

Ferhan's Story

Ferhan is a Muslim and identifies as a queer genderfluid male.

I was born in Glasgow, Scotland to an Afghan father and Punjabi mother. We lived in a suburb which had a sizeable Muslim minority. I was raised in a conservative Muslim community and was fully committed to the religion. When I started to come of age and mature sexually I realised I was different to my male peers; I realised that rather than being attracted to girls I was attracted to boys and as a boy myself that made me gay.



“Up till that point I’d heard that being gay was something negative, so I wrestled with feelings of denial and guilt. I had a flashbulb moment when I realised that being gay was not something I ‘do’ but something I ‘am’ and that I shouldn’t need to feel ashamed or guilty for who I am. I decided to embrace who I was and come-out, but at the time I thought that to do that I needed to turn my back on my religion.”

You can reconcile being LGBTQIA+ and a Muslim. It took me a long time to realise that, but I felt relieved when I did. After an initial feeling of elation after coming out, renouncing my religion and studying a science degree at university I began to realise that I hadn’t found all the answers to my questions and that by turning my back on my faith I’d let a part of me go too easily. Furthermore, Islamophobia was growing all around me and opinion was turning against Muslims. I couldn’t recognise the Muslims that were being portrayed in the media as any of the Muslims that I knew. The assumptions that were being made of Muslims; I knew them to be wrong and besides, whether I identified as a Muslim or not I was still considered to be one and treated as one. I went on to do some research and reconfigure my identity.

“In my research I realised that because the Qur’an was written in Classical Arabic between 609 and 632 CE, which is over 1,385 years ago. The message that has been interpreted by many Alims has come from human beings with unconscious biases. We now know, through the pursuit of scientific knowledge that these unconscious biases shaped their perspectives. If the vast majority of human beings are inclined heterosexually then it’s probable that the majority of those Alims were inclined heterosexually and would have used that point of reference as the normative inclination and anything else to be deviant.”

LGBTQIA+ people know instinctively that their identity is anything but deviant; in fact, they know it’s perfectly natural for them to be LGQBTQIA+ and God intended they identify this way. The problem is that there aren’t enough LGBTQIA+ Alims to share that perspective. Until there are, LGBTQIA+ Muslims must feel confident in their identity and not succumb to homophobia,

transphobia and other societal ills. After all it's only Allah (swt) that judges and no one in the world can claim they know the truth 100%; we can only come to a better-informed conclusion through research, debate and study.

"I am fully out; I came-out at school at the age of 15 and since then have never made a secret of my sexuality. The first few years after coming out were difficult for me but I thrived in adversity. Family life became difficult, so I studied hard to get the best possible grades in my A-Levels, so I could earn a place in a prestigious university in London, 400 miles away from my home in Glasgow to grow into the person I needed to be. I felt London would be the place where I would find most acceptance and understanding, as well the best opportunities to thrive professionally."

In my 20s I built bridges with my family and returned to Scotland. I found, however that I needed to keep coming-out to my family; I had to keep reminding them that I was still a gay man because I never found acceptance and my identity was constantly invalidated. I returned to London in 2011.

As a Queer Muslim I have faced invalidation from other Muslims; I've been made to feel that I should be ashamed of my sexuality and gender identity and religious teachings have been used to justify these invalidations. I have made a conscious decision not to accept these invalidations and to seek my own answers the questions I have. I have made a conscious decision not to listen to those invalidations any more.

"In December 2016 I was offered the opportunity to take part in a BBC 2 structured reality TV show called 'Muslims Like Us'. They were looking for an openly gay practising Muslim that would show how they reconciled being both openly gay and a Muslim. I agreed to take part and the moment was very empowering for me because I could stand up and say, "this is who I am and there's nothing wrong with that"."

I have also been accepted onto a Stonewall BME LGBTQ leadership programme and am a 'Diversity Role Model' that tackles bullying towards young LGBTQ people in schools by giving presentations to educate pupils about the experiences I have had. These opportunities are ways for me to turn the difficulties I have had into positives; being able to inspire young people is something I cherish.

I think that things are slowly changing but there is still much more work to do. There is much greater visibility in the digital age of many of the minorities that had less of a voice before. Nowadays it's difficult for Muslims to claim that there aren't any LGBTQIA+ Muslims because they are visible in media, in print and on online platforms. The LGBTQ rights movement has also achieved many milestones that LGBTQIA+ Muslims can benefit from and they are afforded more protections nowadays if they do choose to come out, than ever before.

“An organisation for LGBTQIA+ Muslims like Hidayah is extremely important in providing a focal point for Muslims that identify as LGBTQIA+. By bringing together LGBTQIA+ Muslims organisations like Hidayah provide a forum for sharing common experiences; building friendships with likeminded people that have had these common experiences; learning strategies for coping with the difficulties that come with being LGBTQIA+ and Muslim and ultimately empowering themselves.”