems from Iman’s statement that her experience has been largely pleasant, and she reports not having to face any racist remarks. This could be seen to be because of a number of factors, firstly Iman herself is a white woman, she does quite clearly not look Arab or of a different

race apart from the clothes she chooses to wear. Secondly, she lives in a very multicultural part of London so there are plenty of women with hijabs and jilbabs on, so she would not presumably stand out as a target. And finally, her understanding and experiences of racism are entirely different to women like Kay and Ayla who have seen racism within their families and communities.

6.5 Managing hate through adjusting dress

Some of the women talked about how they wear or adjust what to wear in public spaces to 'fit in'. Sarah, 48, is of British Pakistani ethnicity, she has lived all her life in the UK and was born here. Her parents came in the seventies to work at the factories. Her experience growing up she described as was challenging because she felt constant pressure to 'fit in'. She told me about how embarrassed she would feel about bringing her parents into school or to meet with teachers because her mum in particular was not fluent in speaking English:

Sarah (first focus group- mixed veil/non veiled women): '... I would just avoid taking her in, I'd make excuses, she is not well ... I just didn't want my classmates or teachers to make fun of her...I was embarrassed about her clothes...I tried to not let my white friends see me in my home clothes... and I was also embarrassed that she spoke so little English, I would translate for her, and she tried her best. I should not have thought like that.'

Growing up Sarah seems to have felt embarrassed over her cultural associations of dress and her mother's speech.

However, the new generation of Muslim women are seen to be quite proudly exploring cultural dress:

Muskan (interview): ‘...I wear shalwar kameez ²¹ a lot and here it doesn’t feel odd, you know what I mean? Like my insta is full of Eid selfies... everyone takes one in their favourite Eid clothes.’

‘...I don’t think they think negative or anything necessarily, but these clothes do stand out a lot more if you go places where there aren’t people like us. I can even wear in Trafford centre and places like that where it’s more common....’

Muskan’s views on cultural dress are completely different to Sarah’s when she was growing up in that Muskan is not at all embarrassed, and comfortable in displaying her ethnic dress which she even posts on social media to see. Younger generations of Muslim women arguably challenge the narrative around dress, it can be comparable to taking on the hijab as a political stand against rising Islamophobia (Hoodfar 1993). Adopting and promoting cultural dress in social media spaces like Instagram reassert the idea that younger Muslim women in particular are fighting for space for their cultures to be celebrated and displayed.

6.6 Mapping ‘safe spaces’

One of the ways in which Muslim women helped minimise their chances of being targets of racist and anti-Muslim crimes was staying within a community that is more multicultural. This was true of both Muslim women who veiled and those who did not, although the women who veiled described it as a more comfortable space for them. Perry and Alvi (2012) in their study found that anti-Muslim hate crimes create ‘an invisible boundary’ over which Muslim members are not allowed to step, it excludes them from these spaces at the same time making them withdraw into their own communities

²¹ A loose fitted trouser garment with a tunic top worn by South Asian women with a long scarf, that is usually worn either over the head or hung loosely around the shoulders.

Rida has been wearing the headscarf for over twenty years, she started to practice her Islamic clothing slowly after she got married. She told me culturally because she lived with her in laws it was a sign of respect to cover your head in front of elders, and slowly she became accustomed and found it easier to adopt a hijab permanently. She argued that her loosely fitted duppata would often slip off around the home while doing house chores. Her husband at the time was studying for his PhD and working a job. She lives in an area with a sizeable Muslim population, and this is her view on how she feels about what she wears and Muslim-hate crime:

Rida (interview): 'No no...my scarf does not make me more cautious about the way I do things and you live in a community with a lot more Muslims it is more accepted- it is respect for the scarf.'

Rida's comment shows how her living in a community she is both seemingly familiar and comfortable with makes her less worried about hate crimes (Perry and Alvi 2012). She has not had personal issues she told me of hate crimes in the area and she cannot imagine moving anywhere else. Other women in my study have also echoed this thought about living in spaces that allow them and their families a freedom to practice their faith without being condemned and judged.

In one of my focus groups with the younger women conversation around schools came up in which the women said that school was a relatively 'safe space' and they did not face any overt racism. Here Ayla states:

Ayla (third focus group- non veiled women): 'Our generation like to mix a lot more, especially in schools its more possible- people from different backgrounds come and they get to know each other...no one really cares who you are...'

To an extent, what Ayla says may hold true that having multicultural society may open up otherwise 'hard to have conversations' and knowing about what the other is thinking or feeling.

However, research (Miah 2013) that was also conducted in a school in Manchester seemed to suggest something entirely different. This research found a growing hostility towards pupils of Muslim faith not only by other pupils but also by some of the teachers. There were also incidences where Muslim pupils were discouraged from the School cadets' team because the teachers kept telling pupils that Muslims were 'killing our British soldiers' (Miah, 2013, p13-14). The discussion that I had with the women about their time in school was concerning the experience they had at least a decade before Miah's (2013) study, and the socio-political landscape has changed vastly since then. Although in my research, the women who talked about school being a 'safe space' like Ayla it does not have to hold true for others who may feel differently.

Another way in which Muslim women in my research navigated resisting where possible exposure to anti-Muslim hate was by sticking to areas around family and friends. Having family and friends as extra support provided some comfort in creating a 'safe' environment:

Fatimah (second focus group-veiled women): 'The reason I think is because we start to move closer to people, we see a lot more. If that means your friends and family live in certain place you naturally feel more comfortable there, because you know those people.'

Samreen (second focus group-veiled women): '...we tend to want to live close by to our families and friends so that's why we stick to the same areas we grew up in because they are familiar to us.'

Some even added there was a bonus of having everything at a convenience:

Samreen (second focus group- veiled women): 'You know what, us Asians in particular get a lot of slack for 'only sticking to our communities' but what it is that we just are looking for convenience. Like if I want to get some halal food- in Asian areas it's there, if I want my

children to go to Arabic school- there are at least one or two to choose from. Or like my husband wants to go pray at mosque he can just walk it there. That's like comfort you know- everything you need close by...'

In my literature review, I explained how Muslims are often questioned on the supposed refusal to integrate in Western society which therefore produces them as targets for hate (Cohen 2002, Philips 2004, Dwyer 1998). What these comments show is that for many Muslim women, familiarity of the area and familiar people seem to be associated with safety. What can be drawn from this is that some of these Muslim women perceive themselves to be more vulnerable going into spaces where they may feel threatened. They also may feel excluded as stated earlier from becoming part of a new community. On the other hand, Sameen's comment is also worthwhile noting as she lists a number of reasons why she finds staying in her area to be more comfortable. Her examples of a Mosque, a halal food and Arabic school being nearby would help her sustain her and her family's religious obligations and duties. It seems from having had conversations with the women that it may be a combination of both convivence and a matter of guarding against vulnerability. This questions the popular narrative that Muslims want to live in segregated communities because they do not want to 'integrate'.

Moreover, the mothers in my research were quick to point out how important living in safe spaces was for the safety of their children:

Zoya (second focus group-veiled women): '...I like being closer so whatever I need I can go get it. I can also tell my kids to walk, and I don't have to worry about their safety there so they don't just rely on me.'

Faiza (second focus group-veiled women): '.... Whenever we go anywhere we get cautious like me especially my husband thinks I am overthinking it at times. But I really do worry not my

safety but especially for my kids- I don't want anyone saying anything bad to them and making them feel awful.'

Both Zoya and Faiza here are especially concerned that their children are not targets of any hate crimes. The concern for their family's safety may also be a reason that Muslim communities tend to prefer living in areas where they feel their children would be less prone to racism and hate.

To add, Naia lives down south in a particularly white neighbourhood. She told me that they do not have a lot of Muslims in the area. She also started telling me about an incident with her son who is five years old. She said he came home one day and was playing with other friends he invited over, and that she heard her son say, 'he hates Muslims because they are bad people' and she was utterly shocked by what she heard. When she told him that they are Muslims he seemed very confused:

Naia (interview): '...It makes life difficult, not being around a mosque. It's very confusing for my kids.. I think some of the issues my husband and I had were the mosque is too far away and it becomes a problem you know-when you can't know your local Muslim community.. kids I feel are so out of touch they are young, but they don't understand why we are and aren't allowed certain things. In a community and amongst other Muslim kids- feels easier to explain. Inshalallah we are looking to move to a more Muslim neighbourhood where these things may not be an issue.'

Naia's battle is not only about having access to conveniences for her family, but it much more deeply ingrained in the sense that she is not able to provide her children with alternate views of Muslims as they have no Muslim community in the area. Naia's hopes to move to an area with a Muslim community seems to be driven by her faith that she wants to share with her children. This may also be why other Muslim families want to remain in Muslim communities

because they want to be able to provide their children with an understanding of religious as well as cultural backgrounds, and to learn ways in which to handle hate.

It is easy to assert that all Muslims want to live segregated lives, but what my research has shown is the complex and various reasons Muslim women in my research have given in explaining why this is not about the question of segregation. Literature like Dwyer (1998), Cohen (2002), Shaw (1988) showed how mosques, areas of migration, and religious facilities are central to Muslim communities in the West. What my research has provided is the evidential inner workings of creating and mapping out these ‘safe spaces’ as a part response to anti-Muslim hate.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter set out to explore the ways in which Muslim women are negotiating through anti-Muslim hate. It has also explored the anti-Black racism that some of the Black Muslim women experience. To conclude, my research has added to the growing body of literature around instances of anti-Muslim hate, but it has also shown a stronger link between wearing traditionally Islamic attire to specific Muslim related hate crimes. It has also shown how language and negative media portrayals of Muslim women can impact and affect the lives of Muslim women with real long-term consequences. Although much research has gone into looking at anti-Muslim hate crimes, there has been few that look at racism within the Muslim community. My research looks the ways in which racism effects Muslim women from within the Muslim community based on internalised concept of a racialised hierarchy.

To continue, Anti-Muslim hate has been looked at largely in terms of experiences of veiled women. My research has informed looking at hate crimes through other forms of dress such as the *sari* and *shalwar kameez*. I have shown that the growing hostility towards Muslims has created an environment which seeks to damage and justify Islamophobic attacks

and in such circumstances show how the women in this research have managed to combat some of the challenges posed. The idea of self-segregating Muslim communities has also been questioned as the women have evidently demonstrated why such false notions need to be challenged.

7. Chapter Seven: Conclusion and Implications

7.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was a critical examination of the meanings that British Muslim women attach to clothing by exploring how gendered discourse and racially defined ideology shaped their everyday experiences. It was argued that mainstream media often projected Muslim women as oppressed, homogenous, and having no sense of agency, especially in relation to dress (Bullock and Jafri 2000; Spivak 1988; Khibani 2009; Cheruvallil-Contractor 2016). The women in this research challenged this notion by demonstrating the diverse views they held whilst displaying agency in their choices of dress through their own rationale. By allowing the space to present their own reasons and motivations behind dress one of the aims was to understand how Muslim women make choices about their clothing and how they use dress. It was highlighted in scholarly works (Spencer 2006; Mirza 2013; Allen 2014) how narratives around Muslim women were often rooted in sexist and racist discourse that essentialised Muslim women by presenting them as deviant, cultural threats, and as nonconforming to British society and values (Hamzeh 2011). To address this, the aim of this research project was to explore, in their own words, the meanings Muslim women attached to clothing as expressions of self and identity in relation to religion. Furthermore, literature (Zempi 2019; Zempi and Chakraborti 2014, Allen 2014) had demonstrated that visible Muslim women were often targets of anti-Muslim hostility. As a result, this research set out to understand the identity negotiation processes Muslim women were taking in response to anti-Muslim hate.

To address the aims of this research, an intersectional approach was adopted, which was attentive to how religion, ethnicity, and gender shape the experiences of British Muslim women. This led to understanding choice of dress through the emergent concept of ‘modesty’. The research clearly identified that through implementing an intersectional approach, the emergence of an arguably sensitive and hard to discuss topic of sexual

harassment was revealed that had impacted Muslims women's lived experiences in discussions around dress. In addition, this research revealed how Islamic dress was a targeted element of anti-Muslim hate, but also that some non-veiled women were also the target of similar anti-Muslim abuse.

The research was about challenging some of the presumptions about British Muslim women. The narratives discussed in this research were about seeing Muslim women's everyday lived experiences through the current climate. The discourse on Muslim women in Western society still heavily focuses on the homogenous Muslim identity. This research explored the differences in opinion of dress through the differing sets of practices and beliefs of Muslim women. It also challenged the often-popularised discourse to see all Muslim women as those who adopt the veil by showing and discussing other types of dress. Furthermore, this research was about giving voice to the women and having conversations that gave them a chance to speak about their experiences in their own words. Through using their own narratives, this research aimed to bring their lived experiences to the forefront.

This final chapter concludes the project pulling together the issues this research has addressed. It begins by reflecting on the methodology used, and why an intersectional approach has been useful in researching the lives of British Muslim women. Through the finding's chapters, discussions on the choices that women made in negotiating dress through differing concepts like modesty, sexual harassment, and anti-Muslim hate will be addressed. It will reflect on what the findings disclosed about the women's self and identity in the previous chapters. It will also summarise the key understandings about the types of anti-Muslim hate that Muslim women are faced with. Furthermore, this chapter will talk about the strengths and weaknesses of this research with a focus on discussion of the methodology used. And finally, the chapter will conclude with laying out questions for further research and its implications for a better understanding of British Muslim women's lived experiences.

7.2 Using Intersectional methodology

The methods chapter started with the discussion of the epistemological stance that was taken, where it was argued that an interpretive approach to this study would have been best suited. The detailed studies on Muslim women (Dwyer 2000, Tarlo 2007, Mirza 2013) were also often more useful in producing more detailed and experience embedded research. Taking an intersectional stance meant that this research was able to determine the intricacies in the lives of the women. As an example, in the findings chapter (chapter four: 'modesty') the term 'modesty' was used in different ways by the women which demonstrated the complexity of its use and the different ways in which it applies to the women's lives. Throughout this research, interpretivist epistemology had given the breadth and space to allow the voices of these women to come forward in their own terms.

In addition, this research was about the application of intersectionality both theoretically, and as a methodological tool to explore the lives of British Muslim women. In chapter four different approaches to examine this research were explored and each of their strengths and weaknesses outlined. One of the approaches was feminist standpoint theory, which allowed a careful inspection and use of my own subjective reality as a Muslim woman whilst understanding that my experiences can aid, but not speak for the women in research. The biggest advantage gathered in this was access to the women for this study, they were more forward to discuss issues around religion as I am a fellow Muslim woman. This was particularly the case on the chapter on sexual harassment, as a woman myself they felt comfortable in speaking to me about their personal issues.

Furthermore, as stigmatisation of Muslims and Muslim communities in general occurred from what they see as 'outsider views' they did not want a further 'bad image' to be created about their faith because they were already facing targeted anti-Muslim abuse (chapter

six). In such instances, my subjective reality as a Muslim woman became a tool for me to readily examine their experiences with further insights on Islamic terms, cultural practices, and norms which as a Muslim woman I was familiar with. Additionally, getting to know the women in the community centre aided me in understanding their narratives better and allowed a rapport to be built.

However, my proximity and my biases were discussed earlier in the reflections section of this research (chapter three). My own religiosity impacted this research in a range of ways. For example, I acknowledged that my lived experience as a Muslim woman along with my educational, historical, cultural, and social position may be different to the women's. This was important to acknowledge especially because this thesis was exploring the varied identities of Muslim women. Therefore, my situated knowledge as a British Pakistani Muslim woman did not and could not speak for the Muslim women in this study. Their experiences are those that I investigated and therefore it was their stories I explored and shared. To help me with this, I made reflexive notes throughout my interviews and focus groups. In allowing a reflexive approach my research suggests that it creates a greater space for open dialogue, for example in the initial focus groups I prepared a few prompt questions but really wanted to ask the women in their own terms about their experiences. Following this method this research was able to pull out initial topics which later formed my chapters on modesty, sexual harassment, and anti-Muslim hate. This research therefore differs in its approach to allow the women to 'map-out' topics that concerned them rather than self-imposing topics onto them. This can be a hugely beneficial way to approach research on Muslim women because we often see stereotypes portrayed widely about Muslim women with a presupposed set of narratives that needs to be challenged.

To add, another approach that was explained in chapter four was the application of Islamic feminism in the research for Muslim women. It was debated that for the study of

Muslim identities, placing and seeing religion at the forefront of their identity may reveal a more accurate account of experiences in Muslim life (Zine 2004). This had been helpful in understanding the realities of some but not all Muslim women. As an example, Dimah and Naia who were forefront in explaining their experiences such as their choice of clothing (chapter four) through religious understandings. My conversations with both these women were centred around the religious outlook and striving of becoming a better Muslim. On the other hand, with other women in this study, their religious identities were not at the forefront. For example, Nura who saw herself as a ‘cultural Muslim’ and who did not follow or talk about her experiences through religious terms. Her lived experiences were more about her cultural Muslim heritage. What this implies is the varied and complex definitions of religiosity of Muslim women, something which is often overlooked and underexplored in studies of Muslims in the West. What this thesis has shown is the nuances that exist within the Islamic faith, as well as the cultural significances that exists indicates that much more thought has to be given to this matter in future research in order to better understand Muslim identities.

In order to address the plurality of Muslim identity, this thesis therefore selected an intersectional approach with an application of feminist standpoint theory and an acknowledgement of Islamic feminism. This approach was initially complex to build on, because it has not been a method used in other Muslim women’s studies (Hunt 1999; Tarlo 2007; Lewis 2015). However (as explained earlier) the advantages of my situated knowledge and an understanding that Islam is a way of life for many Muslims (Zine 2004, Hunt 1999) was important. What Intersectionality has allowed in this research is the historical, racial, and religious barriers to be addressed. The women, themselves, for example described their religiosity and their own narratives that showed the ranging views of opinions and beliefs. This research demonstrates how application of this method could be useful for researching Muslim women as it allows them the space to define their own narratives rather than the researcher

coming in with assumed knowledge of what lived experiences are like for Muslim women. This is especially crucial given the understanding that Muslim women have largely been researched with an assumed homogenous Muslim identity. This does not only amplify the existing issues around Muslims as an homogenous community in the West but ignores the varied and complex struggles of the everyday lived experiences of those that are left out of that discourse.

Although this was a study with a relatively small sample frame of Muslim women. It showed in that even within this small group of women their views are diverse. Applying the intersectional methodology had been difficult initially, as there were so many factors and categories that could have been covered. The advice that was eventually decided to focus upon were age, religiosity, occupation, ethnicity, and choice of dress. Age was seen as generic category that allowed me to see generational differences between the women. This research found that there were some generational differences in outlook such as sexual harassment. Occupation was chosen as a means to understand the various contextual backgrounds of the women. Intracategorical complexity was discussed earlier (p.68) which talked about the difficulties in the endless categories that can be used, however for the size and time of this project choosing categories that were most relevant to this research was important. However, for future research different categories such as sexuality, disability etc could also be chosen to see how these change the range of experiences of Muslim women.

To continue, religiosity was one of the major elements that was integral to this thesis as it explored their religious beliefs (sects and practices) as well as the levels to which they felt religious (see tables 1-4 on the women p, 99). Some women categorised themselves as fairly religious to somewhat religious. This was important because it showed that not all Muslim women share the same levels of religiosity as others and that they apply their faith in different ways. Ethnicity was equally important to include especially in relation to their

references to cultural practices which were sometimes more dominant than religious. In the case of Kay and Ayla who were amongst the two out of three Black Muslim women in this study, their ethnic experiences showed the racist discrimination of Black Muslims within some Muslim communities (chapter six).

Furthermore, it was also vital for this research that women who chose traditional Islamic dress (veiled women) and non-veiled Muslim women were shown as I had argued that non-veiled Muslim women are often under researched especially in regard to the choice of dress. Studies (Zempi 2020; Allen 2020; Afshar 2008; Droogsma 2007) that have been very valuable to the understanding of the experiences of Muslim women. Although they have led the way to look at the experiences of Muslim women, comparing and building upon this knowledge was a key element of this research. By looking at Muslim women who choose to dress in a different way, gave voice to the gaps in literature surrounding non-veiled Muslim women but also a comparison for the veiled Muslim women experience.

Moving on, the discussion of the data methods used were semi-structured interviews and focus groups through the snowball and purposive sampling method in order to capture data. I had discussed in the methods chapter that community centre I attended greatly helped in recruiting women who took part in the research as they were more receptive to a familiar face (these were the focus groups). The women who I got to know also introduced me to other women who were interested in taking part around different cities in the U.K (these were the semi-structured interviews). The biggest advantage of this sampling method was that it allowed me to have good rapport with most of the women. This was certainly true for the focus groups as I had been attending the community centre in readiness for this research about six months prior whilst attending weekly cupcake classes there. The focus groups were reflective of feminist research with providing space for comfortable and engaging conversations that the women had amongst themselves rather than the focus group seeming too

forced. The discussions on sexual harassment for example stemmed from these focus groups because the women were familiar with one another which created a space for them to speak about sensitive topics openly. The detailed discussions that took place between the mothers of the second group of veiled women, was about teaching and sharing how to approach discussions on sexual harassment with their children. This was not only informative for them but was a helpful way for them to share their thoughts with each other about things that were underlying issues in the community.

However, in these focus groups were that because of the familiarity of the women with each other they had a tendency at times to go off topic. I had to, in those instances, direct the conversation back onto the topic. In addition, I had planned that the responses to the images (appendix seven) would engage a much more pronounced and direct reaction to understand how the women felt about different types of veiling. I feel this did not work well because I had pinned the images to board in the space that I used to conduct the focus groups. However, I was to do this again I would print out copies of the Images and pass them around in a form of photo elicitation where the women would discuss in depth what these images mean to them.

The semi-structured interviews with the women who I met through those at the centre were either friends of relatives of the women. This again was helpful because the women had a link who I was familiar with which not only helped in our initial conversations but allowed them to gain rapport as the other women from the community centre acted like gate keepers. Research (Spencer 2006, Hoodfar 2003) suggested that Muslim women have been a target of scrutiny in Western society. Therefore, having gate keepers or rapport has been immensely beneficial to this study in producing insightful data.

7.3 Choices in dress

This research used an intersectional approach which was attentive to how gender, religion, and ethnicity shaped choices around dress. One of the key elements of which was about the ways existing literature Dwyer (2000), Mirza (2013), and Ahmed (2003; 2000) recognised the varied racial, ethnic, and cultural identities. In order to facilitate this, an intersectional methodological approach was taken which allowed the women to self-identify ways in which they practiced their use of dress.

In chapter four, the discussion of dress was in relation to the concept of modesty in which the women expressed their understandings of cultural, religious, and Western styles of dress. It discussed how women from immigrant communities would often adjust their style of dress in order to 'fit in'. The research suggested that although some women adhered to more conservative adjustments of dress - i.e., making sure to wear full sleeves or not showing legs - other women felt quite comfortable to show a bit more skin. The women in this research largely agreed the idea of a modest dress was much more about the relation and appropriate wearing of certain dress just as much as it was about the physical showing of skin. This was similar to literature (Lewis 2015, Tarlo 2007) that found that dress as well as the behavioural aspects were part of modesty. However, both these studies were on veiled women and this research showed that to some extent these concepts were ingrained in some women who also did not veil for example Muskan and Zara.

To add, for both the veiled and non-veiled women they saw dress as a personal extension of what they felt comfort in wearing rather than its relation to the idea of modesty. Some of the younger women in the research talked about other Muslim influencers on social media as sites of inspiration for how they choose their styles in dressing. I had discussed that a study on online fashion (Lewis 2015) suggested that the views on Muslim fashion was

changing the outlook for dress especially in the younger generation of Muslim women. This research demonstrated that these views were also shared by veiled and non-veiled women alike (Kya, Ayla, Nura, Marium). However, some of the women were very clear on what they deemed as immodest forms of dressing (such as showing of cleavage or following fashion trends). For example, Dimah (who although belonged to the younger group of women) was very strict on the religious obligations of her beliefs that fashion should not be part of Islamic dress. This attests to the problematic nature of discourses that homogenise Muslim women.

Furthermore, the choices the women made on the selection of dress often reflected their personal journeys especially in relation to their religious understandings to the concept of modesty. What my research showed was the differing ways in which women not only practiced but also thought about dress and the concept of modesty. Importantly, the research demonstrated that British Muslim women are not restricted to just thinking about the concept of modesty in dress in terms of religiosity but that it also about the cultural, societal, and personal attitudes. Studies (Ruby 2006, Siraj 2011, Mirza 2013, Droogsma 2007, Tarlo 2007) also highlighted the complex nature of understanding Islamic dress. This study also confirmed that these journeys through finding ‘modest dress’ were also something that non-veiled women experienced. For example, we saw Raisa talk about how she would cover certain parts of her body like her cleavage and how it was something that took her time to adopt and learn to adjust her styles of dress to what she felt was modest (example of wearing swimming costume in the pool). This showed that societal, cultural, and personal journeys into modesty are influencing both veiled and non-veiled women alike.

One of the other factors where attitudes towards choices in dress was concerned was its relation to issues of sexual harassment. The topic of sexual harassment was discussed in chapter five. This research showed that most of the women agreed that although the veil is seen to be about steering the male gaze away, they felt that the veil did not and could not ward

off instances of sexual harassment. The women lay blame on the societal and cultural elements that allow a woman to be reduced to an object for the male gaze. In a study of veiled women (Droogsma 2007, p310) the view that the veil allows freedom from sexualisation and exploitation was also shared by some of the participants. This study demonstrated in a similar way that certain forms of Islamic dress were used to create a protection from unwanted advances. For example, Iman used her form of Islamic dress (jilbab and hijab) to cover up her body shape which she felt helped her become in her opinion less of a target of sexual harassment.

On the other hand, some of the women talked about the #MosqueMeToo movement as an evident way to show why dress (Islamic or otherwise) cannot be used to as a tool to eliminate instances of sexual assault. The chapter discussed how the #MosqueMeToo movement was about Muslim women sharing instances of sexual harassment in places of worship. Additionally, this research shows that choices about dress were made in relation to issues in their understanding of sexual harassment. This research also showed the awareness of movements like #MosqueMeToo which discusses the struggles in dealing with sexual harassment for Muslim women in places of worship. This not only affected the ways in which they thought about dress in those spaces but dress in a wider societal context, arguing that Muslim dress does not necessarily provide an answer for issues of sexual harassment.

In contrast, another determining factor in choice of dress was a reaction to anti-Muslim hate. In my literature review, I showed how ‘visible Muslim women’ were the key targets in anti-Muslim hate attacks (Zempi and Chakraborti 2014). This research also reached the same conclusion. However, this research was also concerned with the ways in which Muslim women (visible or non-visible) negotiated dress in dealing with anti-Muslim hate. What this research found was that although there were experiences of hostility the women did not take off their headscarves in response. Some of the women even described that although

they felt challenged their trust and their felt personal duty towards God affirmed a stronger reaction which enabled them to be determined to keep it on.

On the other hand, the women who did not practice veiling did experience racism and hate but as they were not ‘visibly Muslim’ they were not exposed to specific anti-Muslim hate. Some of the women showed concern and wore clothes that were Western as not to ‘stand out’ too much. In chapter six I explain how Sarah did not want her mum to be wearing traditional clothing as she was embarrassed about displaying her culture. However, the research showed that other people like Muskan were much more open to displaying and wearing of traditional dress so there seems to be a generational shift to do with social media and influencers that are much more comfortable in displaying ethnic wear.

My aim in this research was to understand what factors inform choices about dress and my research showed the differing experiences and attitudes that shape the choices for women in this research. I had emphasised that current literature focuses mostly on the images of veiled Muslim women, and that to truly understand the lived experiences of Muslim women we have to move beyond this by allowing spaces for women who choose to wear differing types of dress.

I have met this aim by exploring the different choices of the women, and I have made original contribution to knowledge by showing the experiences of dress in relation to both veiled and non-veiled Muslim women with regard to concepts like modesty and issues of sexual harassment. Although academic work (Ruby 2006, Siraj 2011, Mirza 2013, Droogsma 2007, Tarlo 2007) had shown the use of the concept of modesty it was always in relation to the Muslim women who either practiced traditional or Islamic clothing. What my work demonstrates is that along with the various religiosity of Muslim women, their complex relationship with modesty is not assigned to only veiled women (such as the example of Raisa

given earlier who is non veiled). It has been established through this research that its meanings are more fluid and subject to societal, cultural, and generational differences. The younger Muslim women for example are much more likely to follow trends from social media influencers. Academic work can build on this by doing further studies that does not leave out the experience of non-veiled Muslim women and see if similar results are present with a larger study.

The chapters on sexual harassment and negotiations of dress were concerned with how veiled and non-veiled women chose dress. I demonstrated that in most of the cases (apart from Dimah and Iman) for both veiled and non-veiled women they felt that women were targets of sexual harassment regardless of what they wear. This was particularly evident in the #MosqueMeToo conversations in which women reported being sexually assaulted in places of worship. To them this demonstrated that clothes were not part of the issue but rather it was the attitude of others that led to this. As research (Point 2019, Al-Wazedi 2020) around #MosqueMeToo is still emerging, this study is one of the first to engage with discussions from British Muslim women that openly discusses their views. It would be intriguing to relate some of these findings to other future studies that discuss this phenomenon.

7.4 Self and identity

One of the key issues this research aimed to explore was self and identity in relation to religion and gender. This research examined literature surrounding Islamic feminism and the ‘framing’ of the Muslim body. I argued that there is an oversimplification in understanding Islam as a faith with a set of homogeneous practices and beliefs. However earlier literature (Westfall et al 2016) had displayed the various and differing practices of Muslims. I also argued that most studies in the British context look at generations of mostly Muslims belonging to South Asian backgrounds, it was important to recognise and be inclusive of women of different

backgrounds. As a reaction to this, this study has included Muslim women of differing backgrounds. What was reiterated time and time again in chapter five was that religion was not the reason behind these cases of sexual harassment, but it was about the culture and the communities who did not want to speak up on this issue.

In chapter four, my research has explored the concept of ‘modesty’ which showed that although dress was partially concerned with physical appearance the bigger influence over what was deemed as ‘modest’ was determined by other factors such as manners, etiquettes and behaviours. Modesty in behaviour was shown to play a key role in identifying someone of good or bad values and this was expressed by both veiled and non-veiled women alike. The research also addressed ways in which modesty was understood through religious terms in reference to scriptures of the Qur’an but was understood through personal interpretation of the word itself. Some were more culturally influenced interpretations of modesty which challenged different types of dressing for example the wearing of *duppata* and *shalwar kameez* was also seen to be Islamically acceptable. For example, Muskan said she would wear her ethnic dress and see it as Islamically acceptable because the scarf covered her hair whenever she needed to put it on (for example she mentioned when she went to someone’s house). Similarly, it was argued that (Peek 2005) cultural heritage acknowledged acceptable ways of dressing. This research therefore agrees with earlier studies (Peek 2005, Droogsma 2007) in arguing that with some Muslim women cultural interpretations of modesty are practiced.

To add, journeys into finding ways to be modest was another theme uncovered in this research, here family influence played a part. Dressing at home in particular ways where dress would have to be culturally appropriate and thinking about how ways of dressing and how this is perceived by people around them was equally important to some women. This research found that some of the women in the focus groups had to go through a learning process

in order to understand their religious and gendered identities. My research showed that in the focus groups this was seemingly more obvious as the women had a time to explore and understand ideas about this concept through social interaction. For some of the women the ideals of modesty were about an internal battle to strive to be a good person in day-to-day life.

However, my research showed that there were generational differences between the older and younger women in this study. The older women saw that modesty was more determined by dress whereas the younger women saw that modesty was much more about behaviours and manners. Some women like Dimah, had argued that modesty was part of the identity that was strictly linked with being a ‘good Muslim’ in which the boundaries of what is and is not modest is clearly set in religious texts. What this chapter revealed was that understanding a religiously associated concept such as modesty shows the pluralistic nature of Muslim women’s identities.

The fifth chapter which discussed issues around sexual harassment was also an important revelation to understand the identities of women in this research. Some of the women in this research emphasised the significance of what sexual harassment meant in the current climate arguing that it was a challenge for all veiled and non-veiled women to address. The chapter revealed how some of the women challenged and contested the male gaze by using dress i.e., wearing what they felt comfortable with rather than following ‘fashion trends’.

The concepts of ‘*hayaa*’ and ‘*izzat*’ were discussed as an everyday narrative which some of the women in this research both understood or challenged. It was about self-policing behaviours that may be deemed as ‘bad’ by others in the community. The conversations around this topic showed how intrinsically linked some of the identities are to the wider Muslim community in particular to those that came from a South Asian background and belonged to a collective culture. In these communities the women argued that individual

identity is very much tied to the family in which actions by an individual determine and affect outcomes for the whole family within the community. On the other hand, other women who live away from or are not part of these communities did not worry so much about their individual choices and its implications.

However, women from this research who both belonged and did not belong to areas with Muslim communities openly challenged the collective nature and concept of *hayaa* and *izzat*. They argued that it was damaging to the community by allowing instances of sexual abuse and harassment to be silenced but that it also created a barrier to move forward. The research showed how women made a collective effort to argue for the case of using religious scriptures and texts to dismantle preconceived notions around sex and sexual harassment.

Furthermore, what my research has shown is that a sensitive topic like sexual harassment has laid out awareness of challenges (such as speaking to children about sex and sexual harassment awareness) from within the Muslim community. In the literature review (Hoodfar 2003), I had discussed that Muslim women were often depicted as powerless victims with no agency and controlled totally by their religious obligations to their faith. However, what these conversations have revealed is that the women are tackling and accepting challenges whilst using religion as a way to legitimise their voices and speak about injustices. The mothers in this research talked more proactively on how they were making small changes (such as speaking openly to their children about sex and sexual harassment) in their own families to counter the narratives of understanding *hayaa* and *izzat*. Through these shifting changes this research highlights the varied dynamics of what it means to be a Muslim woman and how the Muslim identity is challenged by sensitive issues like sexual harassment which are coming to the forefront.

My aim was to examine self and identity in relation to religion and gender in this research. This research was able to achieve this through the conversations and discussions on concepts of modesty and sexual harassment. The dialogues shared with these women opened up aspects of identity and collective identities, as well as showing the challenges and issues that some of these women face. This research deals with sensitive topics such as sexual harassment and its implications in the Muslim community. The research also demonstrates the use of concepts like *hayaa* and *izzat* and why they need to be challenged much more openly in order to prevent silence on these issues.

This research was about challenging the homogenous ‘veiled Muslim’ narratives that exist and showing the non-homogenous nature of dress in understanding the construction of Muslim women’s identity. Through exploring the veiled and unveiled choices on clothing this research provides an original contribution to knowledge in showing how the concept of modesty is used. Modesty as a concept illustrated how Muslim women who practice different forms of clothing understand and negotiate around ‘*hayaa*’ and ‘*izzat*’ as a form of adherence to an unwritten culturally and religiously influenced rule. Non-veiled Muslim women are under researched especially within the context of their ‘Muslim identity’. This research adds to the existing body of knowledge about British Muslim women’s identity. This contribution to knowledge can further be explored in future research to understand that Muslims women’s dress whether it be Islamic or otherwise is still largely influenced by their religious and cultural understandings of faith. This is important because most research on Muslim women and dress is still preoccupied with the idea that all Muslim women dress in certain ways. By branching out to look at other forms of Muslim women’s dress, we can get a better understanding of how British Muslim women use and negotiate dress.

Furthermore, in the current climate with the rise of social activism with feminist movements like *Musawah* (discussed in my literature chapter) who not only acknowledge faith

as an important factor but also understand its use in active feminist policies that address such issues like sexual harassment in the Muslim communities and places of worship. This research has made an original contribution in knowledge in showing how simplistic social media movements such as #MosqueMeToo movement can start up conversations especially in younger generations. This research shows why challenges also need to be made in dismantling concepts of *hayaa* and *izzat* which continue to place honour as a woman's sole responsibility and as a tool to silence those who face abuse.

7.5 Anti-Muslim hate

In my literature, I had discussed how the framing of Muslim women's bodies had moved beyond seeing them as early orientalist depictions of 'passive' to objects of 'fear' and 'hate'. I argued that BAME bodies are looked at as objects of scrutiny and brown bodies in particular as suspicious. What this has also meant is that Muslim women are seen to be 'brainwashed' when they assert their religious identities. The women in this research have passionately talked about the struggles of being both a woman and Muslim and in particular being a 'visible' Muslim. In my sixth chapter, the discussions on challenges of anti-Muslim hate and the response to the threat they faced was useful in understanding how the women dealt with hostility.

This research provided a backdrop into understanding how postcolonial orientalist framework (Said 1979) had paved way for what today has trickled down to shape Muslim women's identity. I argued that the 'orient' saw Muslim women to belong to a barbaric culture that required them to be submissive. This research challenges this notion by openly displaying the lives of women in this research who demonstrate agency in their conversations and through their day to day jobs. The women also show how their cultural and religious influences are negotiated to assert their rights and voices.

Although the Muslim women continued to try and challenge this narrative they were faced with hostility and stereotyped as belonging to ‘backward culture’. Some of the women reported being talked to as ‘stupid’ and being deemed as ‘illiterate’ because they are visibly seen as Muslims. My research showed how difficult is to challenge this narrative when images of Muslim women were both portrayed as negative in the media. This research showed that the women who faced such hostilities often resorted to being around ‘safe environments’ i.e., where there is some presence of Muslim communities in order to feel safe. These ‘safe spaces’ also provided them with comfort through forms of convenience such as being able to attend mosques nearby, access to halal meats or cultural food stores nearby and also closeness to families and friends. The research therefore challenged the idea that Muslims want to live in segregated communities as they did not want to integrate. The women in this research showed how factors concerning safety, convenience and closeness to family and friends were instead the reason why they did not want to move out of certain areas.

One of the key areas this research covered was the link between being visibly Muslim and likelihood of anti-Muslim attacks. Earlier literature (Zempi 2014) showed how being visibly Muslim i.e. wearing forms of Islamic dress such as the hijab and/or niqab placed Muslim women in a greater risk of attack. This research has confirmed this to be the case for those women in my research who veiled. Although not all the women who veiled experienced this type of hate, the visibly Muslim women were the only ones to report being targeted specifically for anti-Muslim hate crimes. The other women who did not practice forms of veiling however did report instances of hate and racism, but it was much more about them being classed as foreign bodies rather than their relation to their Islamic religion.

This study also uncovered colourism within the Muslim community although not as overt as those faced by the Muslim community themselves. Through examining the conversations with the Black women in this research the subtle racism towards the Black

Muslims also displayed the ignorance and internalised notion that all Muslim bodies must be brown or Arab. This research has shown how colourism through its origins in orientalist frameworks still exists in the minds of some BAME people and still poses a challenge. What this research shows is there is a greater need to acknowledge and talk about the experiences of Black Muslims especially in challenging the notion that Muslims are only seen as brown or Arab bodies.

Furthermore, the sixth chapter (anti-Muslim hate) set out to look at the ways in which anti-Muslim hate affects Muslim women in this research. This research used the experiences of hate, the challenges of understanding targeted attacks and also what forms of hate exist to gain a better understanding of how anti-Muslim hate works. This chapter also acknowledged that the visible Muslim women is an easy target for attack whilst some non-visible Muslim women are subject to racism. This research also calls into question the racism that exists within the Muslim community and as result sets out future challenges which should address this. My original contribution to knowledge through this chapter has been moving the focus of anti-Muslim hate to only apply to women who veil and broadening the horizon of what lived anti-Muslim hate experiences are for British Muslim women in the current socio-political climate.

To add, this research is timely because it deals with the anti-Muslim hate and the experiences of hostility faced by the women show just how urgently this issue needs to be addressed. Whilst some media, politicians and hate fuelled groups continue to scapegoat and demonise Muslims, this research shows the very real implications this has had for some of the women in this research who have been a target of attack. This research shows that action needs to be taken in policies, institutions, and other organisations to help reduce the impact and spread of anti-Muslim hate. The research also points to a problem of systemic racism which enables and allows for this to continue. In addition, the Muslim community itself faces some challenges

in managing racism within the community an aspect for future studies to explore in better understanding the lived experiences of Black Muslims.

7.6 Final comments

This research set out to investigate the discourse around Muslim women which was especially concerned with Islamic dress rather than showing the differing types of dress Muslim women use. Choices and negotiations were looked at as a way to understand self and identity construction. This research used literature on dress, modesty, Islamic feminism, Intersectionality, and anti-Muslim hate to show ways in which these concepts shaped Muslim women's identity through attached meanings to clothing.

Policies relating to and addressing sexual abuse may find the framework used in this research useful as it shows how some women themselves have challenged this. Whilst acknowledging the sensitivity of this topic getting more women to openly speak within communities may also be a good step forward. I would argue that above all this research has shown trust to be the main factor in allowing experiences such as this to be shared. I would argue that developing future research with Muslim women around sensitive topics are done in a relaxed, familiar environment where they are encouraged to share their experiences.

In conclusion, this research shows the differing views and opinions of Muslim women in this research. It provides an intersectional look at the lives and experiences of Muslim women who have been part of this research. Through the concepts of choice and negotiations in dress we can seek to further add and investigate challenges to lives of British Muslim women. This research brings to the forefront some very urgent issues that need to be tackled and that could be challenged by using some of the suggested frameworks for future research. What this research has shown is the need for more involved conversations with

Muslim women. For this to take place the importance of not representing ‘one type of Muslim’ should be to the forefront. Scholarly works also need to understand and recognise the plural Muslim identities that exist. Muslim women need to be able to express and voice their opinions without prior judgement from within and outside Muslim communities so that everyone is given equal opportunity to express their views. Only by allowing the differing conversations to be had can we hope that there is acceptance of the crucial challenges that need to be addressed.

List of Appendices

Appendix One: Consent Form for semi-structure Interviews

Research Participant Consent Form

Title of Project: Identity, religion, and clothing: The lives of British Muslim women

Name of Researcher: Saima Naaz Ansari

(Delete as appropriate)

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study (version 3- 15.05.17) and what my contribution will be.

Yes	No
-----	----

- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions (face to face, via telephone and e-mail)

Yes	No
-----	----

- I agree to take part in the interview

Yes	No	NA
-----	----	----

- I agree to the interview and for this to be audio recorded

Yes	No	NA
-----	----	----

- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the research at any time **without giving any reason**

Yes	No
-----	----

- **I agree to take part in the above study**

Yes	No
-----	----

Name of participant

Signature

Date

Name of researcher ...Saima Ansari.....
taking consent

Researchers e-mails.ansari@edu.salford.ac.uk.....
address

Research Participant Consent Form

Title of Project: Identity, religion, and clothing: The lives of British Muslim women

Name of Researcher: Saima Naaz Ansari

(Delete as appropriate)

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study (version 1- 15.05.17) and what my contribution will be.

Yes	No
-----	----

- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions (face to face, via telephone and e-mail)

Yes	No
-----	----

- I agree to take part in the focus group

Yes	No	NA
-----	----	----

- I agree to the focus group and for the information discussed to be used.

Yes	No	NA
-----	----	----

- I agree to keep what is said in the group confidential

Yes	No
-----	----

- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the research at any time **without giving any reason**

Yes	No
-----	----

- **I agree to take part in the above study**

Yes	No
-----	----

Name of participant

Signature

Date

Name of researcher ...Saima Ansari.....
taking consent

Researchers e-mails.ansari@edu.salford.ac.uk.....

Participant Information Sheet for Interviews

Identity, religion, and clothing: The lives of British Muslim women

Hello, my name is Saima Ansari and I am a PhD student at the University of Salford. I am currently undertaking research into the experiences of Muslims in Britain today, with a focus on how they construct identities and experience being a Muslim in contemporary society, especially in relation to clothing. It is on this basis that you have been approached with an invitation to participate in this study. Before deciding if you would like to participate, please spend some time reading the following information. I would be more than happy to answer any questions that you may have.

What is the study about?

This study examines the experiences of being a Muslim Woman in Britain today, with a focus on how identity is constructed, and the challenges faced by Muslim women who use Islamic dress in religious (or other) ways.

What is this study hoping to do?

This study will undertake interviews with British Muslim women, who are invited to discuss their everyday experiences. The data will contribute to developing an understanding of the experiences and challenges that British Muslims face in contemporary society.

Do I have to take part?

No. You do not need to take part in the study. Even if you do take part, you do not need to answer every question if you do not want to. In fact, if you change your mind about participating at any time, just let me know and you don't need to continue to be involved. The data collected up to your withdrawal will not be used.

Before participating in the research

You will be given information as to what you will be expected to do if you decide to participate in the research. Once you have read the information (this leaflet) there will be opportunity for you to contact me to ask any questions you have about the research. If you are happy to participate you can inform me directly at S.Ansari@edu.salford.ac.uk and then I would be happy to arrange a convenient time for you to meet me.

What will happen during the research?

Before participating you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you wish, the consent form will be explained to you so that you are clear about what you are agreeing to. If you agree to be involved the research will be conducted on University premises at a convenient time. During the interview you will be asked about your experiences as a British Muslim. I am interested in what you have to say and with your permission the interview will be audio taped.

The interview will last approximately 60 minutes each and what is said will remain confidential between the researcher in the interview and confidential unless you

declare anything that is illegal or there is a risk posed to yourself or others, which the researcher is duty bound to report. At the end of the interview the audiotape will be turned off and there will be some time for you to talk about any aspects of the interview you may have found upsetting or difficult. This information will not be included in the research.

You will be free to leave the interview at any time. If you do decide to do so, the information you have given will be destroyed and not be used in research.

Once the interviews is complete the recordings will be used for confidential transcription. Once the transcriptions of the recordings are done, the researcher (myself) will analyse what has been said by each person participating in the research and will then look across the transcriptions to see what issues arise.

Once the work is complete the researcher will use it to form their thesis and it may be used in the University library archive, conference papers and papers in academic journals. All the information will be anonymised.

Confidentiality

As stated above what is said will remain confidential between you and the researcher, but we must highlight that if you do tell the researcher anything that is illegal, or suggests risk to self or others, the researcher is duty bound to report it to the appropriate authorities.

Every effort will be made to protect your identity at all times. At no time will your identity be revealed to others, and it is important that you know that I am under ethical obligation to keep it confidential. For example, I will use pseudonyms (i.e. a fake name) for you in all the work. All material will be password protected and locked away at a secure location, only known to and accessible by myself.

What if I don't carry on with the study?

If at any stage you wish to withdraw from the research, please do let me know. All data that is used in the interview will be destroyed.

What are the benefits of participating in the research?

By talking about your experiences there is hope that it will better inform and increase knowledge of challenges and issues facing British Muslims today. I cannot promise the research will help you directly and/or immediately, but the information obtained from the study will be used to increase wider understanding of the challenges faced by British Muslims.

What are the drawbacks to participating in research?

There should be no disadvantages or risks to you during the research but some people may find interviews at times to be upsetting due to any personal issues you may want to discuss. However should you feel at all uncomfortable about any aspect of the interview or focus group I will give time at the end for you to discuss this. This will not form part of the research. If you feel that you would like further support the researcher will be able to signpost you where additional help may be sought.

Recommendations for helplines are:

Muslim Community Helpline:

Freephone: 020 8908 6715, 020 8904 8193

Website: <http://muslimcommunityhelpline.org.uk/>

Victim Support:

Freephone: 08 08 16 89 111

Website: <https://www.victimsupport.org.uk>

Samaritans:

Freephone: 116 123 (UK)

Website: <http://www.samaritans.org/>

Making a complaint

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you can speak to me, and I will do my best to answer your questions. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through the University's complaints procedure, by contacting:
Dr Tina G. Patel

Researcher Supervisor

School of Nursing, Midwifery, Social Work & Social Sciences,
Room L522, Allerton Building, University of Salford, Salford M6 6UP

t: +44 (0)161 295 5559 | m: +44 (0)7957-181-174

t.patel@salford.ac.uk | www.salford.ac.uk

or,

Dr Jo Cresswell

Associate Director Research | Research & Enterprise Division

G.08, Joule House, University of Salford, Salford, M5 4WT

t: +44 (0)161 295 6355 | m: +44 (0) 7813 537683

j.e.cresswell@salford.ac.uk | www.salford.ac.uk

What next?

Read the information leaflet and think about your participation, contact details are written at the bottom of the sheet if you want to participate or ask any further questions about the research. If you are unsure talk to someone you trust and feel will be able to help you make a decision as to whether or not you should participate.

Researcher's Name: Saima Ansari

E-mail: S.Ansari@edu.salford.ac.uk

Participant Information Sheet for Focus Groups

Identity, religion, and clothing: The lives of British Muslim women

Hello, my name is Saima Ansari and I am a PhD student at the University of Salford. I am currently undertaking research into the experiences of Muslims in Britain today, with a focus on how they construct identities and experience being a Muslim in contemporary society, especially in relation to clothing. It is on this basis that you have been approached with an invitation to participate in this study. Before deciding if you would like to participate, please spend some time reading the following information. I would be more than happy to answer any questions that you may have.

What is the study about?

This study examines the experiences of being a Muslim Woman in Britain today, with a focus on how identity is constructed and the challenges faced by Muslim women who use Islamic dress in religious (or other) ways.

What is this study hoping to do?

This study will undertake focus groups and interviews with British Muslim women, who are invited to discuss their everyday experiences. The data will contribute to developing an understanding of the experiences and challenges that British Muslims face in contemporary society.

Do I have to take part?

No. You do not need to take part in the study. Even if you do take part, you do not need to answer every question if you do not want to. In fact, if you change your mind about participating at any time, just let me know and you don't need to continue to be involved. The data collected up to your withdrawal will not be used.

Before participating in the research

You will be given information as to what you will be expected to do if you decide to participate in the research. Once you have read the information (this leaflet) there will be opportunity for you to contact me to ask any questions you have about the research. If you are happy to participate you can inform me directly at S.Ansari@edu.salford.ac.uk and then I would be happy to arrange a convenient time for you to meet me.

What will happen during the research?

Before participating you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you wish, the consent form will be explained to you so that you are clear about what you are agreeing to. If you agree to be involved the research will be conducted on University premises at a convenient time. During focus group you will be asked about your experiences as a British Muslim. As part of focus group you are free to discuss other wider issues that you feel are important part of being a British Muslim. Any personal details will not be disclosed or discussed. The group will be asked to keep all discussions confidential and for any personal information not to be disclosed outside the group.

The focus group will last approximately 60 minutes and what is said will remain confidential between the researchers in the interview and confidential within the focus group unless you declare anything that is illegal or there is a risk posed to yourself or others, which the researcher is duty bound to report.

You will be free to leave the focus group at any time if you wish to do so. Once the focus group is complete the information gathered will be used confidentially. The researcher (myself) will analyse what has been said by each person participating in the research and will then look across the transcriptions to see what issues arise.

Once the work is complete the researcher will use it to form their thesis and it may be used in the University library archive, conference papers and papers in academic journals. All the information will be anonymised.

Confidentiality

As stated above what is said will remain confidential between you and the researchers, but we must highlight that if you do tell the researcher anything that is illegal, or suggests risk to self or others, the researcher is duty bound to report it to the appropriate authorities. Every effort will be made to protect your identity at all times. At no time will your identity be revealed (to others outside of the focus group), and it is important that you know that I am under ethical obligation to keep it confidential. For example, I will use pseudonyms (i.e. a fake name) for you in all the work. All material will be password protected and locked away at a secure location, only known to and accessible by myself.

What if I don't carry on with the study?

If at any stage you wish to withdraw from the research, please do let me know. However, all data given up to the point of withdrawal will remain part of the research data.

What are the benefits of participating in the research?

By talking about your experiences there is hope that it will better inform and increase knowledge of challenges and issues facing British Muslims today. I cannot promise the research will help you directly and/or immediately, but the information obtained from the study will be used to increase wider understanding of the challenges faced by British Muslims.

What are the drawbacks to participating in research?

There should be no disadvantages or risks to you during the research but some people may find interviews at times to be upsetting due to any personal issues you may want to discuss. However should you feel at all uncomfortable about any aspect of the interview or focus group I will give time at the end for you to discuss this. This will not form part of the research. If you feel that you would like further support the researcher will be able to signpost you where additional help may be sought.

Recommendations for helplines are:

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Freephone: 020 8908 6715, 020 8904 8193

Website: <http://muslimcommunityhelpline.org.uk/>

Victim Support:

Freephone: 08 08 16 89 111

Website: <https://www.victimsupport.org.uk>

Samaritans:

Freephone: 116 123 (UK)

Website: <http://www.samaritans.org/>

Making a complaint

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you can speak to me, and I will do my best to answer your questions. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through the University's complaints procedure, by contacting:

Dr Tina G. Patel

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t.patel@salford.ac.uk | www.salford.ac.uk

or,

Dr Jo Cresswell

Associate Director Research | Research & Enterprise Division

G.08, Joule House, University of Salford, Salford, M5 4WT

t: +44 (0)161 295 6355 | m: +44 (0) 7813 537683

j.e.cresswell@salford.ac.uk | www.salford.ac.uk

What next?

Read the information leaflet and think about your participation, contact details are written at the bottom of the sheet if you want to participate or ask any further questions about the research. If you are unsure talk to someone you trust and feel will be able to help you make a decision as to whether or not you should participate.

Researcher's Name: Saima Ansari

E-mail: S.Ansari@edu.salford.ac.uk

Outline for interview

The interview questions will be developed following the topic areas discussed in the focus group, for instance, around experiences and identities of Muslim'ness.

The following questions will be used as prompts for the interviews:

- What does it mean to be a British Muslim woman?
- Do you feel that your experiences have changed over the years? When, How, Why, Impact?
- Has your Muslim identity changed over time? When, How, Why, Impact?
- Has your gendered identity changed over time? When, How, Why, Impact?
- How do you feel your experiences as a woman are significant in the ways in which you choose to dress?
- To what extent is your identity shaped by the idea of being a 'visible Muslim'?

Outline for Focus Group

Participants will be given the topic: What is it like being a Muslim in Britain?

I will using a mixture of visual images in order for the group to reflect on images being circulated and used in the media. I will also be using prompt questions in aim to start engaging open discussions within the group and also aid in covering areas such as:

- What types of clothing do they like / prefer to wear and/or feel more comfortable in?
- To what extent is their identity tied to the clothing they choose to wear? (Islamic or otherwise)
- Do they feel visible – in what way? Does being a ‘visible Muslim body’ affect them in any way?
- To what extent are their identities tied to religion / being Muslim?
- How do they present themselves in public and private spaces through terms of dress?

Appendix Seven: Images used in Focus groups discussions



Figure 1 (obtained from https://www.nike.com/gb/t/pro-hijab-y7mzD8/NJNJ3-010?cp=47658763634_search_%7c%7c11152493712%7c108168618894%7c%7cc%7cEN%7ccssproducts%7c466228493516_GEO2&ds_rl=1252249&gclid=EAlaIQobChMlisuV_eX_7AIViKztCh20fwgzEAQYAIABEgKZkfD_BwE&gclsrc=aw.ds)



Figure 2 (obtained from https://www.boredpanda.com/dolce-gabbana-hijab-abaya-collection/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=organic)



Figure 4 (obtained from <https://naziraseedat.com/2015/06/the-dina-torkia-debut-collection/>)

Appendix Eight: Confirmation of Ethical Approval



Research, Innovation and Academic
Engagement Ethical Approval Panel

Research Centres Support Team

G0.3 Joule House

University of Salford

M5 4WT

T +44(0)161 295 2280

www.salford.ac.uk/

6 July 2017

Dear Saima,

RE: ETHICS APPLICATION–HSCR16-103–‘Identity, religion and clothing: The lives of British Muslim women.’

Based on the information you provided I am pleased to inform you that application HSCR16-103 has been approved.

If there are any changes to the project and/or its methodology, then please inform the Panel as soon as possible by contacting Health-ResearchEthics@salford.ac.uk

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sue McAndrew'.

Sue McAndrew
Chair of the Research Ethics Panel

Research – Can You Help?



Identity, Religion, and Clothing: The Lives of British Muslim Women

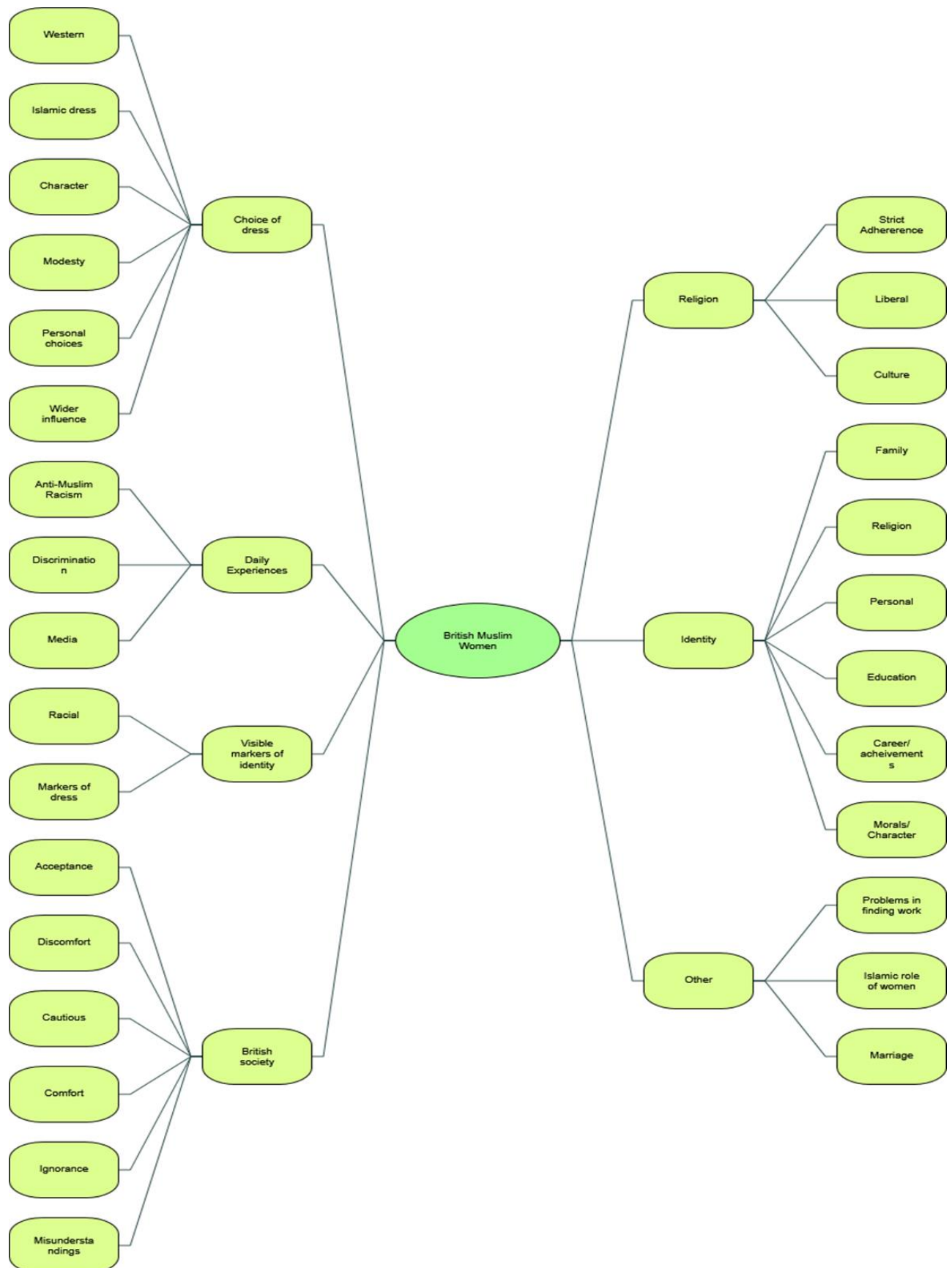
My name is Saima Ansari and I am a PhD student at the University of Salford, as part of my research I am looking to explore and understand the experiences of British Muslim women, with a particular focus on the way in which women choose to dress and what this means to them.

I am looking for British Muslim women to take part in a focus group and/or interview which would both last roughly last for one hour. You will be encouraged to talk about your views and experiences, as a Muslim woman who may or may not wear Islamic dress.

If you are able to give some of your time to share your experience or would like to know more, please email me at: S.Ansari@edu.salford.ac.uk

Your help will be greatly appreciated

Appendix Ten: Themes Mind Map



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