

## Umber's Story

**Umber is a Muslim and identifies as queer and agender.**

I'm 25, born and raised in London to Pakistani parents. My mother raised me and my brother alone in West London. I went to a few private schools which my dad paid for but at home with my mum we struggled with money. At school I was often the only person of colour and I was bullied and felt quite isolated due to racism. I didn't really understand LGBT+ as anything but gay men so I didn't have any language for my sexuality. I just felt unattractive and therefore cut off from my own desires. As a young girl and woman, I felt as though anyone who was attracted to me was someone I should be attracted to. So, I had relationships with boys and men exclusively until I was about 22.



***I can reconcile being queer and Muslim because heterosexuality never felt natural to me, just as my queerness is natural to me, so is my spirituality. Being raised by women meant I was taught a lot about Islam from a feminist perspective so I always felt quite strong about my religion. When I became aware of my sexuality I felt stronger in my identity as a whole. The only difficult I face with this is when other people tell me I can't be both or try to debate with me about it, as it's so intimate it's something that's hard to debate over.***

I am out. I've found that it either fascinates others or makes them angry. People feel as though I must break away from Islam to be queer, or that I must break away from queerness to be Muslim. I came out in my twenties, if it had been sooner I might have struggled even more, but I am sure of myself and do not make my identity open to debate. I know I don't owe anyone a debate but I'm out partly because I know that my visibility, as limited as it is, can help others like me feel strong in who they are, and love themselves.

***I have faced difficulties, mainly just from the criticism of non-Muslims, and the queerphobic remarks of many Muslims but I have had many positive experiences when connecting with other queer Muslims, the friendships I've had as a result of being out and seeking out people like me. It is so healing to meet people like myself after never meeting anyone like yourself. The significance of it is huge and life changing.***

I do think things are changing for us. As we get more visibility we get more courage, but we also get more threats. With one always comes the other.

***I think organisations like Hidayah are so important because they provide a space for us which doesn't exist in our religious communities or in our queer communities. A place where your identity is the norm is so valuable.***