

## Shelina's Story

### Shelina is a Muslim and she identifies as a lesbian woman.

I was born and brought up in East London, the hub of the Bengali community. I realised I was a lesbian during secondary school, however, had to push it to the back of my mind as back then I was fearful of what coming out would do for me. It was a difficult time especially when you're a teenager and hormones are all over the place. You feel quite alone and start to withdraw yourself from others because you feel like an imposter.

***"I think that you can certainly reconcile being a lesbian and being a Muslim. Being LGBTQIA isn't mutually exclusive. You can exist and I am living proof of it. I also believe that being gay isn't condemned in Islam."***

I am out to immediate family, close friends and colleagues. Bizarrely, I've found that the workplace environment is the most non-judgemental of them all. I can be who I am with no questions asked (although unsure if this is because you cannot discriminate openly against others at work or because they are genuinely accepting). When I came out to family, it didn't go down well but that is to be expected, however, I am working on that relationship. I have lost friends over it but I see it as a blessing if I lose friends once I come out to them – tells me they were never my friends!

I would say the difficulties being a lesbian and a Muslim would be dealing with my intersectionality (as a Muslim and Person of Colour) as that can get quite mentally exhausting. There is an identity crisis at all levels. I still question it today and that is something that I am working on.

However, there are many positives. Some of my closest friends are LGBT Muslims and that's what keeps me positive. That there are others out there like me.

***"I think that attitudes toward LGBT+ Muslims are changing. There are groups like this around the world now whereas 20 years ago, there were hardly any. I'd like to think that in the next 20 years, there would be no need for a group like Hidayah as Insha'Allah being a LGBT+ Muslim won't be an issue anymore."***

It is important to have organisations like Hidayah as they give hope for others that are maybe struggling. It is an avenue where you can meet like-minded individuals.

